

An Analysis of the Spatial Status and Function of the *Sangab* (Stone Basin) Based on the Works of Selected Authors of History and Geography from the 14th and 15th Centuries AH

Javad Aghajani Keshteli

Assistant Professor, Art Research Faculty, Science and Arts University, Yazd, Iran (Corresponding Author) /
j.aghajani@sau.ac.ir

Somayeh Omidvari

Associate Professor, Architecture Faculty, Science and Arts University, Yazd, Iran/ s.omidvari@sau.ac.ir

Mahboobeh Tayefi Nasrabadi

Lecturer, Graphic Faculty, Science and Arts University, Yazd, Iran/ Mah.tayefi@gmail.com

Received: 10/06/2025

Accepted: 29/07/2025

Introduction

As tangible cultural heritage, Sangabs (large stone basins) have a special position as well as various material functions in the cultural sphere. The status and function of these artifacts have always been proportional to the place and space in which they are situated. Although many *Sangabs* have lost their primary use today and turned into museum objects, an in-depth analysis of historical and geographical texts can reveal their rich functional and conceptual dimensions. This research aims to define the status of Sangabs more precisely as it seeks to discover their functional links by answering these two main questions: where were *Sangabs* placed? and what were their primary functions?

Method

This research is descriptive-analytical and theoretical in objective. The data collection method was library based, with information collected about Sangabs from the texts on history and geography written in the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries AH. The research population consisted of books and treatises indexed in the *Nur al-Sirah* and *Jughrafiya-yi Jahan-i Islam* collections, from which sixteen volumes were selected. The Sampling was purposive. Data analysis was conducted using a qualitative method, involving the coding, extraction, and classification of relevant sentences and passages, followed by a content analysis of these materials.

Research Findings

The findings of this research indicated that Sangabs were present across a wide geographical area in Iranian cities and even beyond, including Isfahan, Shiraz, Mashhad, Qazvin, Esfaryen, Kashan, Herat, Istanbul, Constantinople, and Medina. Structurally, Sangabs are divided into two main categories: the man-made (crafted from stones such as marble, often featuring inscriptions and calligraphy in the Nastaliq script) and the "natural" (rock pools formed at the foot of mountains by natural factors). The spatial location of Sangabs was highly diverse, encompassing both religious and non-religious spaces. Prominent religious sites included mosques, Imamzadehs, holy shrines, churches, Takayas, and Saqqa-khanehs (public water dispensers). The non-religious sites include palaces and mansions, public baths (*hammams*), schools (*madrasas*), bazaars, caravanserais, shops (like those of barbers/delaki), and even museums. Within these structures, Sangabs were installed in high-traffic areas such as the entrance vestibule (*hasht-ivorudi*), courtyard, *iwan*, portico (*revaq*), next to pools and in the changing room of baths (*sarbineh*). The functions of Sangabs also covered a wide spectrum, tailored to their location. The main uses included: water storage for drinking (public water supply), performing ablutions (*wudu*), washing/cleaning (in baths and for general

hygienic purposes), and ceremonial use (such as baptism in churches). Some natural Sangabs also served as small reservoirs along caravan routes or at the foot of mountains.

Conclusion

The results of this research clearly demonstrate that Sangabs were not merely static stone vessels; rather, they were dynamic elements fully integrated into the daily life, culture, and architecture of their era. The analysis of historical and geographical texts from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries AH confirmed that these artifacts, with their broad geographical distribution and existence in both natural and man-made forms, met the biological, religious, and social needs of the communities. The diversity of Sangab installation sites, ranging from mosques and holy shrines to palaces and public baths, highlighted their multifaceted role: sometimes a symbol of sanctity next to a religious site and sometimes a purely functional element serving public welfare in an urban space. The discovery of the link between location and function is one of the most important achievements of this research. For instance, the function of ablution in mosques, washing in baths, and religious commemoration in *Saqqa-khanehs* perfectly illustrates this connection. Furthermore, the presence of beautiful inscriptions and designs on man-made Sangabs, in addition to their utilitarian purpose, emphasized their artistic and spiritual dimensions, transforming them into a cultural-historical legacy. This research, by systematizing the study of Sangabs through written sources, has not only succeeded in reviving the historical memory of these architectural elements but also provides a model for similar studies on other overlooked cultural artifacts.

Keywords: Sangab, Islamic art, Islamic architecture, Qajar travelogues.