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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Visual Culture of Shi'ism: Qajar-era Murals in Gilan's Holy Shrines

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**Abstract:** Having arisen out of a wide variety of research traditions, visual culture studies are certainly different. Shia believers painted their holy shrines with murals, which have a long history of customs and traditions. Gilan's holy Shrines are places where religious events were held together with paintings on their walls dating back to the Qajar era. Accordingly, the images were influenced by developments such as the prevalence of *Ta'ziyeh* and the promotion of art and literature. This study focuses on religious and ritualistic beliefs of the region from the Qajar era to the present time. To this end, the question here is raised about the relationship between the concepts behind Gilan Shrines' decorative images and visual culture of Shi'ism during Qajar. Being qualitative in nature, the present study adopts a descriptive approach to content analysis with the findings demonstrating that the popularity of *Ta'ziyeh* and *Shabihkhani* during the Qajar era was the pivotal reason for building Gilan Shrines with those images. Furthermore, the event of Karbala, Stories of Prophets with its religious connotation, and folk tales all played a role in the formation of the paintings of Gilan Shrines.

**Keywords:** Qajar-era Art; Gilan Shrines; Battle of Karbala; Ta'ziyeh; Visual Culture.

## Introduction

In the very composite panoply on Shi'i pictorial art, the icon Gilan holy shrines seem to have a special role. "It bears the same name of *shamā'il* as the mural portraits of shrines known as *Buq'ā*, such as found in 'coffee house' paintings. The emergence of Gilan Shrines to hold religious ceremonies date back to the Qajar era and, naturally, illustrations on the walls of these structures also belong to the same period. "In the political and religious sphere, Shi'ism has, of course, been the official religion of Iran since the beginning of the sixteenth century" (Khosronejad, 2011). Furthermore, as images were influenced by events and developments of the time, including the prevalence of ta'ziyeh in Iran, and folk art were extensively popular, the researcher deems it inevitable to look into the same. The illustrations are, in effect, the visual texts which convey a message to the audience. "A word whether written, visual, linguistic, or in the form of media primarily serves the purpose of creating concepts and exchanging ideas and views. Nevertheless, language does not suffice when it comes to the transfer of concepts since humans observe language as a referent and

unearth the stages of perception correctly or incorrectly" (Barthes, 1970: 26).

**Problems:** The key problem of this research is: How visual culture has manifested Iranian Shi'ism through murals at Gilan's holy shrines that are unique in the Islamic culture?

## Literature Review

Khosronejad (2012) in his book entitled "*The Art and Material Culture of Iranian Shi'ism: Iconography and Religious Devotion in Shi'i Islam*", leads experts to trace the material heritage of Iranian Shi'ism within each of its political, religious, and cultural dimensions. In yet another book "*Qajar Shiite Material Culture: From the Court of Naser Al-Din Shah to Popular Religious Paintings*", Khosronejad (2018) focuses on the intercession of Shia religion and depictions of the Prophet Muhammad and Imam Ali inside the royal court during the reign of Naser al-Din Shah. In his book *Paintings of Holy Shrines in Iran*, MirzaieMehr (2007) proposes the remarkable artistic values and social and cultural bases of the folk and religious narrative of paintings

engraved on the wall of holy shrines. Mahmoudi Nezhad (2010) in his book *Gilan's Holy Shrines Murals* proposes that in the past, inner and outer walls of the Gilan shrines were decorated with motifs, and many other religious places there had murals. These paintings depict the sufferings of Imam Hussein (AS) and his family on the day of Ashura. Raouf (2019) in a paper entitled "*Representation of Shiite art in the Tombs of Gilan (With Emphasis on the Approach of Cultural History Studies)*" proposes that the dates in some of Gilan's holy Shrines indicate that they belong to the Qajar period. But it seems that murals emerged during the Safavid and coincided with the spread of the Twelvers.

### Methodology

Through focusing on religious and ritual beliefs of the Gilan region, this paper provides a descriptive review of the works, analyzes with reason their contents, and deciphers the meaning and structure underlying the image in holy shrines thereby achieving a rational relationship between meanings prevailing from previous era to current times. The study is an analytical one where the required data was

gathered from old and new references and was analyzed qualitatively. Although library resources are also used, a field study to get the first hand information of those structures, along with taking photos, proved vital. In other words, to collect the required information, both library resources and field studies were used.

### Visual Culture

Visual culture is precisely new because of its focus on visual aspects of a place where meanings are created and contested. The problem of visual culture parallels the problem of material culture. As discipline or sub-discipline, visual culture incorporates a variety of themes or subject matters in humanities for decades, and thus is central to its emergence as a political and ethical field of study.

"Art History is not sufficient because it is focused quite appropriately on the history of art. It is concerned with works of visual art as certified and legitimated by some aesthetic tradition or institutional practice sculpture, painting, photography, the museums, collections, galleries that house works of art – i.e. the fine arts, and visual representation"

(Marquard, 2008:40). "It has been clear that encouragement has been given to taking refuge in cultural authenticity, historical specificity, artistic identity and tradition, particularly in Islam or the so-called Iranian-Islamic Shii traditions as an integral part of Iranian "authentic culture" (Scheiwiller, 2013: 16) "If art history is content with 'art' and its transcendent aspirations, visual culture can only accommodate the 'art-idea', that is, a sense of art as a social fact. The 'art-idea' is visual culture's anthropological description of those cultural practices of art that have endowed it with the possibility of transcendence, what Paul De Man called the 'temptation to permanence.'" (Tilley, 2006: 134). "Paying attention to the visual characteristics of paintings is crucial, otherwise the organization of the works in terms of visual elements -shapes, forms, tones, colors, lighting, etc.- in terms of the specific characteristics of the medium of representation in question, will be overlooked. This is the central justification for the presence of the adjective 'visual' in the expression 'visual culture'. It is this emphasis which, in the main, distinguishes Visual

Culture Studies from Media and Cultural Studies" (Morra and Smith, 2006: 23).

### Visual Specifications of Paintings

The best examples of rustic Karbala wall paintings are to be found in the northern province of Gilan. The most important building in many villages there is the one devoted to the tragedy of Karbala. It is a medium-sized rectangular edifice called Buq'a (mausoleum)." Many of these Buq'as were created toward the end of the Qajar period. A portico usually surrounds these buildings and protects the outer walls (Fig. 1). Both outer and inner walls are painted. Some of the paintings are in their original state while others have been restored or repainted" (Chelkowski, 1989: 108).

The paintings have been designed with no perspective and in simple forms with mental proportions; the colors of the plank and the image are separate from other images and almost a majority of the space in each painting has been allocated to people and their bodies. "Every village has one because it is the village community center. All the villagers have share in its upkeep, and they compete with each

other to give their best. Peripatetic painters attend to the paintings in the whole neighborhood, and the villagers supply them with eggs and other items for the purpose.

They are entertained every night by a different household in the village” (Chelkowski, 1990: 108).



Fig. 1. Building Construction of Mullah Pir Shamsuddin Lashidan Buq'a – Lahijan

The elements and themes which cover the walls of Shrines include the images of the slaying of Imam Hossein on his horse Zoljanah, Ali-Akbar, Zaynab, Shemr, Abolfazl, the battle of Ghassem with Arzagh from the Levant, Imam Hossein alongside the dead body of Ali-Akbar, the battle of Mosslem with the people of Kufe, walking the captives of Karbala and pulling the dead bodies of the martyrs on the ground in the main square of Karbala, Imam Hossein with Ali-Asghar in his arms with masks, halos, and angels (Fig. 2).

The paintings lack perspective just like miniature illustrations. There is tangible expressiveness in faces; the artistic hyperbola which is manifested in certain works is also observed in heavenly and diabolical faces.

The faces are portrayed innocently together with circular halos around them. Several painters who regarded depicting the faces of the prophetic household would cover their faces with a white mask.



Fig. 2. Building Construction of Agha Seyed Ali Buq'a-Motealegh Mahaleh-Lahijan

The painter would use specific visual conventions in portraits to emphasize the positive and/or negative aspects of characters. The painter would more or less resort to techniques to make the image prominent and profound although being under the influence of religious conceptualization, the painter paid no attention to the rules and regulations.

While being cognizant of eulogies appearing in different Ta'ziyeh, the painters were fully aware of all historical rumors and tales and narratives related to the events of

Karbala and thus benefited immensely from the folk culture and popular beliefs of the region in illustrating the images.

### **Manifestations of Shi'a art in Gilan's Holy Shrines**

Ever since their emergence, religions have consistently had a positive and influential role in providing humankind with civil and social identity. "If this were true that religions play a significant role in building human civilizations, one could assume that religion

from among the elements architecting human culture has borne a decisive role; in a sense, religious culture can encourage vitality, development, and civilization. Religious identity, just like identity itself, which is multidimensional, is indeed a composite concept comprising different dimensions such as ideological issues, rites and rituals, and historical, social, and cultural matters” (Zolfaghari, 2007: 34-35). Portraiture in its general sense is common in all religions. Although there is not much evidence due to religious restrictions on painting living organisms in the early days of Islam, the portraiture became prevalent among Islamic arts several centuries later. This specific art won a more prominent position among popular arts. Theatrical recitations of *Shahnameh* and *Pardeh-Khani* (literally, “reading of the screen/curtain”) were two reasons underlying the growing popularity of this art. Portraiture of the sacred and infallible such as Imam Ali, Imam Hossein, Abbas, Ali-Akbar, and Ali-Asghar benefited from the common traditions of the art of painting in that era.

In Gilan’s Holy Shrines paintings, the spaces are based on a detached division of the two-dimensional space of the image just like Iranian miniature since only through this procedure; one can consider each horizon of the two-dimensional space of a miniature as a manifestation of a level of existence and a level of wisdom and cognizance from another viewpoint. “Hence, space is per se the representation of the space of another world which is related to a form of awareness away from ordinary human awareness. With complete adherence to the concept of detached space, Iranian miniature was able to transform the two-dimensional level of miniature into a representation of the levels of existence and promote the spectator to a superior position from the horizon of their ordinary life and material existence and daily conscience while making them realize a world beyond this physical life, the world which Islamic scholars and Iranians, in particular, have called the world of fancifulness” (Hosseini, 2003: 152).

### **Religious Themes of Murals**

Religious beliefs and views have an important role in the images of Gilan’s Holy Shrines

(Buq'a). A group of these beliefs is to do with religious ones such as the afterlife, punishment, and reward, assessing good and evil deeds, and angels and some such images include:

### Portraits of Imams and Sacred with a Halo

In Gilan's Holy Shrines paintings, the images of the sacred, the infallible, and the clerics bear similarities with Iran's epic and mythical figures; this in its own right is one of the features of folk art. In these samples, the imams are represented in larger paintings compared to others with rings of halo around their heads. Sheikh Eshragh expounds upon divine blessing or charismas which are among the most fundamental components of his philosophies (particularly regarding the "illuminating human") and details his philosophy of illumination. The light which has embraced the creations of Ahura Mazda with halo is the same light emitted from Heaven. This halo is the most pivotal indicator of the sacred and the infallible in portraits, on the one hand, and abstract geometric images, on the other. "This could be the very first example of the presence of the illuminating human and his halo in

Iranian painting; yet, the manifestation of the luminous halo was not specific to the sacred as it also appears in illustrations with abstract geometric designs" (Bolkhari-Ghahi, 2005: 480). One observes repeatedly the halo around the imams and the infallible in Shrines. The majority of these portraits include Prophet Mohammad atop his horse Boraq, Imam Ali, Imam Hossein, Imam Zaynolabedin, Abolfazl, Ali-Akbar, Ghassem, Ali-Asghar, etc.



Fig. 4. Imams with a Halo of Flame-like Light in the Shape of the Cypress, Imam Mousa Kazem Buq'a, Motealegh Mahaleh, Lahijan

Several portraits of Imam Ali (AS) depicted on Gilan's murals from the Qajar era. Some of which depict him accompanied by his two sons. Very often, Imam Ali (AS) is sitting down, his head encircled by a halo, with him carrying his famous sword, Dhū i-Faqār, on his knees. The Prophet also told Ali that he would become known as Asadollah (Lion of God) and Sayfullāh (Sword of God).



Fig. 5. Seyyed al-Shuhada (AS) went to the Battlefield with Hazrat Ali Asghar (AS), Pir Shamsedin- Lashydan Buq'a, Lahijan

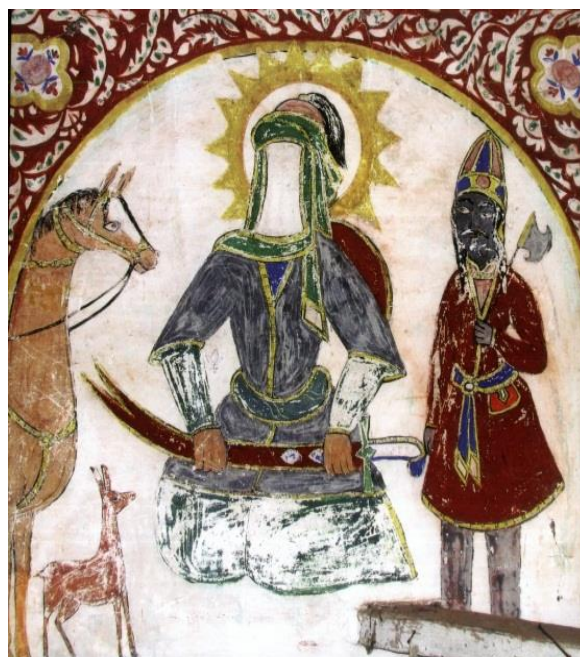


Fig. 6. Imam Ali (AS) and (Dhū i-faqār), Seyed Nasir Buq'a , Amlash, Lahijan (Zamanpour, 2014: 75)



Fig. 7. Imam Hussein (AS) on Horseback with a Halo, Agha Seyed Ali Buq'a, Motealegh Mahaleh, Lahijan

In this painting of Gilan's shrines, Imam Ali (as) is sitting with his famous sword (Dhū l-faqr) is in their hands. Imam (AS) is covered in gray, blue, green, and yellow with a white face and green headband.

Lack of light shadows and flat coloring of images are the features of this art. The presence of the deer is mostly due to beauty and has no role in the story. Imam Ali's slave Ghanbar is standing with a dark face in a simple brown dress with an ax.

### The Battle of Karbala

The Qajar period witnessed a notable resurgence of Shia religious sentiment in Iran. From the vintage point of cultural history, the Shia impact is most visible in the areas of drama and literature. In particular, the dramatic reenactment of the tragic events at Karbala, known as Ta'ziyeh and often labeled the Persian passion play, experienced its formative period during the early days of the Qajar dynasty. "The formation of Ta'ziyeh resulted from the merging of the funeral processions staged on the day of 'Ashura' with a specific genre of Shia literature to whose growing popularity the Ta'ziyeh also

contributed. Works of this genre follow in the vein of Hoseyn Ebn Va Ez Kashefi's fifteenth-century compilation *Rowzat al-Shohada'* (The Garden of Martyrs) and are commonly known as books of *Rowzehkhani* the reading or recitation of the book *Rowzat al-Shohada'*; sometimes they are also called *Marsiyeh* (lament) or *Maqal* [narrative about a] scene of combat" (Marzolph, 2011: 79).

Some of the religious themes in Gilan's Holy Shrines deal with Islamic beliefs, imams, and the events of Karbala. In effect, as noted earlier, the Qajar era witnessed the amalgamation of national identity with a return to pre-Islamic trends. Religion alone plays a profound part in establishing culture and tradition of many countries such that nationality is still considered as a significant factor in those states. The importance of nationality is actually on the rise in many countries and numerous foreign researchers stress the significance of religion in Iranian society. Graham Fuller believes that, "If the Zoroastrian faith were considered as a significant agent in establishing national solidarity in pre-Islamic Iran, the Shiite faith played a phenomenal role in engendering national identity and that the

Iranian identity has joined an inseparable bondage with the Shiite faith” (Goodarzi, 2005: 83). The majority of the commonalities in Gilan’s Holy Shrines paintings are to do with religious themes; the former is mostly focused on the martyrdom of Imam Hossein and his allies in Karbala while the latter is mainly originating from the epics of Shahnameh from the 10<sup>th</sup> century AD. The paintings of Gilan’s

Holy Shrines just like those of Coffee house paintings have been created based on the inevitable need to dramatize and eulogize the national and religious heroes of Iran; indeed, they are reflections of the endeavors of nations to revive and preserve national and religious heroes and be inspired by the scenes of their valiance.



Fig. 7. Hazrate Qasem (AS) went to the Battlefield, Imamzadeh-Seyed- Ebrahim Buq'a, Babajan Dareh, Rankooh- Amlash, Langerood



Fig. 7. Muslim Ibn Aqeel in Kufa, Imamzadeh-Seyed- Ebrahim Buq'a, Babajan Dareh, Rankooh- Amlash, Lahijan

*Pardeh-Khani* and *Shahnameh* reciting are two decisive reasons for the growth of this art modality which falls among folk art and grew under the influence of dramatic arts known as *Naghali* or theatrical story narrating and also *Ta'ziyeh*. The conventional mode of painting included portraiture, painting people, and epic murals emerging in the Qajar era. The images are illustrated and painted in a simple and primitive manner with no observance of perspectives. Many of the paintings and literary texts have intertextuality. "Iranian miniatures are nothing but intertextual

proportions of images or texts. Narratives in paintings are not always but most often founded upon verbal narratives. Hundreds of paintings with a uniform theme of religious and mythical events have been produced throughout history. The ratio of many genres is referred to as other texts" (Ahmadi, 1992: 227). Most paintings in Coffee house and holy Shrines are extracted from literary and religious texts. Religious themes at Gilan's Holy Shrines comprise images related to the mourning rituals of Karbala, popular religious beliefs regarding the afterlife, the rewards and

punishments for good and evil deeds, angels, portraits of imams and the sacred infallible, Qur'anic stories, and religious sayings.

Hazrat Qasim was the son of Imam Hassan (AS) who in three murders (Maghtal): Rawdah al-Shuhada, Tufan al-Bukha, and Muharraq al-

Qulub, likens his face to the moon. Hazrat Qasim (AS) asks Imam Hussein (AS) for permission to go to the battlefield. And is martyred on the battlefield. The wedding of Hazrat Qasim (AS) on Ashura is an invalid narration (Fig. 7)



Fig. 8. Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) Ascension Riding on Boraq, Agha Seyed Davar Kia- Bijarbeneh Buq'a–Lahijan

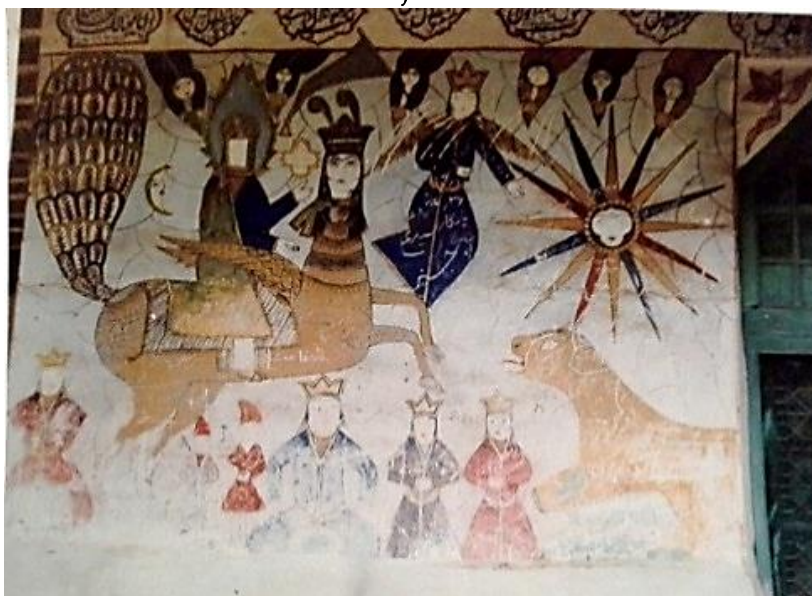


Fig. 9. Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) Ascension Riding on Boraq, Jafar Sadegh, Pincha Buq'a – Lahijan

Generally speaking, the images of Gilan's Holy Shrines with religious themes include:

Religious themes of Karbala mourning rituals, beliefs of the public, Quranic stories, and the portraits of imams and prophets. In Gilan's Holy Shrines paintings, the images of the sacred, the infallible, and the clergy bear similarities with Iran's epic and mythical figures; this issue in turn is one of the features of folk art. Belief in the afterlife is vivid in many images. The other themes observed in these structures are about the rewards for the good and punishments for the evil. The angels with scrolls of good deeds and Satan with the scrolls of evil deeds represent reward and punishment, respectively. “”

The night journey (Isra') and ascension to heaven (Mi'raj) is a singularly auspicious event in the biography of the Prophet Muhammad and is one of the most popular religious narratives in Islam. Amongst other things, it is seen to confirm the Prophet as the final prophet, to explain how the five daily prayers were introduced to the Muslim community as a religious duty, and to give an early explanation of the concepts of heaven and hell. (Buckley, 2013).

Based on a few highly enigmatic Qur'anic cues, the celestial ascension that Islamic tradition very quickly accredited to the Prophet Muhammad (as well as to the imams in Shi'i circles) is one of the most stunning attestations to this heritage that adapted itself so well to this new religion. Indeed, the Prophet's night journey and his visits through the seven levels of the heavens and the seven layers of hell reiterate some of the most important elements of ancient spiritual systems (Gruber and Colby, 2010).

There are many images of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) Ascension on the walls of Buq'a, tombs, and other religious and popular places, whose visual elements with few and common factors such as the bodies of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH), Gabriel, Boraq, Lion and Sometimes formed by drawing one or more angels.

The body of the Prophet (PBUH) with a white face, a green headband, and a blue dress, which is a sign of peace, purity, and honesty, and shows a spiritual, clean, and simple atmosphere that is the induction beyond this universality of the soul. The Prophet (PBUH) is seen riding on Boraq with a fiery halo around

his head and to emphasize the holiness of his divinity (Fig. 9).

Religious beliefs and opinions play a major role in creating images of Shrines. A part of these beliefs is linked with the afterlife, punishment, and reward, assessing good and evil deeds, and angels. In Ta'ziyeh, seeking shelter with Imam Hossein from the fear of a lion and the lion's bowing to the Imam has highlighted the role of this beast thus paving the ground for the introduction of the images of lions in Shrines.



Fig. 10. Lion Protecting the Bodies of Martyrs, Seyed Mohamad Langeroodi Buq'a, Langerood

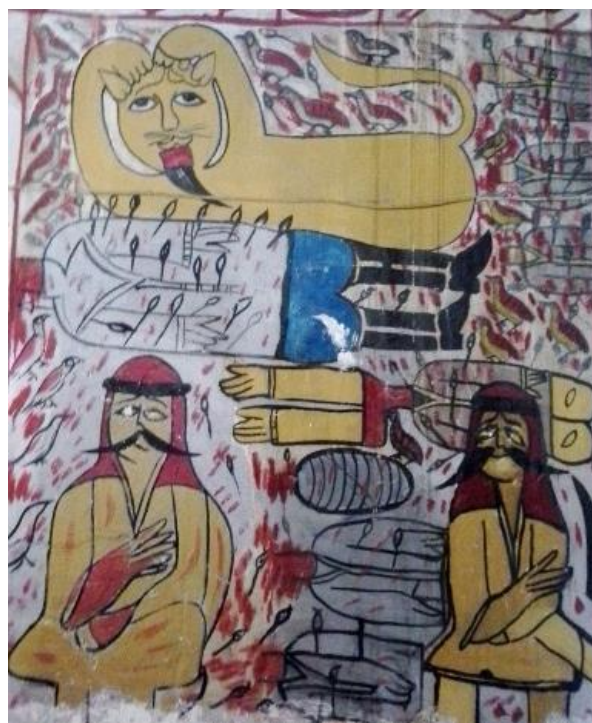


Fig. 11. Lion Protecting the Bodies of Martyrs, Seyed Nasir Buq'a, Amlash, Chelaras, Lahijan

"Sima Kuban, who has studied more than thirty of these buildings in Gilan, writes: "It is almost a rule that one wall is devoted to 'Ali Akbar, one to Qasem, and one to 'Abbas" (Chelkowski, 1990: 108).

The design methodology of images in Gilan's Holy Shrines is among the rarest visual illustrations in Iran's historical-religious places which have been created in an imaginary yet naturalistic and real modalities such as the image of Imam Hossein with the white halo and his blurred face behind a white mask riding his horse robustly. A roaring lion is by

his side attacking the enemy. The lion is of course symbolic. Angels are flying around the Imam safeguarding him. His sword is sheathed and he is calm atop his horse as if he is readily embracing martyrdom.



Fig. 12. Lion Protecting the Bodies of Martyrs, Pir ShamsuddinBuq'a, Lashydan, Lahijan

According to a popular Shia tradition relating to the tragedy at Karbala (680), as the martyrs lay dying on the field their enemies were about to trample over the corpses on horseback when suddenly a lion appeared and frightened the horses away, thus protecting the bodies of Imam Hossein and his family from further harm (Fig.10) (Suleman, 2012: 215).

A massacre pit is a holy place where the blessed head of Hazrat Seyyed al-Shuhada was

separated from her holy body by the accursed enemy. The themes of the images are violently depicted due to the epic nature of the Ashura events; Somewhere, the bloody body of Imam Hussein was cut off with his head and hands, fell to the ground and spears was sunk on his body, pigeons are depicted separating the arrow from the bodies of the martyrs. Bilal is crying over the body of the Imam. The bloody bodies of eight other martyrs have fallen to the ground and the enemy's spears have sunk into their tension (Fig. 12).



Fig. 13. Hazrat Qasim (AS) on the Battlefield, Mola Pir Shams-Aldin, Lashidan Buq'a, Lahijan

The Imam is dressed in white with a black boot, and the other martyrs are dressed in the same way, except for one of them, who is depicted with a red boot. A little further on, above the image, three members of the Ahl al-Bayt are sitting on a red matters and have halos of light around their heads, one of whom is

Hazrat Zainab (PBUH). The lion that falls from the grief of the tragedy that befell the Imam and his companions in the pit of the slaughterhouse on the afternoon of Ashura and pulls the daggers and arrows out of the corpses of the martyrs. The painter used white on the wall instead of white.



Fig. 14. Tent of Imam Hussein (AS) and Emma Zainul Abedin (AS), Seyed Mohamad Langeroodi Buq'a, Langerood



Fig. 15. Seyyed al-Shuhada (AS) went to the Battlefield with Hazrat Ali Asghar (AS), Seyed Nasir Buq'a, Amlash- Chelaras, Lahijan

In Figure (15) Seyyed al-Shuhada (AS) went to the battlefield with Hazrat Ali Asghar (AS), the face of Imam Hussein (AS) that always wears a veil over his face, riding on his horse Zul-Jannah, with a halo of flame-like light in the shape of cypress in green, to show the sanctity of pure human beings is one of the ancient features of Iranian art. Zul-Jannah in the Shiite mourning culture is the name of the horse of Imam Hussein (AS), which he rode on the day of Ashura and means the owner of two wings. While embracing Hazrat Ali Asghar, his face is quite calm and reminiscent of the Qajar era. The Kabuli dervishes are distinguished from other people by signs such as ax, kashkul, dervishes' hat, and with their kashkul, they bring water to the children of the Imam.

### Resurrection and Angles

“After belief in one god (Allah) the belief in a final judgment, or Judgment Day, is a fundamental tenet of ISLAM. On that day, which marks the end of the present world, all human beings will be resurrected and judged on an individual basis according to their righteousness or sinfulness. The righteous will be rewarded with a blissful life in paradise and

sinners will experience the torments of the FIRE (hell)”. (Campo, 2009: 413)

“In some mural panel is a scene of hell, over which the Sirat bridge spans the distance between the Last Judgment and the hereafter. As they traverse it some souls fall to hell, others go to heaven. Heaven is depicted in allegorical terms, showing the cleansing waters of Kausar and a tuba tree” (Chelkowski, 1990: 108).

Religious beliefs and views have an important role in the images of Gilan murals. A group of these beliefs is to do with religious beliefs such as the afterlife, punishment, and reward, assessing good and evil deeds, and. These superhuman figures included the angel of the Islamic dress code, the angel owning land, the angel of rain, the angel of compassion, the angel of punishment, Esrafil the angel of the trumpet.

Another extended scope of religious images comprises an array of angels, the images of the ghosts which are rewarded or punished after death with their deeds weighed by the scales, the tortuous fire of hell and the angels of punishment which are blackened and dark while there are also images of heavenly blessings such as flowers, plants, and trees

overwhelmed by diverse blossoms and fruit, the Kossar Pond, the Salssabil Fountain which is reminiscent of the eternal memory of heaven. All these images contain messages and in effect reflect the powerful dominion of rites and rituals on society. Generally, rites and rituals have played a major role in the foundation of Iranian visual culture, civilization, and art.

The presence of the questioning of the dead by two special angels on the first night after internment is among the scenes which have been painted. Heaven and Hell are discernible in Shrines paintings through the depiction of punishing sinners and rewarding the good-doers (Fig. 16).



Fig. 16. Judgment Day, Agha Seyed Ali Buq'a, Motealegh Mahaleh, Lahijan

## Conclusion

The prime purpose of erecting Gilan's holy Shrines (*Buq'ā*) is to host and accommodate

mourning services for Imam Hossein and his allies and also ta'ziyeh performances which reached its artistic climax during the reign of

Nasseredin Shah. Ta'ziyeh held a prominent stance as a religious-ritualistic drama in the early days of the Qajar dynasty. To this end, the existing images in Gilan's shrines are regarded as a visual text and the traces of the impact of ta'ziyeh texts are detected. Shrines paintings have been directly adopted from coffee-house paintings and as discussed earlier, the latter became commonplace in the Qajar era.

The method of painting images in shrines is among the rarest methods in Iran's historical religious buildings which was a combination of fantasy, naturalism, and realism such as the image of Imam Hossein seated powerfully on his white horse amid a battlefield with a white mask over his face and a halo around his head. A lion is roaring by his side and attacking the enemy. The lion was symbolic. There were angels around the Imam guarding him. The

Imam's sword was sheathed as he sat on the saddle with composure as if he is embracing martyrdom. The existing religious images in shrines are all pertinent to Karbala and the imams and of course focused on Islamic themes. However, literary and mythical images are traceable in ancient literature and folk tales which have been transferred from previous generations orally. Hence, these images could go back to pre-Islamic Iran. The faces are portrayed innocently together with circular halos around them. Some painters who regarded depicting the faces of the sacred family of the Prophet would cover their faces with a white mask. Furthermore, a review of the images of these structures demonstrates that many of the myths which are rooted in the beliefs of the people of the region have been painted in shrines.

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## فرهنگ بصری تشیع: نقاشی‌های دیواری بقاع متبرکه گیلان در دوره قاجار

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**چکیده:** مطالعات فرهنگی تصاویر که طیف گسترده‌ای را دربر می‌گیرند مطمئناً متفاوت است. شیعیان، زیارتگاه‌های مقدس خود را با نقاشی‌های دیواری نقاشی می‌کردند که برخاسته از آداب و رسوم و سنن متمادی آنان است. بقاع متبرکه گیلان مکان‌هایی همراه با نقاشی روی دیوارهای آنها و مربوط به دوران قاجار بوده که مراسم مذهبی در آنجا برگزار می‌شد. بر این اساس، تصاویر تحت تأثیر تحولاتی مانند رواج تعزیه و ترویج هنر و ادبیات قرار گرفتند. این مطالعه بر باورهای مذهبی و آیینی منطقه از دوران قاجار تا زمان حاضر تمرکز دارد. بدین منظور این سؤال مطرح می‌شود که رابطه مفاهیم ضمنی نقوش تزئینی بقاع متبرکه گیلان و فرهنگ تصویری تشیع در دوران قاجار چه بوده است؟ پژوهش حاضر از نظر ماهیت کیفی و به لحاظ رویکرد توصیفی-تحلیلی است. یافته‌ها نشان می‌دهند که محبوبیت تعزیه و شبیه‌خوانی در دوران قاجار، دلیل اصلی ساخت بقاع متبرکه گیلان با نقاشی‌های منحصر به فرد آنها بوده است. علاوه بر واقعۀ کربلا، داستان‌های پیامبران متضمن معانی مذهبی و داستان‌های عامیانه با هم در شکل‌گیری نقاشی زیارتگاه‌های گیلان نقش داشته‌اند.

**واژه‌های کلیدی:** هنر عصر قاجار؛ بقاع متبرکه گیلان؛ نبرد کربلا؛ تعزیه؛ فرهنگ بصری.