

Religious Art in Iran during the Qajar Epoch: Breaking the Boundaries

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Abstract

This article investigates the murals of Armenian churches that became the first examples of the combination of figurative European stylistic features and nonfigurative geometrical and arabesque Islamic motifs in a sacred place in Iran. This quality became one of the main characteristics in decorating Islamic structures during the Qajar era (1795-1925)¹. Iranian artists of this period introduced a distinctive composition in which European-style figurative images became the focal point in a section of wall or ceiling, while arabesque and geometrical patterns frame the figurative parts, therefore, decreasing the importance of the symbolic meaning of Islamic traditional patterns used for centuries in Iran. Qajar artists were in fact the first Iranian artists who broke the rule restricting the use of figurative images on Islamic structures and they provided life-size images of holy individuals showing their faces. This phenomenon is one of the vital factors of the art during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries since it demonstrates how much European art held sway over art in Iran and in what way religious art reflected cultural and social changes.

During the Qajar period, especially in the second half of the nineteenth century, social and cultural transformations occurred because of the Iranian attitude toward religion, the recognition of a person as an individual and as a valued member of the society, an interest in European culture and art which was accepted as modern and superior, and a change in government accountability. As materialism started to become more important than religious beliefs in the minds of the people, questioning social and cultural values commenced. The result was the 1906-1907 Constitutional Movement as a step toward democracy and a more secular society. Also, people looked for new experiences in the educational system, in literature, and in art. During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, art became more descriptive to meet the increasingly materialistic aspirations of its patrons. From about the 1840s until the 1910s, however, the need to indicate the individual characteristics of the sitters came to be of great interest, a notable degree of which is owed to studying European painting.

The influence of European art on Iranian painting began in the Safavid epoch (1502-1736)², but it affected the art of murals more than traditional Persian manuscript illumination. In that period, the art of the Italian Renaissance, as well as Dutch Baroque painting, were introduced to Iranian artists and their patrons, and the demand for this new art increased. These certain artistic styles from Europe gave artists the opportunity to experiment with three-dimensional representation, the use of light, the shape of a human body, and linear perspective to indicate depth as seen in European paintings. The paintings and murals of the Safavid era, therefore, are constructive examples of the first links between European paintings and Iranian image making followed by artists of the Qajar period extensively. In the 1620s, as the presence of European travelers and artists in Isfahan, the Safavid capital, increased, so did the number of commissions for European-style realistic paintings and murals.

The murals of the Safavid epoch also show the inspiration of European art specifically on religious art. During this period, Armenians were brought from the Turkish borders and settled in Isfahan by Shah Abbas I (1587-1629 A.D.) to protect them from Turkish incursions³. Armenian merchants who traveled to Europe brought back numerous pieces of artwork, many of which are still on display in the Vank Museum, in the Jolfa suburb of Isfahan. These paintings include portraits and figures, landscapes and still lifes in the Italian Renaissance style. Painted in oil, most canvases are religious portrayals of Christ and the Virgin Mary, painted and purchased in Europe by Armenian traders, who would in turn donate them to the churches in Isfahan⁴. Eventually, the paintings became effective models for Iranian artists and helped them become familiar with new techniques, especially oil on canvas. In addition, the walls of the churches that were built in the Safavid era, such as Betlaham Church (built in 1628), Vank Cathedral (built in 1655), and George Church (completed in 1719), were covered with murals depicting the life of Christ, the Virgin Mary, and Judgment Day⁵.

One example is the murals on the walls and ceilings of Vank Cathedral attributed to an Iranian-Armenian artist named Minas, who was born in the first half of the seventeenth century. During his childhood, Minas's family moved to Halab, Syria, where he was trained by a European artist. After returning to Isfahan, he was commissioned to provide murals for palaces and merchants' houses and became the chief painter of the murals in the Betlaham Church⁶. The Church murals were probably painted around the 1640s⁷. Since both the technique used and some images painted in Betlaham Church are very similar to the ones in Vank Cathedral, it is more than likely that Minas painted the walls of the Vank Cathedral, as well. As seen in Figure 1, the figures are painted wearing green, red, or brown Roman-style robes or they are nude. The angels are distinguished by wings and the figures of the Virgin Mary and Christ are painted with gold halos behind their heads. God, who

is painted on the upper part of the niche, appears as an old bearded man wearing red and green Roman-style robes, sitting between the clouds and the light. By using light and several hues the artist suggests the texture of the skin and the form of the bodies under their clothes, as well as some three-dimensionality, an aspect assisted by the colors of the background and the landscape behind the figures.

One fascinating characteristic of these murals is that the biblical stories painted in a European style are surrounded by Islamic nonfigurative motifs done primarily in gold and blue. Neither the figurative images nor the Islamic motifs seem dominant or overwhelming; they are harmoniously balanced. The fact that Armenian artists and Muslim artists worked together to create such sublime artwork is not only unusual historically, but it also indicates the first evidence of Muslim artists seeing figurative paintings used in Iran for a religious purpose alongside Islamic nonfigurative motifs⁸. This concept was not used in mosques or other religious structures built during the Safavid era, but it was employed in the holy shrines of the Qajar epoch.

Qajar shahs, courtiers, and court aristocrats commissioned paintings, tiles, and murals for the newly built mosques, mausoleums, *Tekiyehs* (where religious rituals were performed), and *Sagha-khaneh* (individual rooms where people could drink fresh water and pray for the builder)⁹. The religious images and the images in Islamic structures in the form of illustrations, paintings, carpets, tile designs, stone relief or murals can be divided into figurative images of nature and still lifes, portraiture and figures of holy individuals specifically the Prophet Mohammad and the Imams, and sometimes the patrons as well as narrative images describing religious incidents or legends, and figures of ordinary people conducting different tasks or practicing their daily prayer.

Some shrines contain images of still lifes or landscapes in the form of tiles and murals for decorative purposes. Before the Qajar period, stylized geometrical or arabesque patterns were used in sacred places but it was unusual for figurative images to be included on Islamic structures due to the restrictions on the use of figural imagery in mosques. Qajar artists challenged such a prohibition for the first time in Iran. Such an action indicates the changes in the culture and the patrons' point of view about religion in terms of their increasing openness toward accepting new experiments in religious art, and their desire for European realistic style painting. These figurative images marked a new era in the history of religious art in Iran. It kept a notable number of artists, working with tiles, stone reliefs, and murals, busy with a new style of composition in which European-style figurative imagery is shown as the main subject in a section of wall or ceiling, while traditional patterns are used for framing the figurative parts. A study of such work gives one the impression that the Qajar rulers and other commissioners urged artists to use European-style figurative images as the main section and to add traditional Iranian nonfigura-

tive patterns as embellishment. This quality became one of the characteristics of the visual arts in the Qajar era and diminished the importance of the symbolic meaning of patterns and colors that had been used in sacred buildings in Iran for centuries.

The best examples can be found in the tile panels on the exterior walls in the Imamzadeh Davud (David) Shrine, located in the city of Rayy to the south of Teheran, in which the images of mosques and still lifes are framed by arabesque motifs. The arabesques are done splendidly and are different from traditional arabesques since the artist creates a sense of depth using light and shade. The unknown artists attempt to show depth by using perspective and accurate dimensions in the portrayal of the mosques. They are not successful, however, because the human figures in these panels look too small when compared to the height of the walls or the fountains. Yet the artists tend to draw the fruit, the flowers and the birds included in the scenes realistically. In fact, the entire tile displays demonstrate the skill of the artists in creating arabesque patterns while perspective and figurative images appear to be a new challenge.

Portraiture and figures of the Prophets and the Imams are another category of religious imagery. Portraying the Prophet Mohammad and the Imams during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is not a new subject. There are two general groups of the portraits of the Prophet Mohammad and the Imams. The first group of paintings is based on the belief that the Prophet of Islam is a man and a messenger of God chosen to call on nonbelievers. This is the way the Qur'an, Islam's holy book, introduces the Prophet. For instance, the *Mi'raj Nameh* (Book of Ascension), the story of the Prophet Mohammad visiting heaven and hell, was a popular book for illustration¹⁰. One that was illustrated in the fifteenth century in Herat¹¹ contains sixty-three illustrations in which the Prophet is portrayed as a bearded middle-aged man wearing a simple turban and robe with a flame-shaped halo as the only way to distinguish him from other figures¹². The second group of images depicts the Prophet and the Imams as holy elusive individuals who should not be portrayed. In these images, the faces of the Prophet and the Imams are not visible; instead their faces are unpainted and left in white or gold with flame-shaped halos around them. One example is a folio of *Khamseh* by Nizami entitled *The Mi'raj of the Prophet Mohammad*, attributed to Sultan Mohammad, the sixteenth century artist. In this folio, which was painted around 1539-1544, the Prophet's face is not shown but a flame-shaped mandorla in gold surrounds his body¹³. It seems that Qajar artists were really the first artists in Iran who attempted to paint the face of sacred individuals as life-size, tangible human beings placed in religious constructions. This idea was most likely adopted from the Armenian churches in Isfahan or the European churches seen by Iranian artists on their travels to Europe. Iranian artists had investigated the art of Europe in search of new ways of communicating in a period when art was becoming a social issue and was no longer limited to the

royal court. Moreover, apparently some of the qualities in European paintings such as depth, likeness, anatomical accuracy, and *chiaroscuro* (the gradations of light and dark values in two-dimensional imagery) seemed like new challenges for the court artists and they were encouraged to study them.

In the late Qajar period (from 1840s until 1925), Sani-al-Molk (1814-1866), the chief artist of the court of Naser-al-Din Shah¹⁴, painted two illustrations of Prophet Mohammad and Imam Ali, the Shi'ite first Imam, showing their faces in a frontal light. These portraits of the Prophet and Imam Ali are comparable to traditional illustrations; they reveal bearded middle-aged men, who are typically wearing bright green turbans, as indication of their holiness, and clothing similar to the clergy of the nineteenth century. The halo, however, is altered to a golden circle behind their heads, not affecting the light on their faces¹⁵. These two illustrations presumably became the main models for Sani-al-Molk's disciples and for other artists of the Qajar period. Later, in twentieth century, middle class acted as the main patrons of such religious portraits and ordered them in form of lithography, copies on canvas or paper, tile work and carpet to hang in their houses or shops, to use for rituals and ceremonies or donate to mosques and Imamzadehs. Interestingly, this type of religious image making became a traditional practice and remained unchanged although secular portraits reached the highest degree of accurate representation.

Almost all the portraits of the Prophet and the Imams painted in this era look alike: bearded adult men wearing green turbans, with white skin, almond-shaped eyebrows, and big eyes. To distinguish each individual, the artists would write the name of the Prophet and the Imams on the work, or employ symbols that represent each one: Imam Ali's symbol is his double-pronged sword; Imam Reza, the eighth Imam, is associated with a deer as, according to the tradition, he saved the life of a deer by purchasing it from a hunter and freeing it. Sometimes an image of his shrine in the city of Mashhad, located in northeast Iran, accompanies him (see Figures 2). Another example is Imam Hussein, the third Imam, who is often represented in the Battle of Kerbela, which took place in a desert near Kufa in Iraq, around 680 A.D., under the Umayyad ruler of the time, Yazid¹⁶. Imam Hussein is sometimes portrayed just with a helmet or blood on his face to emphasize his innocence and martyrdom (see Figures 2).

In the early Qajar period (from 1790s until 1840s), religious characters differ from the ones created in the late period (from 1840s until 1910s) specifically in their clothing. In the early period, most religious figures such as Prophet Joseph are in royal Qajar costumes and sometimes are crowned, whereas in the late period holy figures wear simple unornamented clothes to downplay their royal connection and suggest ordinary men. These differing costumes also indicate the changes in Iranian culture and religious beliefs. Following this process, artists of the late period, in general, worked more freely and exhibited a significant interest in depicting ordi-

nary people in their unadorned clothing, and the simple life of the middle class and the lower class. One example is a lacquered penbox painted in the second half of the nineteenth century with the image of Issac and Abraham, who as Sheila Canby states in *Islamic Art in Detail* is considered a crucial prophet in Islam, Christianity and Judaism¹⁷. In this penbox, Abraham is shown as an old bearded man with a halo behind his head and in a plain red dress¹⁸. Artists of the early period, on the other hand, occasionally illustrated holy prophets in royal outfit of the time to comply with upper class commissioners and Qajar shahs as the main patrons¹⁹.

Narrative images also exist that describe a religious incident or legend, many corresponding to the hardships of the Imams' lives, their battles, or support for them from divine angels. On a tile in a bazaar near the Imamzadeh Davud Shrine, Hazrat Aboul-Fazl, Imam Hussein's brother, is portrayed at the battle of Kerbela (see Figure 3). According to Shi'ite tradition, Yazid and his soldiers surround the family of Imam Hussein, his troops, their women, and their children, and they refuse Imam Hussein's followers access to water even though the women and children are dying from thirst. Hazrat Aboul-Fazl volunteers to pass through the enemy lines and bring water from the Euphrates River. On his way back, he is attacked by the enemy and his hands are cut off. He tries to carry the container of water with his mouth, but he is killed before reaching the women and children.

This tragic battle of Kerbela, which followers of Shi'ite Islam mourn each year, is among the most common subjects. However, it is not depicted on this tile; instead, Hazrat Aboul Fazl is portrayed on horseback carrying a green flag on which is written a verse from the Qur'an: « God is the source of aid and victory is close »²⁰. It seems that the artist prefers not to overwhelm the viewers with horror and the bloody sacrifice of Hazrat Aboul Fazl. Such traditional representations are seen in manuscript illuminations of the Safavid period in which battle scenes are depicted in terms of grandeur and where clemency or sympathy for the hero or heroes is not expected. However, the artist uses symbols to direct viewers' attention to specific features of the event. For example, on the tile, shown in Figure 3, the name of the river is written, the palm trees suggest an oasis, and the tents on the horizon indicate Imam Hussein's devotees waiting for water. The artist uses some perspective by painting the palm trees and tents smaller in size in the background, but he does not appear proficient in drawing precise human anatomy.

The founders of sacred places, or the individuals who rebuilt or expanded a shrine, are also the subjects of religious paintings. Two murals²¹ in the Imamzadeh Davud Shrine are portraits of the Princess Homa Navab and Prince Nosrat-al-Douleh Navab, the founders of the main hall of the shrine and its stone arches, which were built around 1866²². They look so realistic that their images could have been copied from photographs (see Figure 4). Both figures are shown in the simple costumes of the period with no ornaments or jewels that would symbolize the status of

a Qajar prince or princess. It seems that the sitters preferred to look simply dressed since the mural was commissioned for a holy shrine. Although women are not supposed to display their hair in a mosque or shrine, in the portrait of Princess Homa Navab, her front hair is exposed as in the fashion of the time²³.

The narrative iconographies also represent aspects of believers' lives. Stone reliefs of the Imamzadeh Davud Shrine, for instance, show farmers, workers and soldiers performing various tasks. Also, at the Bibi Shahrbanou Shrine²⁴, there once was a fascinating mural of a group of women and young girls worshipping (see Figure 5)²⁵. The setting is as simple as the shrine itself. The unknown artist portrays stylized figures of women, each with a long black veil covering her body, over which a short white veil is worn to cover her face. During Qajar period, this was typical women's outfit when they appeared in public. Women perform their daily prayers or recite prayers written on hanging papers, while little girls accompany them in prayer or just look around. One woman is facing the viewer as she kneels, leaving her veil open. The artist suggests three-dimensionality through the use of light and shadow, although outlining tends to delineate the figures. The illustration indicates a limited palette of three or four colors. This mural and other narrative murals of the Qajar era are the first known examples of religious figurative murals in Iran after the adoption of Islam. Moreover, the fact that ordinary people are acknowledged and their illustrations are placed in holy shrines alongside with the portraits of the religious figures, patrons and courtiers, is noteworthy.

Although secular art dominated society in Qajar period, religious art was frequently commissioned as well. The rise of materialism and individualism, recognizing the life of the ordinary people by the artists of the late period, more openness in accepting changes in religious art, and curiosity and interest in European art and lifestyle had a strong effect on religious painting, particularly portrait painting. Perhaps for the first time in Iran, Qajar artists broke the rule restricting the use of figurative images on Islamic structures and they provided life-size images dedicated to a mosque or a sacred shrine of holy individuals such as the Prophet Mohammad, Imam Ali, and Imam Reza, showing their faces. This phenomenon is one of the most important aspects of art in the Qajar epoch since it demonstrates how much religious art reflected cultural and social changes and the influence of European art. Worshipers viewed tangible portraits of their beloved Prophet and Imams on religious structures. And, although they were aware that those images were not similar to the real faces, they felt that they were communicating with real human beings, not the creations of fantasy. Also, following the tradition seen in Armenian churches, Iranian artists of the Qajar period employed an uncustomary style of composition in Islamic structures. In this style, European-style figurative images became the focal point in a section of wall or ceiling, while arabesque and geometrical patterns frame the figurative parts, therefore, lessening the significance of the symbolic meaning of traditional Islamic motifs and colors.

Figure 1



Attributed to Minas, murals in the Vank Cathedral in Isfahan, Iran, probably 1640s. Photographed by Iman Yaribakht in 2001.

Figure 2



Unknown artist, carpets hung in a cave in Bibi Shahrbanou Shrine, Rayy, Iran, date unknown. Each carpet is about 177-254 inches (70-100 cm). Photographed by Mahshid Modares in April 2005.

Figure 3



Unknown artist, tile in a bazaar attached to Imamzadeh Davud Shrine, Rayy, Iran, date unknown, about 457.2×457.2 inches (180×180 cm). Photographed by Mahshid Modares in April 2005.

Figure 4



Unknown artist, *Two Portraits of Princess Homa Navab and Prince Nosrat-al-Doleh Navab*, probably 1866, mural, Imamzadeh Davud Shrine, Rayy, Iran. From Mohammad Taghi Mostafavi, "Neveshteh-ha Va Bana-haye Tarikhi Dar Tehran Ghadim Va Khareje Shahr: Imamzadeh Davud" [The Monuments and Religious Constructions in Old Tehran and Its Region: Imamzadeh Davud], *Etela'at-e Mahaneh*, no. 58 (Day 1331 [December 1942]): 17.

Figure 5



Unknown artist, *Women Praying*, date unknown, mural, Bibi Shahrbanou Shrine, Ray, Iran. From Mohammad Taghi Mostafavi, "Nevshteh-ha Va Bana-haye Tarikhi Dar Tehran Ghadim Va Khareje Shahr: Bibi Shahrbanou" [The Monuments and Religious Constructions in Old Tehran and Its Region: Bibi Shahrbanou], *Etela'at-e Mahaneh*, no. 50 (Ordibehesht 1331 [April 1942]): 8.

Notes

- 1 The Qajars were a tribe of Turks who lived in Central Asia, some parts of northern Afghanistan and Iran from the fourteenth century. The Qajar Dynasty (1795-1925) was established by Agha Mohammad Khan. He chose Tehran as his capital. The official language of the Qajar court was Farsi and the state religion was Shi'ite. See Ferydoun Barjesteh van Waalwijk van Doorn, « Short Report: DNA-evidence versus the Paper Trail. Groundbreaking News on the Origins of the Qajars », *Qajar Studies, Journal of the International Qajar Studies Association*, vol. VIII (2008), p. 147-153.
- 2 The Safavid Dynasty was founded by Ismail who conquered Azerbaijan and later other regions in Iran and Armenia when he was only thirteen. Safavid Shahs ruled over Iran from 1502 to 1736. They chose Shi'ite as the state religion and Farsi as official language although their main language was Turkish. See Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom, *The Art and Architecture of Islam 1250-1800*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1994, p. 165.
- 3 As George A. Bournoutian states: « Although [Shah Abbas I] protected the Armenians of New Jolfa and prevented the Catholic missionaries from making major inroads in the community, his death and the eventual decline of the Safavids in the second half of the seventeenth century forced some of the kolas to emigrate to India and Italy, where they established branches of their trading houses ». From George A. Bournoutian, « Armenians in Iran (ca. 1500-1994) », *Iran Chamber Society*, p. 2, http://www.iranchamber.com/people/armenians_in_iran2.php (accessed 6 June 2007).
- 4 Iraj Bashiri, « Jolfa », 1999, <http://www.angelfire.com/rnb/bashiri/Esfahan/Jolfa.html> (accessed 30 June 2007).
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 It wasn't until 1977 or so that Leon Minasian, the head of the Jolfa Armenian Museum, recovered the name of Minas on a wall in Betlaham Church and introduced him as the chief painter of the church's murals. See Leon Minasian, « Ostad Minas, Naghash-e Mashhour-e Jolfa » [Master Minas, the Famous Artist of Jolfa], *Honar va Mardoum*, no. 179 (Shahrivar 2536 [1977]), p. 28-30.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 29.
- 8 The identity of Muslim artists or other Armenian artists who worked in these churches is not known. Were Muslim artists trained by Minas to work on the murals is also uncertain.
- 9 These places were also built by people in an area of a town or by wealthy individuals in the memory of someone or for their faith.
- 10 *Mi'raj Nameh* was about the miraculous journey of the Prophet Mohammad to the seven heavens. He was guided by the angel Gabriel. The book was written by Rashid-al-Din in the fifteenth century. See « Non-Western Art and Architecture », http://cat.middlebury.edu/~slides/slide_web_page/nonwesternp.html (accessed 15 September 2005).
- 11 Herat, one of the cities of today's Afghanistan, was a part of Iran in the first half of the nineteenth century and one of the most important regions for developing a unique style in book illustration in the early Timurid period of the fifteenth century.
- 12 B. W. Robinson, *Persian Drawings from the 14th through the 19th Century: Drawings of the Masters*, New York, Shorewood Publishers Inc., 1965, p. 48, 49, 132.
- 13 M. Ashrafi, *Hamgami Naghashi Ba Adabiyat dar Iran* (The Correlation Between Painting and Literature in Iran), translated by Ruin Pakbaz, Tehran, Negah Publishers, 1989, Figure 11. This folio is kept in the British Museum, London.
- 14 Naser-al-Din Shah ruled 1848-1896 and he was the fourth shah of the Qajar dynasty. He was a poet, photographer, calligrapher and an artist. He invited the most talented artists to his court among

- them were Sani-al-Molk and his nephew Kamal-al-Molk. For more information see Abbas Amanat, *Ghebleh A'lam: Naser-al-Din Shah Qajar va Padeshahi Iran* (Pivot of the Universe: Naser-al-Din Shah Qajar and the Iranian Monarchy), translated by Hassan Kamshad, Tehran, Karnameh Publishers, 2004.
- 15 Examples can be seen in Yahya Zoka, *Zendegi va Asar-e Ostad Sani'ol-Molk* (Life and Works of Sani'ol-Molk, 1814–1866), Tehran, Markaz Nashr Daneshgahi, 2003, p. 78-79.
- 16 Peter Chelkowski, « Popular Arts: Patronage and Piety », *Royal Persian Paintings: The Qajar Epoch (1785–1925)*, Layla S. Diba and Maryam Ekhtiar (dir.), New York, I. B. Tauris Publishers, 1998, p. 90.
- 17 Sheila R. Canby, *Islamic Art in Detail*, Cambridge & Massachusetts, British Museum Press & Harvard University Press, 2005, p. 53.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 53.
- 19 See examples in S. J. Falk, ed. *Qajar Paintings: A Catalogue of Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Paintings*, Tehran, The Private Secretariat of Farah Pahlavi, 1973, figure 41.
- 20 Green symbolizes peace is Islamic iconography.
- 21 These murals were seen and photographed in 1942 by Mohammad Taghi Mostafavi, an archaeologist and the head of the Archaeology Organization, who was in charge of providing articles about the holy shrines of Tehran for the magazine *Etela'at Mahaneh*. These paintings may no longer exist or have been relocated since the author was not able to identify them at the Imamzadeh Davud Shrine on a visit in April 2005.
- 22 Mohammad Taghi Mostafavi, « Banaha-ye Tarikhi va Mazhabi-e Tehran Ghadim va Kharej-e Shahr: Imamzadeh Davud » [The Monuments and Religious Constructions in Old Tehran and Its Region: Imamzadeh Davud], *Etela't Mahaneh Magazine*, no. 58 (Day 1331 [December 1942]), p. 17. According to the author, it is not clear when this shrine was built, but as seen on a stone relief, Shah Tahmasb, in the Safavid period, purchased some lands around the main building and donated these to make the shrine larger. Thus, the building had existed before the Safavid period. In the Qajar era, during the reigns of Fath Ali Shah and Naser-al-Din Shah some parts were rebuilt and new buildings were added.
- 23 Mostafavi does not mention the name of the artist or the technical characteristics of the murals.
- 24 Bibi Shahrbanou Shrine is located on a hill. The main building was constructed out of stone in the Sasanian era and some parts of the original building still remain. Bibi Shahrbanou commemorates the daughter of the last Sasanian emperor, Yazdgerd, who was also one of the wives of Imam Hussein.
- 25 Mohammad Taghi Mostafavi, « Banaha-ye Tarikhi va Mazhabi-e Tehran Ghadim va Kharej-e Shahr: Bibi Shahrbanou » [The Monuments and Religious Constructions in Old Tehran and Its Region: Bibi Shahrbanou], *Etela't Mahaneh Magazine*, no. 50 (Ordibehesht 1331 [April 1942]), p. 8–9. This mural no longer exists, but it was seen and photographed by Mostafavi in 1942.