

## **Holders of Religious Key Positions in Safavid Painting (Duties and Functions)**

### **Abstract**

The art of painting has been intertwined with narrative from the beginning and has drawn various scientific, social, political and economic themes. One of the brilliant periods of this art was the period of Safavid rule (907-1136 AH). During this period, with the support of the government and other elders of the society and the establishment of royal workshops, this art reached its ultimate stance. In the meantime, due to the religious approach of the Safavid government, religious and political themes became the subjects of painting. The issue that can be raised here is how to reflect the position and role of the leading officials of the Safavid period in the art of painting of this period. This research has been completed via descriptive and analytical methods and by relying on the data of library resources. The findings of the study indicate that in this period, religious positions played an important role in cultural and political developments and consequently, this had a tremendous cultural impact on commonalities as religious positions played an important role in the political and social dimension. This change can also be seen in the surviving paintings of this period.

### **Research aims:**

1. To explain the nature of the occupation of religious officials in the Safavid period and their role in the continuation of this government.
2. To analyze the duties and performance of the officials of the Safavid period regarding the art of painting.

### **Research questions:**

1. What were the duties and functions of the officials of the Safavid period?
2. What is the reflection of the position and role of religious officials in the Safavid period regarding the art of painting of this period?

**Keywords:** Grand Master, Safavid Painting, Sadr, Malabashi, Lawyer of Conditions.

## **Introduction**

Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili, as the head of the Safavid dynasty, founded a movement that played an important role in the political, social and cultural developments of Iran. The teachings of Sufism that had begun in this family gradually faded and Sufism in its historical course turned to Shiism until Shah Ismail Safavid established one of the most powerful dynasties in Iran and gradually the teachings of Shiism developed and replaced Sufism. It is natural that for this change, administrative and religious institutions were necessary, and with the creation of the position of Sadr, who was the first religious institution, the foundations of religious institutions were established in this sequence. Of course, in the meantime, the Morshed-e Azam (Great Guide) was a cross between Sufism and jurisprudence, and both groups had full common ground in this regard. These institutions gradually found certain ups and downs; as the Sadr was the special feature of these divisions. In later periods, positions such as Shaykh al-Islam, Mala Bashi, Vakil-al Halaliat and other figures were religious administrative institutions, each of which played an important role in the strength and continuity of the Safavids. Shah Tahmasb left the hands of the Olema (Religious figures) in the affairs of the government and appointed a number of them as the head of government positions; among them were Sadr, Shaykh al-Islam, Qazi, Qazi Asgar and Malabashi, and later, Vakil-al Halaliat who were considered religious institutions and they played a significant role in solving the current problems of the people. This religious and political change is also reflected in the works of art of this period. One of these arts is painting, which reached its peak during this period, hence, the study of this issue can reveal important points regarding the paintings of the Safavid period.

Regarding the research background, it should be said that no independent work with this title has been written so far. However, several works have examined the themes of the paintings of this period. Karimian and Jayez (2007) in an article entitled "Developments in Safavid Iran and its manifestation in painting" have examined the reflection of developments in the art of painting and the role of foreign relations in this regard. Karjani (2017) in an article entitled "Study of Safavid period painting and comparison with painting of other periods" has dealt with the issue that the painters of this period have apporioned with mystical issues and Islamic wisdom. In fact, in this period, painting has become a tool to express beliefs and convictions. Afrough and Nowruz Talab (2010) in an article entitled "Religious concepts in the art of painting in the Safavid era" have addressed the issue that during the Safavid dynasty in terms of ideology governing society and its

influence on art. The reflection of subjects related to the Prophet, Imams, Holy Verses and hadiths in the painting of this period is a clear manifestation of this influence. However, in these studies, the religious officials of the Safavid period are not mentioned, hence, the present study is a descriptive and analytical study based on library sources and seeks to investigate the role and position of religious officials in the Safavid period.

## **Conclusion**

The subject of this research is a look at the functions of prominent religious positions in the Safavid era. Therefore, for a better understanding, the functions of these positions from the Supreme Leader to the solicitor lawyer have been examined. Shah Ismail, who was the supreme guide, paved the way for the elimination of Sufism from the Shiite approach and, consequently, created certain religious positions. The founders of these religious positions were the Olema (religious leaders) who had influence throughout Iran, and their interaction and cooperation with the people provided the grounds for the strength and stability of the Safavids. Religious officials were in charge of litigation at the social level and played an important role in facilitating the current affairs of the people. They also had full-fledged representatives who settled civil rights disputes on the basis of poor jurisprudence and the Safavid legitimacy was exercised through these individuals in society, an important feature without which no stability and popular support would have existed. They were also able to contribute significantly to the unity and integrity of political Iran by creating propaganda fields, and at the same time, the Iranian and Shiite identities would be stable and durable. All these cases can be considered as the benefits of creating religious positions in the Safavid period. The paintings of the Olema, especially those who held prominent religious positions and managed the institution of religion, show that they were at the top at the social, religious and political levels, and were second only to the Shah, although few drawings of such figures remain, nevertheless, even those subtle evidences remaining are enough to confirm the validity and importance of these positions.

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