

**Asghar Fahimi-Far****Painted tile work in the Tekkiyeh Muaven ul- Mulk in Kermanshah****Topic: Architecture****Author:**

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**Abstract:**

This paper examines the influence of both European and Iranian patterns on the painted tile works in the Tekkiyeh Muaven ul- Mulk in Kermanshah city in Iran. These art works based on a new artistic movement which called folk art in the 19th century in Iran.

Popular or folk-art developed intensively during the late Qajarid period (1785-1925) primarily deriving from popular Shi'ah beliefs and rituals. This artistic movement gave rise to some specific architectural forms in the urban landscape of Persian cities- in particular the Husayniyye or Tekkiye, where the popular Shi'ah rituals and practices were performed. These Tekkiyes were decorated with murals, painted tiles, and canvases showing the major personalities of the Shi'ah pantheon and their exploits. The building of religious edifices for theatrical performances and the decoration of these Tekkiyes and other structures with figurative representations of the holiest and most revered personalities, displayed for the public at large, was a startling new development in the history of Persian Islamic art (Chelkowski, 1999). The improvement of folk mural decoration and wall painting was, paralleled with the growth of the religious architectural spaces such as the Takkiye at the same time. For all social classes the artistic movement associated with the Takkiye was triggered and inspired by the annual commemoration in Persia of the Karbala tragedy (Chelkowski, 1986 & 1999). In the nineteenth century the Takkiye became a major feature of Persian urban life..

The building of Takkiyes reached its zenith during the late Qajarid period. According to Salari (1992) there were many Takkiyes in Iranian cites such as Kirmanshah. The Tekkiye Mu'aven ul-Mulk in Kermanshah is generally held to be among the best of the survivors. The construction of Tekkiyes in Persia was largely based on the popular artistic movement which grew during the late Qajarid period. It is ornamented with many painted tiles whose subject matter is largely religious.

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## **Painted tile work in the *Tekkiyeh* Muaven ul- Mulk in Kermanshah**

### **A study on the influence of the both Iranian and European patterns on the painted tile works this place**

(1785-1925)

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Popular or folk-art developed intensively during the late Qajarid period (1785-1925) primarily deriving from popular Shi'ah beliefs and rituals. This artistic movement gave rise to some specific architectural forms in the urban landscape of Persian cities- in particular the *Husayniyye* or Tekkiye, where the popular Shi'ah rituals and practices were performed. These Tekkiyes and subsequently other architectural forms such as *saqqakhanehs* (wayside shrines providing water for wayfarers) were decorated with murals, painted tiles, and canvases showing the major personalities of the Shi'ah pantheon and their exploits. The building of religious edifices for theatrical performances and the decoration of these Tekkiyes and other structures with figurative representations of the holiest and most revered personalities, displayed for the public at large, was a startling new development in the history of Persian Islamic art (Chelkowski, 1999). In fact traditional royal art now ended gradually with the Nasirid court ( Nasir-al-Din shah, 1843-1852, was one of the most famous Iranian kings. Nasirid court or Nasirid period were derived from Nasir-al-Din shah). It was succeeded by popular art with the same patterns and techniques. New patrons, such as urban merchants contributed to its growth. The improvement of folk mural decoration and wall painting was, paralleled with the growth of the religious architectural spaces such as the Takkiye at the same time. For all social classes the artistic movement associated with the Takkiye was triggered and inspired by the annual commemoration in Persia of the Karbala tragedy (Chelkowski, 1986 & 1999). In the nineteenth century the Takkiye became a major feature of Persian urban life. In fact during Nasir-ed-Din Shah's reign the pride of any Persian community was its Tekkiye. In this form may be a uniquely Persian feature and certainly characteristic of 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The building of Takkiyes reached its zenith during the late Qajarid period. According to Salari (1992) there were forty-five Tekkiyes in Tehran in 1870. There were also many in other provinces such as Kermanshah, Isfahan, Kashan, Kerman, Shiraz, Yazd and Mashad. The Tekkiye Mu'aven ul-Mulk in Kermanshah is generally held to be among the best of the survivors. The construction of Tekkiyes in Persia was largely based on the popular artistic movement which grew during the late Qajarid period. The Tekkiye of Muaven ul- Mulk was built in 1890 (A.H. 1315 ) by Muhammad Hasan Khan Muien ul-Ru'aya (Muaven ul- Mulk ). It is ornamented with many painted tiles whose subject matter is largely religious.

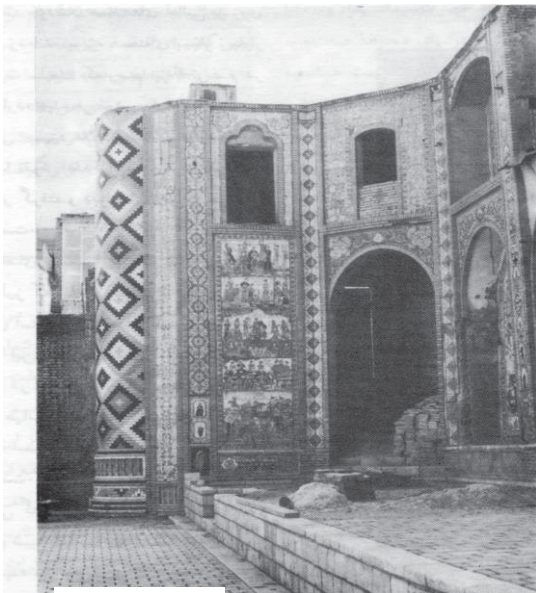


Fig. 1a

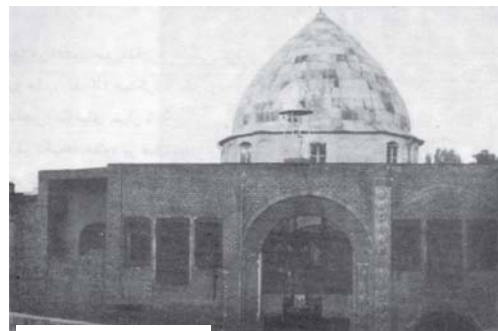


Fig. 1b



Fig. 1c

1a. A view of the Tekkiyeh Mu'aven ul-Mulk from its northeastern side

1 b. A general view of the dome of the Tekkiyeh Mu'aven ul-Mulk from the section which is called Zaynabiyeh.

3 c. An interval view of the Abbasiyeh of the Tekkiyeh Mu'aven ul-Mulk. After Salari (1992).

Note: as the superintendent explains, different parts of this place were named for Imam Husayn and his family. For example the Zaynabiyeh derived from the name of the sister of Imam Husayn and the Abbasiyeh referred to his brothers. Both of them were with the Imam at Karbala. The name of Imam Husayn was given to all the Tekkyie (*Husayniyye*). For this reason such places are known alternatively as Husayniyye in Persia and other Shi'ah strongholds such as Bahrein.

In terms of painted tile work, the Tekkiye Mu'aven ul-Mulk in Kermanshah is one of the finest in Persia.

Religious identity and the function of the Tekkiyeh Mu'aven ul-Mulk has controlled the subject matter of the majority of tile works of the building which have focused on religious events, often in the form of Qur'anic stories and also in particular the events of the martyrdoms at Karbala. Moreover some tiles portray national stories, which, for the most part, originated in the *Shahnameh* of Ferdawsi. The depiction of the tragedy at Karbala and the martyrdom of Imam Hussain with the epic national stories provide common motifs for the tile work of this type of building. In contrast to the polarization of politics and religion by intellectuals during the late Qajarid period however the national and religious concepts were integrated and correlated as different aspects of common beliefs. Consequently a single group of folk artists seen to have used both nationalistic and religious material as subjects in these places.

To illustrate both traditional and European influenced, I have selected some of the most important and relevant works in the Tekkiye Mu'aven ul-Mulk.



Fig. 2. Detail of a panel of painted tiles dated to the later 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries showing the battle of *imamzade* Qasim, Imam Husain's nephew, with the enemy. Photograph by the author.

Note: this work shows continuity of the Iranian traditional artistic patterns in both theme and style. The title written at the top is 'the battle of Qasim'. Artists for the most part use similar patterns to depict different stages in the Karbala story. The Imam's family are very similar. Therefore the painter tries to distinguish such scenes by their title. This pattern is regarded as a very old tradition in Persian art (see fig. 2. a).



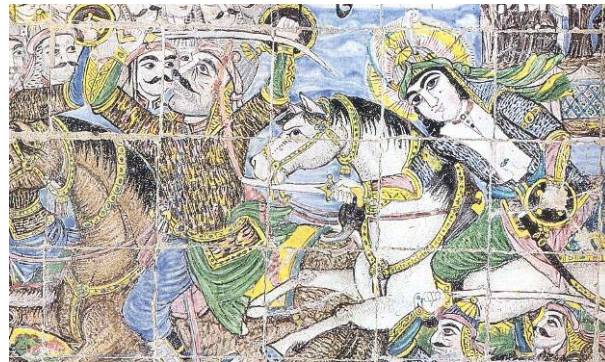
Fig. 2.a. Two harem girls dating to 1811- 14. attributed to Mirza Baba. Oil on canvas. Collection of the Royal Asiatic Society, London.

Note: The artist depicted two harem girls in archetypal form and in identical pose. The painter displayed his personages and other natural objects in an absolutely typical way which pointed to celestial and divine rather than material beauty. Artists tried to discover and display archetypal forms and turned the objects in a typical way. This tradition penetrated into early Qajarid art. The early Qajarid artist recovers this traditional pattern and discarded the European element which was promoted in the Safavid period. In the early Qajarid period artists tried to idealize the subject. The static quality as well as the striking resemblance between many figures ( men with men and women with women ) suggests that the early Qajarid artists were not interested in portraying the personages as individuals, but as stock types to blend into the painting's decorative setting. (See detail of fig. 2.a).



Detail of fig. 2.a

The Persian artist always tried to present heroes in a typical way. Here Qasim is presented in his youth, very beautifully, with strong eyebrows recalling the common type of miniature. Good people were always represented beautifully and their enemies were portrayed with ugly faces.



Detail of fig. 2

Fig. 3. Detail from a coffee house painting by Qullar Aqasi, dating from the first 20<sup>th</sup> century showing Ali Akbar ( the son of Imam Husain) in battle at Karbala. The out-stretched hoorses neck and the position of its rider compares directly with the portrayal in the Tekkiye.



There are essential similarities between this paintings and fig. 2. Only title distinguishes them. The artist would enlarge Qasim and his enemy to emphasize their significance in the narrative. In order to show the mass of the enemy the artist followed tradition by crowding the canvas.

Basically the religious and social role of these stories is to arouse the emotion of the Shi'ah against their historical enemies. This was the purpose of the painted tiles. These pictures combined to lead the Shi'ah to a proper understanding of events, particularly at Karbala and so to justify the separation of their sect from Sunni Islam. That is why painted tile work with a religious theme was associated with the Taziyeh (passion play) as another aspect of religious art in the period. In fact both of them had similar religious and social objectives and were part of the same phenomenon.



Fig.4.1.



Fig.4.2.



Fig.4. 3.



Fig.4. 4.

Fig.4.1. Ali Akbar, Imam Hussein's son. Unknown artist. Dated to the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. 170 x 110 cm..

Fig.4. 2. Qamare-e Bani Hashem, anonymous. Dated first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. 170 x 110 cm. Photograph by the author

Fig.4. 3, Qasim Ibn Hasan, anonymous. Dated first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. 170 x 110 cm. Photograph by the author

Fig.4.4. Imam Hussein, the victim of injustice, anonymous. Dated first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. 170 x 110 cm.

Photograph by the author



Note: These works in the Tekkiye Mu'aven ul-Mulk express the different stages of the tragedy of Karbala. Shi'ah followers know such stories very well because the Ulama (the Shi'ah priests) recite them endlessly. Their verbal presentation is echoed in the pictorial presentation. All the iconography of the events at Karbala followed distinguishable archetypes. For this reason the personality and character of the artists was not allowed to impinge on the works. Individuality was sublimated to the dominance of the theme.

The similarities between figures in terms of technique and composition, demonstrate that they have been created by one specific artist.

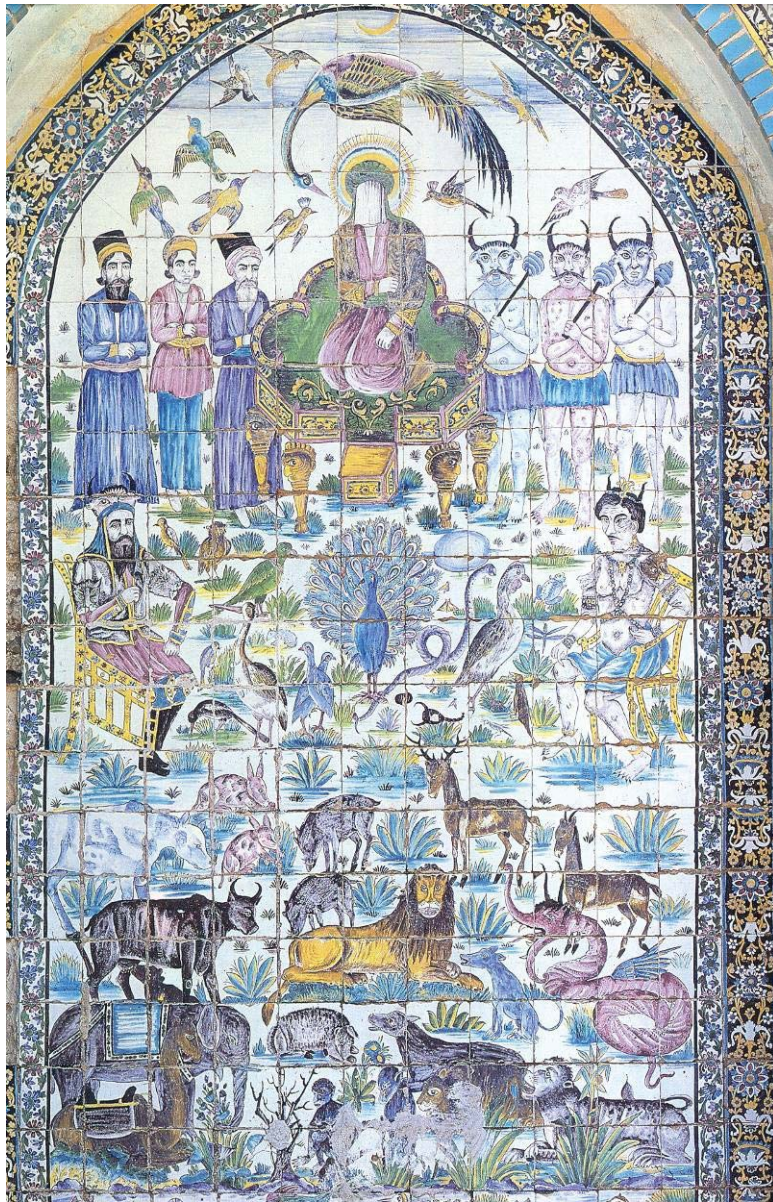
Fig 4.1 portrays the martyrdom of Imam Hussin's son Ali Akbar. It is one of the most tragic and important elements of the Karbala stories in which Ali Akbar as teenager embraces his father after a major battle. According to the history of Karbala Imam Hussain embraced all his companions in his last moments.

At first glance the type of framing commands attention. The cartouche dividing the literal subject from its surroundings was introduced to Persia through postcards and pictures and became significant during the Qajarid period, together with, it seems, the attaching iris flowers. These are of European derivation.

The three quarter viewpoint and similarities are evident in all them. The stance derives from European religious iconography in subjects such as the Madonna and child. Persian patterning around the frames is intended to beautify the composition; but otherwise, carries no symbolic meaning.

In such tiles the face of Imam Hussain was covered by a veil because according to the Shi'ah beliefs the painters are not allowed to show the face of the Holy prophet and the innocent Imams. Despite this some painters did.

The halo beyond the head of Imam Hussain emphasizing his sacred position probably comes from the Christian iconography of Persia during the Safavid period (1502-1722) A.D. . It should not be forgotten that the halo appears in Sasanid (642 AD-224 BC) relief depicting Mithra, the God of Light.

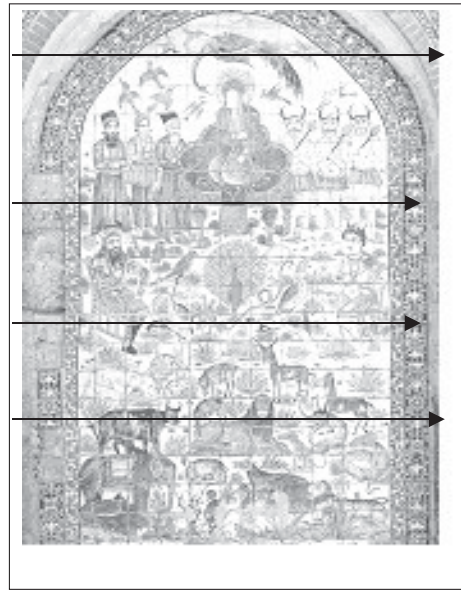


5. The panel of the prophet Solomon Tekkiyeh Mu'aven ul-Mulk in Kermanshah, artist unknown. First half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, 400x 2660 cm,

Note: The panel is based on a Qur'anic story. According to the Qur'an and other religious sources the prophet Solomon had a splendid court. He governed people, animals and divine beings (*Jen*). All are depicted in this panel. Birds shade his head to protect him from the sun and he is able to converse with the creatures around him.

The conception of space in this work is totally derived from tradition and is essentially two-dimensional. There is no sign of perspective so the artist employed traditional devices to show the various several depths within the viewing plane.

Fig. 5a. Shows different layers of the composition.



Solomon seated on the throne is placed at the top of the composition, surrounded by courtiers. His superiority is shown by his position; this pattern, derived from the Achaemenid phase (550B.C.-330B.C.)

, has been constant throughout Persian history. The face of Solomon is covered by a veil out of respect for religious bans which ban the artist from showing the countenance of the sacred person. Birds fly around Solomon in profusion. According to the Holy Qur'an (a flock of birds was commanded to fly above Solomon's head, to shade him. The *Symurgh* (a fabulous bird) as a symbol of *Ensan-e Kamel* ( the noblest of men ) flies around the head of Solomon identifying him as perfection among human kind. According to the Holy Quran all the animals and Divines were within Solomon's dominion and obeyed him. Consequently animals occur throughout the composition.

In the second layer, Rustam, the national Iranian hero, is seen seated on the left faced by the *Div-e Sefid* (white devil). According to the *Shahname*,( book of king) Rustam killed the *Div-e Sefid*, in order to rescue the king. The question arises as to why Rustam was added to the composition. While Rustam was considered a national hero who served the Persian kings before the coming of Islam it seems that here the artist deliberately tried to integrate religious and national myths. As Meskoob (1998) claims it was in order to integrate national beliefs and Islamic ideas that Persian artists tried to redefine and reevaluate their ideas. For instance they made *Kiumarsh*, the first Persian man, into Adam and Jamshid one of the greatest mythological kings into Solomon. In this way, Persian cultural history became more intimately associated with Islamic culture.

The courtiers on the right side of Solomon, are wearing Qajarid clothes. Qajarid kings took on the inheritance of the prophets.<sup>1</sup> The Shah is also metaphorically seen as Solomon, in Persian poetry. Therefore the artist also tries by this association to link his work with the Qajarid rulers.

The composition is based on a symmetrical balance. This is clear at the top. At the bottom the lion, symbolic of the monarchy, is placed on the centre line and is surrounded by animals. The lion may here symbolized Solomon, or the king, reflecting mythological beliefs, which is why the artist has used a warm colour (yellow) to make a connection between them.

This analytical image illustrates the composition based on a symmetrical sub division. Despite the continuity of Persian tradition some European elements such as anatomy, shading and lighting enhance the detail of his composition.

<sup>1</sup> As is evident in the letter of Fath Ali Shah to the king of Afghanistan (Haeri, 1999).

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