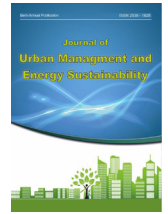


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CASE STUDY RESEARCH PAPER

Distribution and Spatial Position of Shir-o-Shekari Painting in the Historical Houses of Isfahan from the Safavid to the End of the Qajar Period

Mahila Al-Sadaat Fani¹, Hayedeh Khamseh^{2*}, Maryam Kolbadinejad³

1 Ph.D. Student, Department of History and Archaeology, SR.C., Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran

2 Associate Professor, Department of History and Archaeology, SR.C., Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran*

3 Assistant Professor, Department of History and Archaeology, CT.C., Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran

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ABSTRACT

Historical houses are among the most telling expressions of a society's material and social culture, and their decorative systems carry meaning beyond mere ornament. Among the lesser-known decorative arts of the historical houses of Isfahan is the painting known as "Shir-o-Shekari." This study aims to identify and analyse the prevalence, spatial distribution and application position of Shir-o-Shekari painting in the historical houses of Isfahan from the Safavid to the end of the Qajar period. The study adopts a qualitative approach and is fundamental-applied in purpose and historical, descriptive-analytical in method. Using purposive, criterion-based sampling, 38 historical houses containing studiable examples of Shir-o-Shekari painting were selected from different historical quarters of Isfahan. Shir-o-Shekari painting was not applied randomly; its placement was related to the spatial hierarchy and to the importance of the prominent parts of the house. The shah-neshin and the central hall in which the painting was present in all 38 houses (100%) were the most frequent locations, followed by the corner (gushvar) rooms (47%), corridors (39%) and iwans (39%). The art most frequently co-occurred with line-work (97%), plasterwork (89%), coloured glass (87%) and painting on plaster (82%), and was usually executed with pen-work and shading (92%). The results show application position of Shir-o-Shekari painting was linked to the function, spatial position and importance of the parts of the house, and the art was used to place visual emphasis on prominent spaces and to enhance their aesthetic quality.

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*Corresponding Author:

Email: hkhamseh72@iau.ac.ir

Phone: +982144865154

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2828-5832>

INTRODUCTION

The architecture of any land reflects the way of life, culture, beliefs, social relations and technical abilities of its people, and the house as one of the most important expressions of architecture has a direct and deep connection with human life. Unlike buildings erected mainly for governmental, religious or public purposes, residential houses were directly bound up with everyday life, family relations, the social order, comfort, security, privacy and the aesthetic taste of their occupants. The study of historical houses is therefore not limited to their physical structure; it can also provide valuable information about the material and social culture of a society. According to the existing theoretical discussions, the form and structure of the historical houses of Isfahan took shape in direct connection with the way of life and needs of their occupants, and were in turn influenced by them (Hariri, 2021). One of the lesser-known decorative arts within this heritage is the painting known as “Shir-o-Shekari.” Because of its distinctive colour qualities and mode of execution, this art belongs among the decorations whose precise place can be understood only through the study of surviving examples in historical buildings. In discussions of this art, attention to its history, mode of execution, materials, motifs and—above all “in whose houses and in which parts of those houses it was used” has been raised as one of the main axes of study. The investigation of the application position of Shir-o-Shekari is therefore not a secondary matter but one of the central pillars of understanding this art. Within the house, spaces differed in status. The vestibule (*hashti*) after the portal acted as an intermediary between the passage and the interior and stood at the boundary between the public and private domains, which makes the study of its decoration important for gauging the prevalence of arts such as Shir-o-Shekari. By contrast, the *shah-neshin* or central hall (*talar*) was the principal, largest and usually most ornamented room of the house, where notable guests were received, so that the presence of Shir-o-Shekari there may be linked

to the more formal and ceremonial status of the space (Ghasemi-Sichani & Sartipzadeh, 2016). This is comparable, in method, to studies of the wall-fireplace decorations of Safavid and Qajar houses of Isfahan, which showed that the form and ornament of the fireplaces followed the spatial position and the economic status of the owner (Malakouti, 2021). The *howzkhaneh* (pool room), designed for summer comfort in Isfahan’s semi-arid climate, is likewise a space whose decoration can illuminate the relationship between environmental conditions, function and the choice of ornament.

From this perspective, the question of the prevalence of Shir-o-Shekari is not limited to “in which houses it existed” but extends to why it was used in a particular house and a particular space: whether its use was related to the owner’s economic status; whether it appeared more in the houses of the wealthy, merchants, office-holders or particular families; whether it was applied more in formal, reception spaces than in service or private ones; and whether its spatial position changed over the Safavid-to-Qajar period. Accordingly, the present study focuses on the historical houses of Isfahan from the Safavid to the end of the Qajar period and examines the pattern of prevalence and application position of Shir-o-Shekari painting, understanding “prevalence” not merely as the number of surviving examples but as the distribution of the art across house types, historical periods, social groups and architectural spaces, and “application position” as the precise location of the work within the structure of the house and its relationship with the spatial and functional hierarchy of the building. Such a study can clarify whether the hypothesis of the greatest use of Shir-o-Shekari in historical residential buildings and in spaces such as entrances, *iwans* and *shah-neshin* rooms is consistent with the evidence, and can extend our understanding of the relationship between decoration, the function of space, the social standing of the owner, and the culture of living in the historical houses of Iran. The aim of this paper is therefore to iden-

tify and analyse the prevalence, distribution and application position of Shir-o-Shekari painting in the historical houses of Isfahan from the Safavid to the end of the Qajar period and to determine the relationship between its use and the type of building, the social standing and possible economic status of the owners, the historical period of the building, and the function and spatial position of the different parts of the house. Accordingly, the research question is: in what types of building, and in which parts of the historical houses of Isfahan from the Safavid to the end of the Qajar period, was Shir-o-Shekari painting prevalent, and what is the relationship between the spatial position and function of these parts and the use of this art?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Painting and religious-cultural context in the Safavid and Qajar periods

With the establishment of the Safavid state in 907 AH/1501 CE and the adoption of Twelver Shi'ism, religion became one of the important components of Iranian culture and art. This transformation was reflected in painting and increased attention to religious themes, sacred figures and subjects connected with Shi'i culture, although Safavid painting continued to draw on literary, Iranian and courtly traditions (Hillenbrand, 1986). A notable example is the depiction of the Prophet's ascension (mi'raj), in which visual elements and symbols carrying Shi'i meanings appear in some Safavid works; the imaging of subjects connected with the Prophet, Imam Ali and their household, alongside mystical and literary themes, reflects the presence of religious culture in the visual art of this period (Gruber, 2009). The influence of religion on Safavid painting was not, however, limited to religious subjects; courtly patronage, cultural and social change and the formation of a Shi'i identity also shaped the art, so that Safavid painting was the product of an interaction among religion, Iranian culture, literature and the court patronage system (Babaie, 2008, Chel et al., 2009). In relation to the Shir-o-Shekari painting

of Isfahan's historical houses, religion can likewise be regarded as one of the contextual factors shaping the visual culture of the Safavid period, although establishing a direct link between Shi'i beliefs and Shir-o-Shekari motifs requires examination of the thematic, physical and historical evidence of each building. In the Qajar period the influence of Western art and culture increased and a current of "Europeanisation" took shape. Qajar art, while retaining the Safavid legacy, tended toward the experience of new elements, some of which gradually entered private life and domestic architecture; in Isfahan, plasterwork, mirror-work and painting became widespread in the decoration of houses. This development is significant for the study of the prevalence of Shir-o-Shekari, since the status and extent of its use in different periods may have depended on changes in taste, cultural contacts and social conditions. (Nabil and Mardaljevic, 2005, Tsikra and Andreou, 2017). Research on the Vasigh-Ansari house of Isfahan has shown that the decoration of Qajar houses can be read as a reflection of the spatial function and cultural thought of the period, and that the encounter of the artists of this period with imported Western elements led to combinations that in many cases were harmonised with Iranian traditions underlining that decoration cannot be fully understood without regard to its place and space of execution (Hashemi, 2011). Visual and historical evidence drawings and paintings, photographs and other pictorial documents can play an important role in re-identifying the position and prevalence of house decorations; the spread of photography in Isfahan from the reign of Naser al-Din Shah, and the surviving photographic collections, can serve as historical and cultural documents alongside the direct study of the buildings. In parallel, the economic and social status of the owners could affect the extent of decoration: the historical houses of Isfahan did not belong to a single social group, and differences in the owners' standing, occupation, wealth and cultural connections could influence the form and extent of a building's ornament,

as observed in studies of house decoration such as that of the wall fireplaces (Malakouti, 2021) (Es'haghian, 2017). Identifying the groups in whose houses Shir-o-Shekari was more prevalent is therefore an important avenue for understanding the social position of this art.

Function, too, could be a decisive factor in the choice of decoration. The more public spaces of the house the talar and shah-neshin were places for receiving guests and important persons and were usually more richly decorated than service or private spaces, while the entrance and hashti, because of their intermediary and social role, might also require greater visual emphasis. (Vaisi et al., 2019, Li, 2010). The iwan occupies a notable place in this respect: in the traditional architecture of Isfahan the main facades of houses faced the courtyard, and from the mid-Qajar period, under the influence of Western architecture and the extroverted culture of the Armenians, iwans and windows facing the street appeared in some houses showing that the position of architectural elements relative to public and private space changed over time. Recognising the prevalence of Shir-o-Shekari therefore requires a kind of spatial typology in which the houses containing the art are first identified and then compared by building type, construction period, owner or social group, probable economic status, type of decorated space, its position in the spatial hierarchy, and the type and extent of ornament an approach that also serves the documentation and conservation of a heritage increasingly threatened by change of use, decay and demolition. Despite the importance of the subject, the studies conducted on Shir-o-Shekari have been largely scattered, and no coherent picture of its prevalence, spatial distribution and position in the historical houses of Isfahan has yet been offered. The present study addresses this gap by treating the location of the work not as a secondary variable but as one of the primary data for its interpretation, and by testing rather than presupposing the hypothesis that Shir-o-Shekari painting, from the Safavid to the end of the Qajar period, was most used in histor-

ical residential buildings and especially in spaces of greater spatial, social and ceremonial importance, such as entrances, hashti, iwans, talars and the shah-neshin, with its extent of use probably related to the social and economic standing of the owners and the functional importance of the space.

Methodology

The overall approach of this research is qualitative, since the data were obtained mainly through observation, visual analysis, the study of documents and semi-structured interviews, in keeping with the theoretical foundations of qualitative research. The study is fundamental-applied in purpose and historical and descriptive-analytical in method: by recognising the characteristics and principles of the architecture and paintings of the historical houses and studying the beliefs, religion and behavioural patterns of their owners and users, it analyses how and why these variables influenced the physical system, with a view to explaining strategies for conserving the residential heritage of Isfahan. The reasoning combines inductive and deductive modes; the main method is qualitative content analysis and the comparative comparison of historical examples, in which data are first gathered from library and field sources and then, through visual and content analysis, the changes in the style of Shir-o-Shekari painting across the historical periods are examined (Mohammadpour, 2011). The statistical population comprises the historical houses in the old fabric of Isfahan from the Safavid to the end of the Qajar period that possess Shir-o-Shekari decoration, and the spatial scope is the historical fabric of Isfahan. Purposive, criterion-based sampling and the technique of "intensity sampling" were used seeking rich, information-laden examples of the phenomenon with "document-based study" as the principal criterion; secondary criteria were then defined in four cultural, social, economic and political dimensions, and houses with interpretive capacity in these dimensions were selected. On this basis,

38 historical houses from different historical quarters of Isfahan were chosen (Tab. 1). Data were gathered by library and field methods and analysed by deductive and inductive reasoning and qualitative interpretation; to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the criteria of transferability, dependability, confirmability and objectivity were observed through detailed description and careful documentation, and the work was reviewed by the supervising and advising professors (Flick, 2018) (Hafeznia, 2016). In interpreting the paintings, sub-criteria were

defined in the four cultural, social, economic and political dimensions, since the human layer of the house politics, economy, society, culture and religion plays the greatest role in understanding meaning and relations within the supra-physical structure of houses (Hariri, 2021). The visual and structural features of the Shir-o-Shekari works were analysed and classified by technique (painting on plaster, Shir-o-Shekari, under-coat), motif and execution, and the findings were interpreted comparatively from the Safavid to the Qajar period.

Table 1: Introduction of the study samples (38 historical houses of Isfahan).

No.	House	Dimension studied	Total area (m ²)	Floors	Period
1	Malek-al-Tojjar (Angurestan-e Malek)	Cultural, social, economic	7000	2	Qajar
2	Charmi	Social, economic	16000 (≈3500 remaining)	3	Qajar
3	Haj Hasan Ghafouri (Qazviniha)	Economic	621	2	Qajar
4	Haj Mosavar-al-Molki	Cultural	740	2	Late Safavid / early Qajar
5	Dr. Alam	Cultural, social	798	2	Qajar
6	Zoolian (Pelshir)	Political, social	646	2	Safavid, Zand, Qajar
7	Akkafzadeh & Sharif	—	1900	2	Qajar
8	Karimi	Social, cultural, political	—	1	Qajar
9	Vasigh-Ansari (Moshir-al-Molk)	Cultural, economic	700 (1200 built-up)	1.5	Qajar
10	Yadollahi	Cultural	1455	2	Qajar
11	Marta Peters	Economic	2500	2	Safavid
12	Akhavan Haghighi	Cultural	1300	2	Safavid, Qajar
13	Meysami (Art University)	Cultural, social	—	2	Qajar / early Pahlavi
14	Arastooei (Khoshnevis House)	Cultural	375	1	Qajar
15	Ostad Faghieh Homaei	Economic	—	1	Qajar
16	Amin-al-Tojjar	Social	—	2	Qajar
17	Mashrutiyat (Najafi)	Social, cultural, political	730	1	Qajar
18	Javaheri	—	—	2	Qajar
19	Khamse-Ashar	—	—	2	Qajar
20	Badi-al-Sanaye	—	—	—	Safavid–Qajar
21	Shiran	—	900	2	Late Qajar / early Pahlavi
22	Mollabashi (Motamedi)	Cultural	—	2	Qajar
23	Zartaj	—	618	1	Qajar
24	Keshish	Social, cultural, political	900	3	Qajar

25	Qasr-Monshi	Political, cultural, social	—	2	Late Safavid–Qajar
26	Khatam	—	—	—	Late Qajar
27	Khan-Kharasgan (Hosseini)	Political	23000	1	Safavid–Qajar
28	Saeedian	Political	1000	2	Safavid, Zand, Qajar, Pahlavi
29	Meshki	Cultural, social, economic	—	2	Qajar
30	Alafchian	Cultural	500	1	Safavid, Qajar
31	Seyrafi	—	—	—	Qajar
32	Zargarbashi	Cultural	1100	2	Qajar
33	Malekipour	—	—	1	Late Qajar / early Pahlavi
34	Habibabadi	—	1300	2	Qajar
35	Sartip Sedehi	Political	3800	2	Qajar
36	Zahab	Social, economic	250	1	Qajar
37	Bonakdar	Cultural, religious	5000	2	Qajar / early Pahlavi
38	Kazerouni	Social, economic	540	2	Late Qajar / early Pahlavi

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

About 50% of the historical houses of Isfahan bearing Shir-o-Shekari painting from the Safavid to the Qajar period were examined. The decorations of these houses continued to develop and reached their peak of flourishing in the Qajar period. A notable point in the Qajar buildings is the gradual replacement of the earlier introversion of Iranian residential architecture by extroversion observed increasingly toward the late Qajar period under the influence of Western culture and architecture so that in some houses the andaruni (inner) section is absent.

Prevalence of decorative techniques

The examination of the decorations of the 38 houses. Tab. 2 and Fig. 4 shows that Shir-o-Shekari painting is present in all of the studied samples (100%), which is consistent with the sampling logic, since the houses were selected on the basis of the presence of this painting. Among the accompanying decorations, Shir-o-Shekari

line-work (khatkeshi) has the highest frequency (97%), followed by plasterwork (89%), coloured glass (87%) and painting on plaster (82%). The frequent co-occurrence of these elements shows that Shir-o-Shekari was usually not executed independently but within an integrated decorative ensemble in interaction with the other arts of the interior. Mirror-work and mirror (each 76%) and gilding and muqarnas (each 63%) are further frequent decorations, indicating that in a considerable part of the aristocratic houses Shir-o-Shekari was executed alongside costly and valuable ornament a matter that may reflect the social standing and economic capacity of the owners. Painting behind glass (42%), painting behind mirror and inscription (each 34%) have a moderate frequency, whereas layering on mirror (13%), wallpaper (5%) and painting on paper (5%) have the lowest, reflecting the limited spread of these techniques, their high cost, or their belonging to later periods and particular tastes.

Table 2: Frequency of the decorative techniques accompanying Shir-o-Shekari painting in the 38 studied houses

Decorative technique	Count (of 38)	Frequency (%)
Shir-o-Shekari painting	38	100
Line-work (khatkeshi)	37	97

Plasterwork	34	89
Coloured glass	33	87
Painting on plaster	31	82
Mirror-work	29	76
Mirror	29	76
Gilding	24	63
Muqarnas	24	63
Painting behind glass	16	42
Painting behind mirror	13	34
Inscription	13	34
Layering on mirror	5	13
Wallpaper	2	5
Painting on paper	2	5

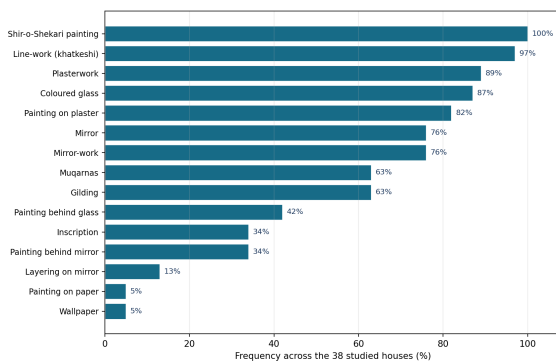


Figure 1: Frequency of the decorative techniques co-present with Shir-o-Shekari painting in the studied houses.

Prevalence and application position of Shir-o-Shekari painting

Table 3 and Figure 5 present the distribution of Shir-o-Shekari painting across the different spaces of the studied houses. The results show that the shah-neshin and the central hall (ta-

lar), with a frequency of 38 samples (100%), are the most important places for the execution of these paintings, indicating that the artists and patrons chose the most prominent and formal space of the house the place for receiving guests, holding ceremonies and displaying the owner's social standing for this ornament. The corner (gushvar) rooms rank second (18 samples, 47%), showing that the painting was not confined to the main space but was also used in the spaces attached to the shah-neshin to create visual continuity. Corridors (39%) and iwans (39%) have a relatively notable frequency, indicating that aesthetic attention was not limited to ceremonial spaces but extended to circulation and transitional spaces. By contrast, entrances, portals and hashti (29%) and the howzkhaneh (21%) have a lower presence and played a more complementary role, while the lowest frequency belongs to the sofrehkhaneh (dining space), observed in only one sample (3%). (Tab. 3 and Fig. 5)

Table 3: Spatial position of Shir-o-Shekari painting in the geometry of the studied historical houses (* = present).

No.	House	Entrance/ portal/ hashti	Dalan/ corridor	Iwan	Shah-nesh- in/ Talar	Gushvar	Howz- khaneh	Sof- rehkhaneh
1	Malek-al-Tojjar	▪	▪	▪	▪	▪	▪	
2	Charmi		▪	▪	▪		▪	
3	Qazviniha	▪	▪	▪	▪			
4	Mosavar-al-Molki				▪	▪		

5	Dr. Alam	▪			▪	▪		▪
6	Zoolian	▪	▪	▪	▪	▪		
7	Akkafzadeh				▪			
8	Karimi				▪			
9	Vasigh-Ansari				▪	▪		
10	Yadollahi				▪			
11	Marta Peters				▪			
12	Haghighi	▪	▪		▪	▪		
13	Meysami				▪	▪		
14	Arastoei	▪	▪		▪	▪		
15	Homaei	▪	▪	▪	▪	▪		
16	Amin-al-Tojjar	▪	▪	▪	▪	▪		
17	Mashrutiyat		▪		▪			
18	Javaheri				▪			
19	Khamse-Ashar				▪			
20	Badi-al-Sanaye				▪			
21	Shiran				▪	▪		
22	Mollabashi	▪	▪	▪	▪	▪	▪	
23	Zartaj	▪	▪	▪	▪	▪	▪	
24	Keshish			▪	▪	▪		
25	Qasr-Monshi		▪		▪			
26	Khatam				▪		▪	
27	Hosseini		▪		▪			
28	Saeedian				▪			
29	Meshki				▪			
30	Alafchian	▪		▪	▪		▪	
31	Seyrafi			▪	▪	▪		
32	Malekipour				▪			
33	Habibabadi		▪	▪	▪	▪		
34	Sedehe			▪	▪	▪	▪	
35	Bonakdar				▪			
36	Kazerouni		▪	▪	▪	▪	▪	
37	Zahtab				▪			
38	Zargarbashi				▪			

Overall, Table 3 shows that the shah-neshin and talar are the principal focus of Shir-o-Shekari painting, with the other spaces of secondary importance. This pattern of placement shows that the choice of the location of the paintings was entirely purposeful and directly related to

the spatial hierarchy, the social function of the spaces and their visibility. Shir-o-Shekari painting thus served, beyond its decorative role, as a means of emphasising prominent spaces and enhancing the aesthetic quality of the most important parts of the historical houses.

Co-occurrence of Shir-o-Shekari painting with other architectural decorations

Table 4 and Figure 6 compare the co-occurrence of Shir-o-Shekari painting with other architectural decorations. The results show that the dominant feature of the paintings is their execution with pen-work and shading (qalam-giri) and in interaction with other decorative arts, especially mirror-work and plasterwork indicating that Shir-o-Shekari was used not as an isolated art but as part of a coherent decorative system, and reflecting the close connection between the architecture-related arts in the Qajar

period. (Tab. 4)

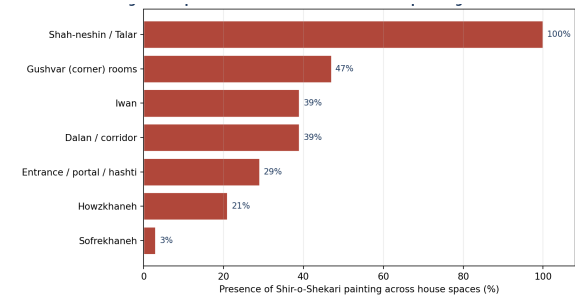


Figure 2: Spatial distribution of Shir-o-Shekari painting across the spaces of the studied houses.

Table 4: Co-occurrence of Shir-o-Shekari painting with other architectural decorations in the studied houses (* = present).

No.	House	Without pen-work	With pen-work & shading	With mirror-work/ mirror	With Qajari colour painting (gol-o-morgh)	With plaster arrays
1	Malek-al-Tojjar		*	*	*	*
2	Charmi		*	*	*	
3	Qazviniha	*				*
4	Mosavar-al-Molki		*			
5	Dr. Alam		*	*	*	*
6	Zoolian	*	*		*	*
7	Akkafzadeh	*	*	*	*	*
8	Karimi	*	*	*	*	*
9	Vasigh-Ansari	*	*	*	*	*
10	Yadollahi	*	*	*	*	*
11	Marta Peters	*	*	*	*	*
12	Haghighi	*	*	*	*	*
13	Meysami	*	*	*	*	*
14	Arastoei	*	*	*	*	*
15	Homaei	*	*	*	*	*
16	Amin-al-Tojjar	*	*	*	*	*
17	Mashrutiyat		*	*		*
18	Javaheri	*	*	*	*	*
19	Khamse-Ashar		*	*	*	*
20	Badi-al-Sanaye	*				*
21	Shiran	*	*	*	*	*
22	Mollabashi	*	*	*	*	*
23	Zartaj	*	*	*	*	*
24	Keshish	*	*	*	*	

25	Qasr-Monshi	▪	▪	▪	▪	▪
26	Khatam	▪	▪	▪	▪	▪
27	Hosseini	▪	▪	▪	▪	▪
28	Saeedian		▪		▪	
29	Meshki		▪	▪	▪	▪
30	Alafchian		▪	▪	▪	
31	Seyrafi		▪	▪		▪
32	Malekipour	▪	▪			
33	Habibabadi	▪				▪
34	Sedehe	▪	▪	▪	▪	▪
35	Bonakdar		▪	▪		▪
36	Kazerouni	▪	▪	▪	▪	▪
37	Zahatab		▪	▪	▪	
38	Zargarbashi		▪	▪	▪	▪

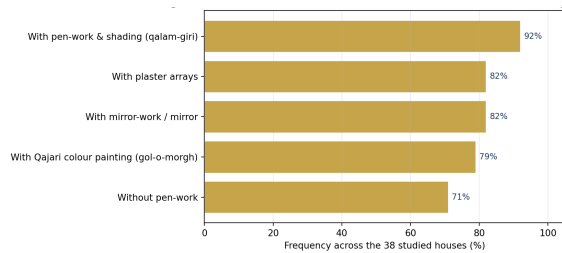


Figure 3: Execution features and co-occurrence of Shir-o-Shekari painting with other decorations.

Figure 6 shows that Shir-o-Shekari paintings were executed with pen-work and shading in 35 houses (92%), confirming that this was one of the most important technical and aesthetic features of the art, enhancing the delicacy of the lines, the modelling of volume and the legibility of the motifs. Co-occurrence with mirror-work, mirror or painting behind mirror, and with plaster arrays, each appears in 31 samples (82%), and co-occurrence with Qajari colour painting (gol-o-morgh) in 30 houses (79%); paintings without pen-work, at 27 samples (71%), are in the minority. These patterns confirm the integrated approach of the Qajar artists to the design of interior spaces. Representative examples of Shir-o-Shekari painting and its interaction with

the other decorations of the studied houses are shown in (Fig. 4-6).

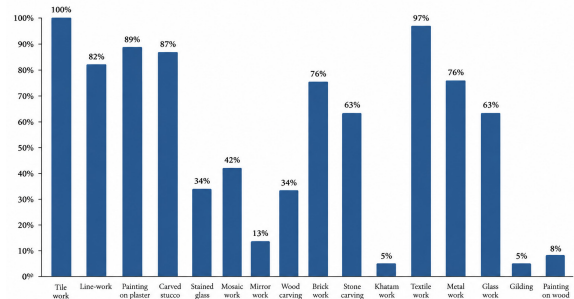


Figure 4: Example of Shir-o-Shekari painting in a shah-neshin of one of the studied historical houses of Isfahan.

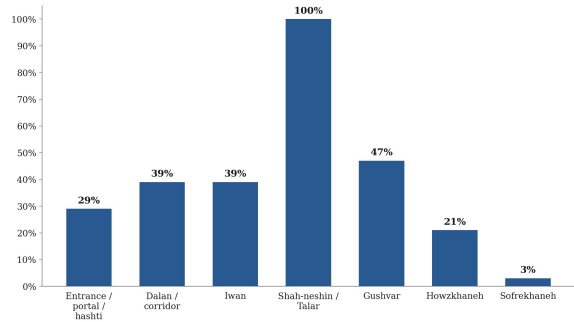


Figure 5: Shir-o-Shekari painting in interaction with plaster-work and mirror-work in the studied houses

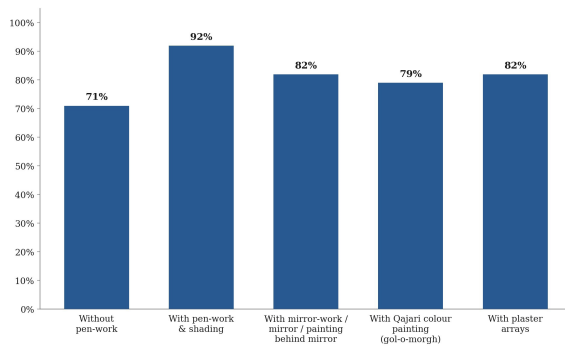


Figure 6: Detail of Shir-o-Shekari motifs executed with pen-work and shading.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

An examination of the background of the owners of the studied houses shows that most of them belonged to the affluent and influential classes great merchants, clerics, government officials and people closely connected to the court and the apparatus of power. Many played an effective role in economic, political, cultural, social and religious spheres, and some held administrative or governmental posts. The social standing and financial capacity of this group made it possible to employ prominent artists and to execute exquisite decorations including Shir-o-Shekari painting, plasterwork and mirror-work in their houses. The frequency of these decorations can therefore be read as a reflection of the social status, economic power and connection of the owners to the structure of power and the cultural elite of the age. Beyond preserving their traditional identity in plan and combining Safavid and Qajar decorative innovations, these houses reflect Iran's interaction with global developments and are worthy of deeper study as historical documents of the encounter between tradition and modernity. In terms of spatial organisation, the motifs were chosen and executed in proportion to the functional status of each space: the greatest density and complexity of decoration is seen in the talars, shah-neshins and the ceremonial five-door and three-door rooms, whereas service spaces have more limited and simpler ornament. The continuous extension of the motifs over

walls, ceilings, frames, niches and around the openings strengthens the visual unity of the interior and creates a coherent relationship between decoration and architecture.

On the basis of these findings, the hypothesis can be advanced that Shir-o-Shekari painting was most used in historical residential buildings especially houses belonging to the affluent and office-holding classes and that its placement was a function of the spatial hierarchy and the functional value of the spaces. This decorative technique was mainly executed in the parts of the building with the greatest social presence and display entrances, iwans, talars, shah-neshins, the ceremonial three-door and five-door rooms, ceilings, niches and the framing around openings. This pattern of placement shows that Shir-o-Shekari paintings did not have a merely decorative role but acted as a means of displaying the social standing, economic capacity and artistic taste of the owners, playing an effective part in shaping the visual and cultural identity of the historical houses of Isfahan. These results are consistent with prior studies that relate the richness of house decoration to the spatial function and the economic status of the owner (Malakouti, 2021) (Hashemi, 2011), and they extend that line of work by mapping, for the first time in an integrated way, the spatial distribution of a specific decorative art across a sizeable corpus of houses. Because the present study focuses on the distribution, building type, owner type, spatial position and function of the different parts of the house, the following recommendations concerning ensemble-based conservation, GIS, a database, the classification of houses and social values are the most relevant. First, a digital database and a GIS system should be created for the historical houses bearing Shir-o-Shekari painting, to allow scientific management, continuous monitoring and more precise planning. Second, since the Shir-o-Shekari paintings of Isfahan's historical houses share common stylistic, functional and spatial patterns, conservation should not be limited to individual buildings but should be

ensemble-based. Third, these works as a prominent expression of the decorative art of Isfahan's residential architecture should be introduced through specialised visit routes, permanent exhibitions, virtual museums and educational programmes, drawing on the potential of cultural tourism. Fourth, public awareness and the participation of non-governmental organisations and the local community in the conservation of the historical houses and their Shir-o-Shekari paintings should be strengthened; recognising the distribution of these works can help to identify the local communities and stakeholders connected with the houses that contain them.

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