

## The Impact of the Intellectual Discourse of Imam Reza (A.S.) on the Geography and Environmental Planning of Iran

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### Article info

### Abstract

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The migration of Imam Reza (A.S.) to Iran and his enlightening and reformist religious presence led to fundamental transformations in the cultural, social, and political spheres, and particularly in environmental interactions and the emergence of new variables within the geographical fabric of Iran. The introduction of novel knowledge and the expansion of the intellectual milieu, through the implementation of changes in attitudes, perspectives, and conduct, so profoundly disrupted the geographical atmosphere of Iran that the agglomeration of environmental planning underwent a conceptual metamorphosis, resulting in the emergence of a new discourse of environmental planning with a cultural approach. The main research question is: What were the impacts of the presence of Imam Reza (A.S.) in Iran, in terms of environmental planning, on the expansion of the scientific and intellectual sphere of Iranian society? The results and findings indicate that with the presence of Imam Reza (A.S.) in Iran, people were guided towards spirituality, and after his martyrdom, through the promotion of the culture of pilgrimage and the presence of the invited Sayyids, the construction of buildings such as mosques and seminaries, and the strengthening of Shia culture—which is directly related to the presence of the Imam and his holy shrine-experienced substantial growth.

**Keywords:** Imam Reza (A.S.), Iran, Intellectual Discourse, Geography, Migration.



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## 1. Introduction

The migration of Imam Reza (A.S.) to Iran was not merely a historical event, but a “civilizational turning point” that had profound and lasting impacts on the spatial, cultural, and environmental organization of the Iranian plateau. Moving beyond historical or theological analyses, this interdisciplinary research seeks to examine the influence of Imam Reza’s (A.S.) intellectual discourse in the field of “geography and environmental planning,” relying on the theoretical frameworks of “discourse” and “cultural-spatial systems.” The central question is: How did his presence transform the geocultural map of Iran and establish a new model of environmental planning centered on culture and spirituality?

## 2. Research Objectives

This research has the following objectives:

1. To explain the mechanisms for converting the “symbolic capital” of the Razavi discourse into “spatial-physical structures.
2. To identify and analyze the tangible manifestations of this discourse in Iran’s geography, including: the formation of the city of Mashhad al-Reza, the development of settlement networks for the Sādāt (descendants of the Prophet), the establishment of service-medical institutions (e.g., Dār al-Shafā’), and the expansion of endowments (Mawqūfāt).
3. To provide a systematic analytical framework for understanding the influence of religious thought on environmental planning.

## 3 .Methodology

This study employs a descriptive-analytical method with a historical-documentary approach. Data was collected through library research, consulting historical, hadith, geographical texts, and contemporary studies. The theoretical framework integrates discourse theory (emphasizing the role of discourses in shaping socio-spatial realities), cultural geography, and environmental planning theory with a cultural approach. Data analysis was conducted using qualitative content analysis with an inferential approach, and the validity of the findings was ensured through cross-referencing sources and peer review by specialists.

## 4. Findings

The research findings indicate that the discourse of Imam Reza (A.S.) transformed

the geography and environmental planning of Iran through four primary mechanisms:

1. **Development of Rationality and Scientific Spaces:** Holding structured debates with People of the Book and various sects, mentoring students, and forming non-governmental scholarly circles (such as the study circle in the Mosque of Marv) not only elucidated Shi'a beliefs but also, by promoting rationalism, inquiry, and reasoning, expanded the "mental geography" of society and laid the groundwork for scientific flourishing.
2. **Change in Physical-Environmental Geography:** The martyrdom of Imam Reza (A.S.) and the transformation of his resting place into a pilgrimage center led to the gradual formation of the city "Mashhad al-Reza." This process involved the construction of landmark buildings like the Goharshad Mosque, porticoes (Riwāqs), and numerous caravan series (Rabats) for pilgrims, showcasing a model of urban development centered around a spiritual site.
3. **Encouraging the Presence of the Sādāt and Forming Settlement Networks:** The migration of Imam Reza (A.S.) accelerated a wave of Alid Sādāt migration into Iran. The presence and martyrdom of these figures in various cities (such as Qom with the presence of Hazrat Masumeh (A.S.) and Shiraz with the martyrdom of Shahcheragh) created new centers of Shi'ism and strengthened a cultural-settlement network across Iran.
4. **Establishment of Service Institutions and Development of Endowments:** In proximity to the Holy Shrine, public welfare institutions like the "Dār al-Shafā" (hospital) were established to address the medical needs of pilgrims and residents. Furthermore, the tradition of endowment (Waqf) served as a powerful economic-spatial mechanism, consolidating and developing the properties and financial resources of the Astan Quds Razavi across a vast expanse of Iran and even beyond its current borders.

## 5. Conclusion

Analysis of the findings demonstrates that the discourse of Imam Reza (A.S.) was a meaning-generating and transformative system that reshaped Iran's intellectual and physical geography through several key mechanisms. At the heart of this discourse was the concept of "Divine Guardianship" (Wilāyah) and the station of Imamate, which acted as the central signifier of his debates and interactions. Unlike rival discourses, which were sometimes entangled in linguistic games and fallacies, the

strategy of Imam (A.S.) was to elucidate the systematic framework of concepts, processes, and signs of the pure Muhammadan Islam (S.A.W.W.). This strategic, intelligent, and ethically grounded preference not only facilitated the acceptance of truth by the audience but also exemplified the ideal of “the best disputation” (al-jadāl al-aḥsan), effectively representing the identity of the Shi’a discourse in contrast to its constructed “others«.

The impacts of this discourse can be analyzed in three main areas:

1. Spatial-Civilizational Transformations: The presence of Imam Reza (A.S.) became a catalyst for population concentration, economic prosperity, and cultural flourishing in Khorasan. This process continued with the formation of Mashhad al-Reza as a religious metropolis and the construction of a network of landmark buildings (such as mosques, seminaries, and shrines). These structures, directly or indirectly influenced by his presence, not only expressed the deep affection of the Iranian people for the Ahl al-Bayt but also became symbols of the embodiment of the Shi’a discourse within the geographical fabric of Iran.
2. Scientific and Cultural Institution-Building: Imam Reza (A.S.) effectively laid the foundations for a sustained scientific movement by establishing new-style seminaries (including in the Grand Mosque of Marv), mentoring prominent students, and holding structured scholarly debates. These actions placed rationalism and intellect at the core of the religious discourse, paving the way for the flourishing of Islamic-Iranian civilization and its fusion with ancient Iranian culture. This scientific movement transformed Khorasan into a hub of knowledge production.
3. Network Expansion of Shi’ism: The migration of the Imam (A.S.) accelerated the migration of Alid Sādāt to Iran. Although many of these Sādāt were later martyred, their burial sites became new cultural and religious centers across Iran (such as in Qom and Shiraz). Beyond their function as pilgrimage sites, these shrines became “grand schools” for promoting Shi’a rituals and teachings, enabling the networked development of Shi’ism.

In conclusion, it can be affirmed that the discourse of Imam Reza (A.S.), through its intelligent integration of Islamic ethics, critical rationality, sustainable institution-building, and spatial planning, transcended the cultural and social limitations of Iranian society and established effective connections with all ethnic groups. His Holy Shrine and the shrines of other Imamzadehs, as tangible symbols of this discourse, have played an unparalleled role in expanding Islamic civilization, fostering scientific development, and deepening the culture of Shi’ism in Iran, presenting

an enduring model of the mutual influence between “thought” and “geography«.

**Suggestions:**

Conduct similar studies on the influence of the discourse of other Imams (A.S.) on urban and regional geography.

Utilize the model extracted from this research as a framework for contemporary cultural-environmental planning in Iran’s religious metropolises.

Research the role of the endowment (Waqf) institution as a sustainable tool in spatial development planning.

**Keywords:** Imam Reza (A.S.), Intellectual Discourse, Geography, Environmental Planning, Mashhad al-Reza, Endowments (Mawqūfāt).