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Original Research Article

A Visual and Content Analysis of the Fireplace Tile Panel at the Shangri-La Museum through the Lens of the Legitimacy and Hierarchy of Power in the Qajar Era

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Abstract

Problem statement: Like any other government in Iran, the Qajar dynasty required authority and legitimacy for its establishment and existence. The structure of government and political power of this dynasty was organized on the basis of positions and ranks, at the head of which was the king, and at the next hierarchical level, there was *mulūk al-tawā'if* (feudal). The artworks of the Qajar period, especially the high ones at the court, can in one way or another be the reflection or product of these non-objective features and currents. The tile panel of the fireplace in “Shangri La Museum” (USA), a piece of artwork with special visual and conceptual components, is an example that sheds light on these features.

Research objective: The purpose of this article is to study the features of this tile panel in terms of images and visual techniques and to examine the content of these characteristics based on the legitimacy and the hierarchy of power in the Qajar era.

Research method: This research is qualitative employing a descriptive-analytical approach.

Conclusion: The results of the research accentuate these points that, in addition to the practical and decorative aspects, the above-mentioned work portrays the political-governmental supports of the Safavid government and antiquarianism as legitimizing factors in the form of an image. The array of people at three consecutive levels represents the structure and levels of power in this period. The level includes the main core of power, the entertainers (the royal court), and the military.

Keywords: *Qajar, Fireplace Tile, Shangri-La, Legitimacy, Hierarchy of Power.*

Introduction

At some historical turning points, works of art can be a reflection of the situation of their time, especially the will of the government and its pillars. Since the visual arts are associated with “seeing” and “representation”, they are considered a suitable means to achieve this goal. The art of the Qajar period shows this in many cases, and various artistic media in this period, including oil painting, watercolor, stone carvings, lacquerworks, hand-printed cloths (known as *qalamkar* in Persian), and especially tile work, sometimes have been a favorable platform for portraying themes and certain purposes. Power and the concepts associated with it, such as dominion,

sovereignty, authority, and legitimacy, have always been the most important issues that dynasties and governments have had to achieve in appropriate ways. The Qajars sought to fulfill such needs on the one hand, by looking at the past and, on the other hand, by understanding the needs of the times and adapting to the contemporary conditions. The remaining works of art from the first years of the establishment of this dynasty, especially from the reign of Fath Ali Shah until the middle of this period and the Nasrid era dealt with political and court themes. The portraits of kings, princes, dignitaries, nobles, entertainers, and in general, the family and dynasty of the monarchy were aligned with the advancement of the goals of the power system and political propaganda.

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One of the works in which the above contents and concepts are evident is the seven-color tile panel preserved at the Shangri-La Museum, located in the state of Hawaii, America. This place, which used to be the home of a collector named Doris Duke, is now a place in which numerous works of art from all over the world, especially Islamic art are presented. The subject of the work, which has been created in relatively large dimensions (208 × 329 cm), seems to be a court party and a royal reception. However, apart from the visual coordinates and the type of composition and staging of this panel, this study is interested in the hidden concepts behind this image and their relationship with the political system and power system in the Qajar era. The purposes of the research include visual reading and examination of the formal and aesthetic aspects of the work, then finding examples and finally analyzing the panelworks in relation to the power system and the legitimacy factor. Due to the limitations of the space, it has been avoided to mention some preliminaries, including the background and developments of the art and tile work of the Qajar era or the explanation of some artistic techniques. The significance of this research is to know the motivations and political-government ideas of a historical period and how these factors spread and manifest in the realm of art.

Research Method

This qualitative research employed a descriptive-analytical and comparative method, and the data was collected using archival research. At first, a desirable image of the panel was prepared, and then, based on the visual foundations and the structural and thematic matching of this panel with similar works in other artistic media, a visual analysis was done. Finally, the existing and related visual effects and features in the work were compared with their corresponding political and historical concepts to realize the possibility of analyzing and achieving the meanings and concepts hidden in the image.

Research Background

Not much exists on Qajar tiling studies. Unlike some other media in this period, there is a lack of coherent and diverse references. Even the published ones focus on buildings with tiles, describing individual examples

in museums and collections, or teaching techniques. Among the research of pioneers in the field of Iranian tile studies, usually, the final part of the work is historically related to the Qajar period. Among them, there are books such as “Design and Implementation of Naqsh in Iranian Tiles” (Maher al-Naqsh, 1982) and “Mo’aghali selected” (Zamrashi, 1989). “Persian painted tiles” (Seif, 1997) is one of the first illustrated sources in which most examples of Qajar tile work are presented. The book of “Qajar Tiling” (Riazi, 2015) is among the relatively most complete sources collected so far. In this work, after describing the evolution of Iranian tiling, the author specifically discusses the Qajar tiling industry and the styles, motifs, techniques, and factors influencing the image development as well as the buildings and museums where Qajar tiles are found. This source is at a higher level than other similar examples in terms of providing numerous color images and rich content. “Tehran in the Panel of Tiles: A Look at Qajar Period Tilework in Tehran” (Majdaniya & Abdolrahimi, 2018) is another volume, mainly illustrated, that classifies Tehran tiles of the Qajar era from thematic perspective (monochrome, war, hunting grounds, animals, etc.) They have presented numerous examples of works. The author of the book “The Glory of Qajar Art (A Collection of Articles on the Culture, Art, and Tiling of the Qajar Era)” (Scarce, 2019) in her final three articles, specifically describes the historical and artistic aspects of Qajar tiling and issues such as color, design, theme and some artists of this field. “Life and Works of Master Ali Mohammad Esfahani” (Makinezhad, 2021) is one of the most recent sources of Qajar tile studies, and as its title suggests, it studies the condition and artistic works of this eminent tile master of the Nasrid era in detail.

Authoritarianism and Legitimation in the Qajar Government

Throughout history, governments have always needed to be recognized by their communities and people for establishment and durability. Political and social thinkers refer to this formalizing factor as “legitimacy”. The Qajar dynasty, like any former government in Iran, was not an exception to this rule and attempted to put the issue of legitimacy and continuity on the agenda in various ways. Having power with tribal support, the Qajars managed

to unite Iran once again after a relatively long break from the collapse of the Safavid government. The Qajar dynasty (Agha Mohammad Khan) belonged to one of the Turkoman clans of Iran called Qajar, who migrated to Iran from Central Asia during the Mongol invasion and settled near Armenia. The Qajar clan was one of the seven main “Qezelbash” clans that Shah Ismail could establish the Safavid dynasty with the help of their military power (Holt et al., 1970, 395; Towfiq, n.d.; Babayan, 1993, 1-6). Shah Abbas I also settled a group of them in Astarabad (today Gorgan) (Matthee, n.d.). For this reason, the Qajar considered themselves to be the rightful descendants of the Safavid dynasty (Rostam al-Hukama, 2005, 51). Relying on the historical and political foundations of the Safavid government was considered one of the Qajar strategies to establish and claim legitimacy.

But another factor that attracted the attention of the Qajar sultans goes back to the eras before the Safavid period and even before Islam. This case is referred to as “archaicism”, which is synonymous with the revival of Iranshahri ideas, Kayani traditions, and Khosravani ideology. The beginning of this flow was mainly during the time of Fath Ali Shah and his court. According to Zarrinkoub: “Since he [king] was not devoid of the taste of poetry and wrote poetry with the title of “Khaqan”, and despite being miserly, he wanted to make his court similar to the courts of the Seljuk and Ghaznavid eras. That is why he attracted poets. The poets of the age were given authority. Mirza Abd al-Wahhab Nishat was appointed as the “secretary of the mamalek”. Fath Ali Khan gave Saba the title of “Malek osh-Sho’arā” and the position in the government named Seyyed Hossein Mojmar Esfahani was given the title of “Mojtahed osh-Sho’ara”. The king established the Khaqan Society as the center for the revival of poetry and literature of the age” (Zarrinkoob, 1995, 150). Regarding Fath Ali Shah’s insistence on Iran’s historical past, it is even said that “court poets and historians had the duty to present the Qajar ruler as the rightful heir of Iran’s past kings. Fath Ali Khan Saba, the Malik al-Sho’ara wrote the Shahnashahnameh in imitation of Ferdowsi’s Shahnameh in which he equated Agha Mohammad Khan, Fath Ali Shah, and Abbas Mirza with mythological and historical figures” (Pakbaz, 2015, 24). Concerning images, “all the

efforts of the court painters were aimed at reviving the glory of the Achaemenid, Sasanian, and Safavid eras” (ibid.). The application of these new inspirations, as a result of the introduction of new techniques and technologies and the existence of a wide treasure of visual materials and elements that were all influenced by the arts and crafts of ancient Iran (pre-Islamic dynasties), seemed possible and ready (Scarce, 2019, 109). The effort of painters and artists to revive this forgotten magnitude and glory is aligned with the above two legitimizing factors such as relying on the support of the Safavid government and antiquarianism. Today, many works show that Qajar tended to revive the Islamic past and refer to the kings of this period, and in general, manifest Fath Ali Shah’s fascination with the ancient history of Iran and ancient kings in many artistic media of this period, such as painting, lithography, and of course, tile work. Identifying and using the role of ancient warriors and mythological and historical kings (from Rostam and Jamshid to Seljuq Malik Shah and Safavid Shah Abbas) in the visual arts of this period (a part of which directly prepared by court artists and later on multiplied in large dimensions by popular artists of the society), is a proof of the involvement of the government in this legitimizing tactic, which continued in a different form even after Fath Ali Shah (Figs. 1 & 2).

Besides the two components mentioned, there is a third important factor in the field of gaining authority and legitimacy. This case was directly related to the religious beliefs of the society whose majority had a single religion and the institution of religion was considered one of its vital pillars. According to Yervand Abrahamian, the Qajar kings continued the tradition of the Safavid kings of creating a genealogy and establishing a link between ancient dynasties and Shi’ite imams (Abrahamian, 2010, 41). Therefore, although the Qajar kings did not enjoy a pre-existing and essentially religious legitimacy like the Safavid kings, almost throughout their rule - with ups and downs - they tried to get the support of the clergy to gain legitimacy and continue their rule with emphasis on objective and subjective factors (Karimi Zanjani Asl & Hosseini Golsefi, 1996, 87).

In general, it can be stated that the three factors or currents mentioned, namely (1) attributing oneself to the Safavid dynasty and relying on the governmental-ideological



Fig. 1. Tile panel with Darius's public audience scene (inspired by the reliefs of the Persepolis), Mirror Hall at the Golestan Palace, Qajar period. Source: Riazi, 2015, 211-210.



Fig. 2. Tile panel of the fireplace with the image of Shah Abbas and his entourage, Olana Museum, America, related to the Qajar period (right); The tile of Ustad Lorzadeh's family tomb with the portrait of Safavid Shah Tahmasb, from the Qajar period, Ray city (left). Source: Makinezhad, 2021, 73.

supports of that Shiite dynasty, (2) antiquarianism, and (3) supporting the mass religion in the form of alignment with the institution of religion and clergy had effects and consequences that were also reflected in the art of this period - most of which served the court and the power structure (court art).

Structure and Hierarchy in the Qajar Power System and Pyramid

The Qajar political power structure, like other absolute monarchies, was similar to a system in which there was a main nucleus in the center and elements with a function corresponding to their position in the whole system were placed around it. In this system of power, the king and the main elements of the government structure formed the foundation of the Qajar government system. In fact, it can be said that in a geometric plan, the central core of such a system was formed by the king, and the political and social classes, each according to the degree of distance and proximity to the origin of power and according to their inherent advance and backwardness in the process of forming such a structure, established. In this absolute authoritarian system, the king was considered the factor of survival and durability of the political structure, and the influence was mostly one-sided (from top to bottom) (Karimi Zanjani Asl & Hosseini Golsefidi, 1996, 86 & 85).

In the reports and chronicles of that period, the absolute rule and undisputed authority of the Shah along with his magnificent status are also mentioned. For example, Sir John Malcolm, a British politician, historian, and diplomat, contemporary with the reign of Fath Ali Shah Qajar in Iran, writes about this: The king of Iran has been said to be more absolutist and more powerful than all the sultans of the world and [...] since ancient times it was based on this approach. The ruling has always been the ruling of the Malik law (Malcolm, n.d., 398). Lord Curzon, a British politician, historian, and Iranologist, also says that the Shah of Iran has the three duties of legislation, execution and judgment, and he is actually the absolute ruler in all matters (Curzon, 1983, 513). Mohammad Shafi Qazvini and Mohammad Hasan Khan E'temad os-Saltaneh, one of the authors of that period, have also pointed to the status and position of the king's grace on earth and the hand of God's providence and destiny in this selection and assignment in line with the above sayings (Qazvini, 1991, 32 & 31; E'temad os-Saltaneh, 1978, 42). In the Qajar power pyramid (another term for the power system), the influential elements after the head of the system (the king) were under the title of Moluk al-Tawa'if, which itself was divided into two main categories, including central elites and local elites. The central elite consisted of the Qajar dynasty, princes, courtiers, stewards, ministers, governors, and officials; and the local elite was made up of nobles, aristocrats, rulers, and mirzas. Some religious-government officials, such as Imam Jum'a, Sheikh-ul-Islam, and judges, were also considered in the Qajar political pyramid and close to the upper class (Abrahamian, 2005, 43). The courtiers, as a part of the central elite mentioned above, had their own subdivisions, which included high-ranking civil and military officials. The chiefs of clans and rulers and local governors were among the other components of this system. Regarding the military officials, it should be mentioned that at the beginning, the Qajars mainly relied on the defense and protection force of the tribes, but gradually, due to external pressures and internal disturbances, they decided to form an orderly army in the Western manner (Ringer, 2021, 27-39).

Court Etiquette, Ceremonies, and Requirements

Despite its tribal origin, the Qajar dynasty followed special and unique court customs and ceremonies. These customs and habits, based on historical reports and works of art, can generally be analyzed under two categories, including ceremonies (crowning and Nowruz greetings) and reception (formal visits of representatives, leaders, and officials with the king) (Elseidy, 2017). The paintings and murals obtained from the Safavid era before the Qajar period are proof of this claim. Some historical-artistic examples of these ceremonies and rituals are the reception of Shah Tahmasb from Humayun (King of India), the reception of Shah Abbas with Abd al-Mo'men Khan Uzbek, the reception of Shah Abbas II from Nadr-Mohammad Khan (King of Turkestan) (Fig. 3), the reception of Shah Abbas II from the mongol envoy, the distribution of Nowruz gifts by Shah Sultan Hossein, the honoring of the Ottoman representative in the presence of Nader Shah, Karim Khan Zand, and the Ottoman ambassador. The second category of court etiquette (reception), like the first category (ceremonies), was accompanied by attachments and requirements that were mostly fixed. In this case, the presence of the king (and his guest) and his intimates and courtiers, along with singers, entertainers, and dancers, and the role of each in that particular event, were considered necessary and influential. This type of ceremony always followed certain criteria the visual appearance of which in works of art, especially from the Safavid era onwards, was also subject to a specific visual format and pattern.

Features of the Qajar Fireplace Tile Panel at the Shangri-La Museum

- **An introduction to the Doris Duke Islamic Art Foundation, Shangri-La Museum (Honolulu, Hawaii)**
Doris Duke (1912–93) is the name of an American philanthropist and collector whose home in Honolulu, the capital of the state of Hawaii, located in the Pacific Ocean, is known as a place for keeping collections of Islamic art. The Shangri-La Museum (with the full name Shangri-La Museum of Islamic Art, Culture, and Design) was in the former house of this collector, which is currently managed by the Doris Duke Islamic Art Foundation as a public museum of art and culture of the Islamic world. Duke compiled this collection in 1935. He started and continued this work until



Fig. 3. The reception of Shah Abbas II from Nadr Mohammad Khan (King of Turkestan), mural painting, Chehelston Palace, Isfahan. Source: Authors's archive.

a year before his death. This collection has 2,500 art objects that include works from Spain, Morocco, Egypt, Syria, Iran, Central Asia, India, and parts of South Asia. The mentioned collection includes samples from Iranian tile work to ethnic objects such as leather saddles and primitive tents. A part of this collection is related to the Qajar period and also before the Qajar period (Afsharid and Zand). This collection is very rich in the use of different materials such as wood, glass, enamel, ceramics, metal, paper, and canvas, as well as all kinds of art items such as carpets, windows, doors, chairs, tables, tiles, manuscripts, wall paintings, and dishes (Littlefield, 2002; Anonymous, 2017; Anonymous, 2021). Among all these works, there is a ceramic patterned panel, which in terms of style and work method is similar to the Iranian tile works of the Qajar era, and in the museum catalog it is also referred to as “tile panel around the fireplace (Iran, 19th century)” (Fig. 4). This is a noteworthy work that will be discussed in detail below. This panel, like most of the ceramic works in the above collection, found its way to Shangri-La through intermediaries, collectors, and art dealers. In 1938 Doris Duke, with the coordination of Arthur Pope, traveled to Iran, Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and Egypt to buy the desired works, and he was able to buy this fireplace panel through an art dealer named Ayoub Rabinou in Iran (Tehran). It should be mentioned that he also bought other tiles from the Safavid period, which were previously obtained by the same dealer from a private house in Jolfa, Isfahan, and the panel of the mentioned fireplace was probably among them (Littlefield, 2002, 40).

- **The Qajar Fireplace tile panel**

“Fireplace”, which in the Qajar literature the words “bukhari” and “pishbukhari” are used instead, before this period was mainly decorated with plaster and mirror work, and it is clearly from this time (especially the end of the Nasrid period) that it appeared in the form of patterned ceramic patterns. In the mentioned period, this functional element (warming) gradually got a decorative

aspect inspired by Western examples and became a luxury element along with many pieces of furniture from noble and aristocratic life (Makinezhad, 2021, 128; and to see more examples, see *ibid.*, 129-135). In the decoration of ceramic fireplaces, vegetal and geometric motifs are dominant, and military and banquet subjects are preferred. These motifs and themes are usually painted among several separate decorative panels, and the entire structure of the fireplace is mostly the result of assembling different prominent components (panel and border). But the tile panel of the fireplace preserved at the Shangri-La Museum (if we consider the use of “fireplace” for it) not only lacks decorative panels and the mentioned components but also has a different structure, composition, and form in general (Figs. 5 & 6). Although this work does not have the name of its maker (artist’s signature) or any type of text or inscription, referring to the recent statement (Makinezhad, 2021, 128), the approximate time of its construction can be dated to the end of the Nasrid era or the Mozaffari period, which was the peak of tile-making developments in the Qajar era.

The Shangri-La fireplace (mounted on the wall of the former living room of Doris Duke’s house) consists of a simple flat curved form, resembling a semicircle, and square bricks. The clays are made of stone paste, and the technique used in tiling is a type of underglaze painting. The width of this panel in the widest part is 329 cm, and its height is about 208 cm. The situation and subject depicted in this work, as can be seen from the characters and their movements, are a court and a banquet (royal reception). Here, the total number of personages present on the stage reaches 37, who according to their faces, moods, and clothing, are connected with the royalty, and in terms of performance style and drawing style, they evoke the mood of the Safavid palaces. These people are represented in a symmetrical composition (from the vertical axis), and in a general view, they are arranged on three different levels, which are, from bottom to top: (1) soldiers or guards; (2) entertainers, minstrels, and dancers and (3) the king, nobles, officials, entourage, and others (Figs. 7, 8 & 9). Among these three groups and in the white spaces of the background, there are many decorative elements, which mainly include fruits, cups, vases, decanters, pitchers, dishes, and accent tables. In the lower part of the work, among the guard soldiers, various plant and flower motifs (chrysanthemum, lily, tulip,



Fig. 4. A view of the living room of Doris Duke’s house (now the Shangri-La Museum, Doris Duke Foundation) with the fireplace tile panel on the right. Source: Littlefield, 2002, 45.



Fig. 5. Ceramic fireplace panel, glazed tile, Shangri-La Museum, Hawaii, Qajar period. Source: Littlefield, 2002, 47.

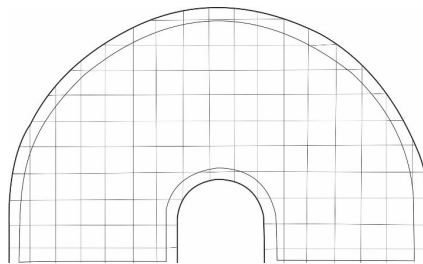


Fig. 6. The structure and general form of the ceramic panel of the fireplace. Source: Authors.



Fig. 7. A view of all personages present in the scene (37 people). Source: Authors.



Fig. 8. The composition and principle of symmetry (from the vertical axis) in the tile panel. Source: Authors.

and pomegranate) and a bird are painted at regular intervals. In this image, blue, yellow, green, and red are the dominant colors, and the whole panel is surrounded by a decorative border with arabesque, Khatai and medallion-like patterns.

The above components can be summarized in the table below (Table 1).

Visual and Content Analysis of the Features on the Basis of Principles and Criteria

The mentioned tile panel seems to function as a cover for a functional element (fireplace) in interior architecture and displays a series of visual ornaments and elements. However, it is a combination of disparate, yet harmonious elements and has major concepts in the interior of this composition. It originates from the intellectual system that governs the process of ordering and producing works of art in the Qajar era. According to the sample of similar images presented above (Fig. 3), the subject of this tile panel is the meeting and reception of one of the Safavid kings (probably Shah Tahmasb or Shah Abbas II) from a foreign guest. However, unlike other examples, here there is not much difference in the appearance, clothes, and belongings of the king and the guest, and it is as if both are the same king from the same nationality. Considering that in similar images, the king of Iran is always offering a cup of fruit to his guests, in this image, the person on the left can be considered the host. Whoever the above two characters refer to and whatever meeting this tile painting does, in the researchers’ opinion, the intention of the illustrator and the tiler (in line with the request of the customer) was not

necessarily a direct reference or a mere recounting of the event, but rather a presentation of the common themes of Safavid art in the Qajar era, which, in a way, comes back to the question of the Qajar identity and their legitimacy. As mentioned before, this appeal was the result of the important fact that the Qajar considered themselves to be descendants of the Safavid dynasty (one of the seven main clans of Qezelbash during the time of Shah Ismail), and this type of artistic exploitation was also a common thing for the artists of that period and almost appeared in all artistic media (Figs. 10 & 11). In addition to the images of the recent style, the description of such adaptations is also found in the historical writings of that period. For example, Charles James Wills wrote in his travelogue (Qajar period) about a painting that was copied from an older work and reached him in Iran: It was a banquet of a Persian king who reigned in Isfahan one hundred and fifty years ago [the Safavid era]. The people in that scene appeared all in the

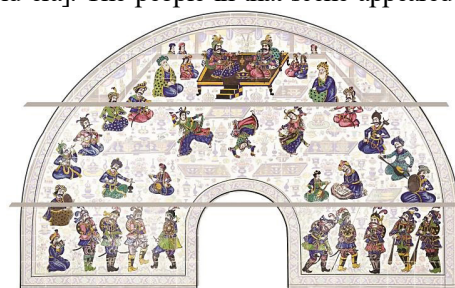


Fig. 9. Three levels in the arrangement of components and personages present in the scene. Source: Authors.

Table 1. Features of the fireplace tile panel at the Shangri-La. Source: Authors.

No.	Features & Characteristics	Explanations
1	Structure and composition	Symmetrical (from the vertical axis)
2	Technique	underglaze painting
3	Material	Stonepaste
4	Shape	Semicircle (crescent arc)
5	Shape of the tiles	Brick (square)
6	The overall dimensions of the fireplace	329×208 cm
7	Dominant colors	Blue, yellow, green, red
8	Number of personages	37
9	Position and number of characters in each group (from bottom to top)	Guard and protectors: 9 Minstrels: 12 King and officials: 16
10	Subject	Court banquet and reception of the king from a guest
11	Artist	Anonymous
12	Side elements and ornaments	Between the characters of the stage: fruits, cups, vases, decanters, pitchers, dishes, and accent tables below, between guards: chrysanthemum, lily, tulip, pomegranate and a bird; Above, behind the king: curtains and decorative hangings
13	Period	Qajar (second half), probably late Nasrid or Mozaffari era
14	Style	Safavid (Isfahan)
15	Place	Shangri-La Museum (Honolulu, Hawaii, USA)
16	Installation location	Doris Duke’s former living room

dress of that time [Safavid], and they had drawn the figure of the king holding a very beautiful cup in his hand, and all the trustees and pillars of that great king were sitting in a row around that banquet hall. In the scene in front of the painting, there were singers and dancers, and in the middle, a group of very beautiful girls was drawn (Wills, 1987, 188 & 189). This description refers to the reproduction of similar images of the above tile panels in the Qajar era. The superiority of the elements and arrays of Safavid art, including the “clothing of the time” mentioned by Wills, is one of the distinctive features of this type of re-creation. As in the tile panel of this fireplace, there is no sign of Qajar crowns and robes, and Safavid robes are drawn instead (Fig. 12).

Apart from the mentioned issue, which goes back to the question of the legitimacy of the Qajars, it should be noted that in the special composition of this image and the way of arranging the people, three levels or three areas are considered horizontally, which together with the general format of the tile panel, takes the shape of a triangle and a pyramid evoking power and its hierarchy (Fig. 13). The viewer’s gaze in this composition is directed from the bottom to the top, just like the structure of a pyramid, as the gaze of the two soldiers on the bottom, the right side, is also in the same direction (Fig. 14). According to what was mentioned, the top of the Qajar power pyramid was the king himself, and the next levels included central elites and local elites. Again, as it was said, the central elite was made up of princes and officials. In this image, double groups of two people sitting with the same headdresses as the king on both sides of the throne and in smaller dimensions, and each of the people present on the sides, can represent the mentioned elites (young princes and officials). The elderly men on both sides of the throne can also be considered judges or other related statesmen (Fig. 15). And finally, the soldiers and bodyguards painted at the bottom of the work can be considered high-ranking civil and military officials in this system. These soldiers are also present in some other works of the Qajar period, of which the wall painting of Negarestan Palace, by Abdullah Khan the chief painter, is considered to be its former counterpart. It should be mentioned that in the panel of the tile mentioned, the appearance and the cloths of the guards are somehow similar to those of the Qezelbash (Fig. 16).

Relying on the Safavid features and adapting the artistic elements of that period is a significant issue that is not only



Fig. 10. Tile painting of Shah Abbas meeting with Abdul Mo'men Khan Uzbek, Golestan Palace treasure, Qajar period. Source: Makinezhad, 2021, 103.

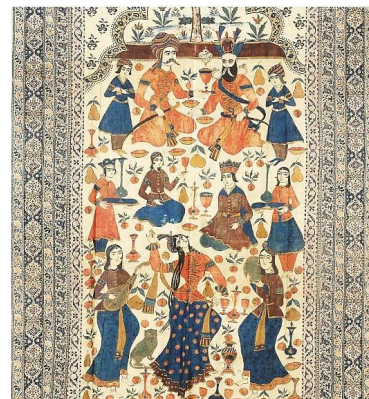


Fig. 11. Qalamkar cloth (calico) with the subject of the Safavid king meeting and reception of a guest, Qajar period, private collection. Source: www.qajarwomen.org.



Fig. 12. Samples of the personages of the fireplace tile panel with Safavid makeup, clothes, and headdress. Source: Authors’s archive.



Fig. 13. Reconstruction of the form of the pyramid of power and its hierarchy in the frame of the fireplace tile. Source: Authors.

manifested in the figures present in this tile panel but also the appearance of Rostam, the warrior of the Shahnameh (Fig. 17) should be noted as well. Here, unlike other Qajar images of this legend, which are generally similar to those of Fath Ali Shah Qajar1, Rostam is sitting in the guise of a Safavid man along with other courtiers, and like other personages and officials, he also wears Safavid clothes and headdress. Here only his mace is an identifying factor. According to the traditions of Qajar art representation,

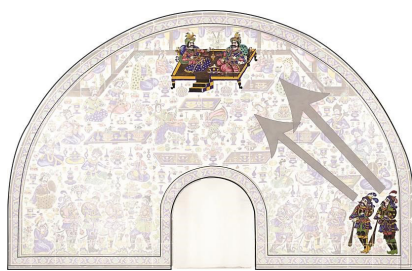


Fig. 14. Hierarchy and way of placing the personages in the power pyramid (from bottom to top) and the type of direction of the audiences' gaze. Source: Authors.



Fig. 15. Some personages around the king's throne, including judges, officials, elites, and princes. Source: Authors's archive.



Fig. 16. Qajar soldiers and bodyguards in the guise of Safavid Qezelbash, in the lowest part of the pyramid. Source: Authors.



Fig. 17. Rostam in the guise of a Safavid man with special clothing and accessories of the same period. Source: Authors.

Rostam is usually depicted in a sitting and motionless position outside of the campaign and in the courts, including this ceremonial banquet, and other cases such as Solomon's court. Here he is placed above the musicians and entertainers and below the courtiers. Therefore, his position can be considered neither at the level of upper courtiers nor at the level of lower courtiers, but in an intermediary position. Since positional perspective is not used in this tile painting, the position and rank of each person are determined by the way they are placed and leveled, and not by the enlargement or reduction of proportions. In general, the whole surface of this panel, except for the balustraded section of the iwan, where the king and the guest and some courtiers are present and a sense of depth is created, is uniform, and it is only a leveling arrangement that has a decisive role in the classification

and ranking of the characters. However, the presence of a mythical warrior in a Qajar work can be considered one of the examples of archaism in the thought and art of this period, which is once again an issue aimed at gaining legitimacy and authority in the Qajar period.

Conclusion

According to the information of the work in the catalog of the Shangri-La and based on stylistic features discussed, the fireplace tile panel at the museum is attributed to the Qajar period. Among the three main components that the Qajars often resorted to obtain the legitimacy of their government, two factors, i.e. relying on Safavid political-governmental credits and antiquarianism are evident. Here, the emphasis on antiquity and ancient values is embodied in the form of Rostam, the mythological hero of the Shahnameh, and on the other hand, the composition, the subject of the historical narrative, the characterization, and the garments are all Safavid-associated. Since the works of art of any period (especially noble and courtly samples) largely reflect the political-social conditions and the intentions of their patrons and clients, in this work, the illustrator and the tiler, in parallel with the request of the client, present the common themes of Safavid art during the Qajar era. In a way, this adaptation reflects the issue of identity seeking, authoritarianism, and legitimacy of the Qajars by referring back to the historical past of Iran (Islamic and pre-Islamic).

The subject of this tile panel is the court and a banquet and royal reception, and the figures present in the scene are arranged on three levels or three consecutive levels, which mainly include soldiers, minstrels and the main core of power. This special composition and the position and rank of each of the people present in it, which are determined by the way they are placed and leveled, evoke the shape of a triangle and, finally, the pyramid of power and its hierarchy. This leveling and ranking include major concepts in the field of politics and power, which is a result of the intellectual system governing the process of ordering and producing works of art in the Qajar era and their way of looking at this matter. Here, the king himself is placed at the top of the pyramid as the absolute ruler of affairs, and each of the officials and other elements of the government, including princes, officials, statesmen, people of the harem, and soldiers, are considered to be the representatives of the central and local elites and

members of the royal family. They are located around the top of the system and in lower ranks. In this way, both the form of the tile panel and its structure represent the issue of classification and hierarchy of power in the Qajar era, and on the other hand, its theme and visual content evokes the issue of legitimacy.

Endnotes

1. For more information on this topic, refer to Ghasemi & Baharlou (2021).

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