

Shi'ah Symbols in Qazvin with Emphasis on Illustrated Historical Resources

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Abstract

In this descriptive-analytic study with data and images collected through library and virtual methods, a number of Shi'ah themed manuscripts of the Qazvin school have been introduced. The results of this study indicate that the stories derived from the Qur'an, events and teachings of Islam and Shi'ism, which explicitly or symbolically represent the truth and legitimacy of Shi'ism, constitute the main frame of these images. In addition, the important concepts and notions of Shi'ism such as the right of succession and Imamate of Prophet Ali (PBUH) chosen by God, the infallibility of the Shiite Imams, the belief in the miracles and wisdoms of the Imams; also the intercession of the Imams and the expression of the dignity and status of the Imams, are represented in these paintings. Artists who have created such works have been able to visualize coded and spiritual beliefs, narratives, and concepts by avoiding a realistic approach and by applying symbols, signs and visual and tangible arts; moreover, Shi'ah paintings are distinguished from religious paintings. They have also portrayed sacred figures and icons of Shi'ah Islam in a symbolic manner with the use of special decorative elements, emphasizing their unique and sacred status and directing the audience to their spiritual and intrinsic perfection.

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Research objectives:

- 1- Introducing the Shi'ah manuscripts of the Qazvin School and describing and explaining the main features of the applied paintings.
- 2- Examining the presence of the images of holy Shi'ah figures, content, narration and expression method appearing in the Qazvin manuscripts with respect to significant Shiite concepts.

Research questions:

- 1- What are the themes and concepts represented in the paintings of the Qazvin school?
2. What is the artist's purpose in representing Shi'ah themes and concepts, and what are the arrangements and symbols used to depict them?

Keywords: Shi'ah, Safavid era, historical sources, manuscripts, Qazvin school.

Introduction

One of the cities that was conquered by Islamic soldiers during the conquest with the existence of both types of thinking (Shi'ah and Sunni majority) was Qazvin. Today, the city is home to almost 100 percent of the Shi'ah population. Like many parts of Iran during the conquest, Qazvin's people became acquainted with Islam through the troops carrying and distributing the message Sagifa. However, it appears that the Shi'ah since the early years of the conquests led to the familiarity of the people with Shi'ah principals with the arrival of Ghazians in the city. This familiarity was very persistent to the extent that the people of Qazvin were devote followers of Shi'ah Islam during the early emergence of the Safavids. Hence, the commencement of a new phase in the Islamic history of Iran begins with the ruling of the Safavid monarchy. The Safavids created the culmination of certain developments during a long religious-rational history based on Shi'ah principals. The fall of the Mongols and the conversion of Muhammad Khodabandeh Oljayto religious perspective towards Shi'ah Islam paved the way for the growth of this religion in Iran. These great events continued the initial Shiite influence created by the Sufi sects. The key role of these sects was to prepare people for acceptance of Shiite-dominated Islam by emphasizing the spiritual and divine aspects of religion; hence, the importance of Shiite religion and its tendency was the most obvious feature of the late Mongol era (Shayestehfar, 2005: 196).

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Artworks were predominantly purposeful and dependent during the period of religious rulings and artistic advocates focused on particular ideologies and beliefs; hence, religious and sacred themes are manifested in such artworks. The emergence of Shi'ah themes in artworks that began before the Shi'ah religion became official in Iran gained rapid growth during the Safavid era and continued until the Qajar era. The relationship between Shiite themes and art is found not only in book illustrations but also in other arts such as wall-paintings, tile designs, lacquer paintings, back glass artworks and even carpet patterns that expresses a deep connection between the foundations of Shi'ah thoughts and Iranian life. Shi'ah discourse encompasses a coherent set of concepts, beliefs and narratives that, with Shiite mentality, reproduce in all aspects of their individual and social life, and is reasonably manifested in painting beholding Shi'ah concepts. Given that the Shiite tendency calls for a special discourse on Islamic concepts and theorems, it is necessary to describe and analyze Shiite figures in the light of the concepts, beliefs and narratives in question and to emphasize Shi'ah discourse. In this way, one can obtain remarkable results on the different nature and aspects of Shiite painting and extend the theoretical foundations of Shi'ah art and painting.

Conclusion

Shiite discourse encompasses a coherent set of specific concepts, beliefs and narratives, and one of the main and vital concepts of this discourse is to emphasize the sacred status and spiritual dimensions of Shiite sacred personalities. From the point of view of object discourse, the Shi'ah are worthy illustrations that, in addition to representing or illustrating a Shi'ite personality, are also in line with the basic principles and key concepts of Shiite discourse in terms of content, form, procedure and method of expression. Illustrations of historical sources of Qazvin drawings created during the Safavid period and some of them were introduced and investigated in this study, concepts by avoiding a realistic approach and by applying symbols, signs and visual and tangible arts; moreover, Shi'ah paintings are distinguished from religious paintings. They also portray the sacred figures and icons of the Shiite belief sacred figures in a symbolic manner, with special decorative elements, emphasizing their unique and sacred status and directing the audience to their spiritual and intrinsic perfection. In these themes, unlike earlier versions, we are not confronted with the representation of historical and religious figures, but with their extra-human, spiritual and sacred character, as stated in the Shi'ism principals. In these paintings, we come across folk tales that illustrate the opinion and

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sentiment of ordinary people about the personality and status of Shiite Imams. In fact, folk tales are rooted in the beliefs, theories, values, knowledge, and needs of a society and derive their credibility from the issue. This type of literature, which belongs to the populace and the masses, is simple and unassuming, representing the social and world view of the masses, and the personalities of religious folk tales illustrated have much in common with identity and they have no personality-historically. As artistic styles emerge on the basis of social conditions and developments, the manifestation of Shiite-emphasized beliefs and narratives in the paintings in question must be influenced by the overwhelming dominance of Shiite discourse at all levels of political, social and cultural knowledge of the society.

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