A Thematic and Aesthetic Study of the Holy Shrine of AqaSeyyed Ali in Motealleq Mahalle in Lahijan

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Abstract

Wall paintings of holy shrines in Guilan Province are an illustrated collection of Shia’s religious history and narrations. The paintings are often about Ashura and they are painted by local and anonymous painters. The present study aimed to recognize the thematic and aesthetic characteristics of Mashhadi Aqa Jan Lahijani’s paintings in the Holy Shrine of AqaSeyyed Ali located in the Motealleq Mahalle Village, Lahijan and, also, to study the relationship between the narrations and paintings in this religious place. One of the hallmarks of the paintings of this holy shrine is the artist’s explicit and immediate expression in the presentation of religious and folk themes. In fact, he depicts the narrations as people thought and created religious and emotional relationship between the observers and the artwork by creating a unity between the theme and painting. The present study includes three major parts: The first part, "Introduction," examines the relationship between the paintings of holy shrine and its historical place in Guilan Province and the people’s religious beliefs. The second part discusses the geographical location of the Holy Shrine of AqaSeyyed Ali, and introduces the painters. The last part scrutinizes the paintings in terms of aesthetics, theme, form and contents.

Keywords: Mashhadi Aqa Jan Lahijani, AqaSeyyed Ali’s holy shrine, Imam Hussain (AS), Ashura, wall painting
Introduction

The paintings in holy shrine are a reflection of the art of loved and humble artists who honestly paint about their lives and beliefs. “The holy shrine is the second and larger house of people of a region in which it has a special place among them. The belief in healing and the meeting of prayers in these holy places is a sign of their spiritual place among the people.” (Mircea Eliade, 2006, P 108). The Guilan Province located in the North Iran is unique in terms of the multiplicity of religious wall paintings on the holy shrines and Imamzadeh. “The appearance of wall paintings of holy shrines in Guilan is attributed to the Safavid era, the period of propagation of Twelver Shia Islam." (Mahmudinezhad, 2010, P19). However, the oldest wall painting remained in the holy shrines dates back to about 120 years ago and most of them back to the late Qajar Dynasty. It is said that in the past, there were more than 40 holy shrines in Guilan which had wall paintings but today, significant number of them have been destroyed due to the reconstruction and destruction of the building. “These paintings had no relations with the buried person and also, were not even suitable for the holy shrine and its architecture. In other words, the architect and builder of the holy shrine didn’t consider a given place for the paintings and after the end of its construction, the custodian or the local residents employed a painter for some reason so that he painted on the inner or outer walls of the holy shrines arbitrarily or according to the order of custodian(s). These painting were often about the events of Karbala2” (Jaktaki, 2006, P. 49). The epic dimension of this event and the brave behavior and psyche of Imam Hussein (as) and his followers, especially on Ashura, have been always of interest to the artists and have been often reflected in the paintings after the official establishment of Shi’ism (Shia Islam). During the Qajar period, the historical and religious event of Ashura and other events attributed to it have been painted many times by the painters and many paintings about them were used in the book (especially lithography). Due to the strong influence of stories of the Imams and Ashura, the similar images have been painted on the walls. The painters of religious wall paintings of holy shrines had selected the main themes of their paintings according to the stories and narrations told by Ta’ziye3 reader (who narrates Ashura), panegyrist and those who do RawdaKhwani. These painters took the rules and techniques from the narrative drawings or lithographic books, and used them in the architectural space that allowed new narrative. Since, on the one hand, they were unexperienced and on the other hand, they were free-standing and unaffected, new principles have been invented in their narratives. Although they seemed unexperienced, clumsy and awkward, they were full of feelings and also rational and pleasing. In the present study, it is attempted to scrutinize the reflection of Ashura in the wall paintings of AqaSeyyed Ali’s holy shrine4, painted by MashhadiAqa Jan Lahijani. It should be noted that the author has not studied the religious aspect of this historical event and he has mentioned the narrations and stories, to the extent that they help the reader to understand the images by relying on texts that the painter directly or indirectly has access to them (through Ta’ziye, narration and oral presentations of preachers) and is inspired by them. Also, all the

1"During the Safavid period, the Twelver Shia Islam became the religion of most Guilan people, and the religious diversity, which was characteristic of Guilan during its history, was destroyed." (Panahi, 2011, P. 14)
2The battle of Karbalais the most terrible disaster of Muslim history in the view of Muslims, especially the Shiites. Shiites hold annually mournful ceremonies on its anniversary.
3Ta’zieh is a drama with the poetry that depicts the tragedies of the Imams, especially Imam Hussein.
4AqaSeyyed Ali ibnMousaKazemi
images used in this article belong to the author's personal archive and have been photographed in numerous visits of the paintings of this holy shrine.

Research background
About wall paintings of holy shrines, Ali Asghar Mirzaei Mehr has written a book entitled “The paintings of holy shrines in Iran” in 2007. In his book, Mirzaei Mehr has paid more attention to historical aspects and examined the painting descriptively. Also, Ahmad Mahmoodinezhad has specifically studied the wall painting existing in Guilan in a book titled “The wall paintings of holy shrines in Iran” in 2009. In one part of his book, he has mentioned the paintings of Aqa Seyyed Ali’s holy shrine located in Motealleq Mahalle.

Parisa Shad Qazvini, in the Journal of Honar-ha-ye Ziba-Honar-ha-ye Tajassomi, Issue 41, has thematically and aesthetically studied the wall paintings of Aqa Seyyed Mohammad’s holy shrine located in Lasht Nesha, Guilan Province. Mozhgan Khadbaz, in an article titled “The wall paintings of Imamzahed and holy shrines in Lahijan” published in specialized journal of Ketab Mah Honar, Issue 45 and 46 in 2002, has analyzed and investigated the place of these paintings with a historical, social and religious approach.

Method
In the present study, first, a summary of the history and characteristics of holy shrines in Guilan Province was discussed. Then, the themes of wall paintings painted on three walls of Aqa Seyyed Ali’s holy shrine were studied analytically and thematically. The present study is descriptive and analytical. And the data were collected through library studies, image processing and field studies. Also, the data were analyzed qualitatively.

Image processing was performed based on the stories of two main Shi’a books about the Karbala event, i.e. Rozatol Shohada (The Garden of Martyrs) and Tofanol Boka. The former book was written by Molana Hussain Kamal al-Din Hussain ibn Ali, known as Vaez Kashefi. It is a reminder of the tragedy of the Ahl al-Bayt and the battle of Karbala, and of the famous Maqtals. This book became famous after publication, and it is read in the Tazi’ye on the martyrs of the battle of Karbala (Kashfi, 2011, P.13). The second book, Tofan al-Boka, is a reminder of the tragedy of the fourteen infallibles, especially Imam Hussain (AS). It was written by Mirza Muhammad Ibrahim Marzavi, under a pseudonym of Johari. He is known as Afsah al-Shoara’a. This book is one of the most famous Maqtals used by Shiites in the 13th and 14th centuries AH (1785 CE - 1980 CE). "This book consists of an introduction, and fourteen fire temples and each fire temple has several flames and a conclusion (which is about the condition of the author).” (Johari, 2012, P. 17).

Geographical location and architecture of Aqa Seyyed Ali’s holy shrine
“The number of holy shrines of Imamzadehs or holy places and/or holy shrines and tombs in the Guilan Province is more than the number of holy shrines in other cities in Iran. The very similarity of these places with the houses of the villagers shows the closeness of holy shrine to the people. People know these holy shrines as their own property and understand it completely.” (Khakban, 2002, P. 96). “Aqa Seyyed Ali’s holy shrine” is located beside a mosque and a the mosque and the cemetery in the Motealleq Mahalle Village, Rodboneh District, Lahijan City located in the east Guilan Province. It is one of the historical
and religious holy shrines belonging to the Qajar era. Its northern wall was tangent to the southern wall of the mosque, which was probably later built for religious ceremonies by the people. In the architecture of this holy shrine, the construction technique of residential houses, used in the plain area, was used. “There is no significant difference between this holy shrine and the houses surrounding it in form, area, height and material used and it is distinct from the houses just in decoration of walls, i.e. wall painting” (Khakban, 2002, P.100). Wooden quadrangle column with capital can be seen around the Iwans. Its roof was made of clay and recently reconstructed. Brick and cob were used to build the walls of holy shrines and then, they were coated by plaster. The holy shrine has the stairs on the eastern side and two entrances on its eastern and western Iwans. The following phrase has been carved out on the right door of the north entrance door: God bless the founder of this holy shrine, 1224 (AH, probably). On the left door of the same entrance door, the following phrase has been carved out: Founder: Mirza Hassan NajjaribnMirza Muhammad Ali SakenKooshal. (Figure1)

Figure1

Inside the holy shrine, “there is a wooden lattice Zarih with a length of 230cm, width of 155 cm and height of 172 cm” (Sotoudeh, 1969, P. 203). At present, there is no painting on the inner walls. The three sides of the holy shrine are full of paintings. Despite the damages, the paintings can be still recognized.

The painter of wall paintings of AqaSeyyed Ali’s holy shrine

The painter of the most of wall paintings of the holy shrines in the Province of Guilan is unknown but, fortunately, on the western wall of this holy shrine, the name of painter was

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5This historic and religious holy shrine has been registered in the National Iranian Works List by the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization for preserving it for the next generations. Since several years ago (2010) the operation of strengthening and clearing the images and designs has been started. Its clay roof has been completely replaced.

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7Currently, the wall paintings of AqaSeyyed Ali’s holy shrine, located in the Moteallegh Village, are in very bad conditions and threatened by the danger of complete destruction.
inscribed on an inscription: “Painter: MashhadiAqa Jan Lahijani, Master Gholamhussain’s son” (Figure2).

Obviously, MashhadiAqa Jan was a painter of AqaSeyyed Ali’s holy shrine has learned painting from his father. “He has used his usual technique to make this building. His last work can be seen in this holy shrine. It seems that in 1353 AH\textsuperscript{8}, he spent his old age because he was alive for seven years after this date. According to its tombstone\textsuperscript{9}, he died in the 1\textsuperscript{st} Muharram, 1360AH” (MirzaeiMehr, 2007, P. 33). At the top of the western entrance door, the names of two persons who ordered the paintings and of elders of the village can be seen: “Ali Kadkhoda, son of Ali Akbar” and “KarbalaeiJafar, son of Asghar”. Also, the date of paintings can be seen: 1353 AH (Figure3). So, the painting dates back to 83 years ago.

\textbf{The themes of wall paintings of AqaSeyyed Ali’s holy shrine}

The main themes of paintings painted on three outer walls of AqaSeyyed Ali’s holy shrine, like other works of MashhadiAqa Jan, are the battle of Karbala, the epic description of the battle of Imam Hussein and his followers at the noon of Ashura, the revenge of MokhtarSaqa\textsuperscript{fi} from those who caused the battle of Karbala, crossing the As-Sirāt Bridge and the doom of hell. “Since the battle of Karbala was epic, the themes were painted in violent mode. Somewhere, a body full of spears and a cut head can be seen and somewhere else, the wounded body of hostility is seen falling on the ground. If the scene is empty, the fighting equipment, such as sword, dagger, spear, etc. will make the space violent”(Mahmoodinezhad, 2010, P 40).

The battle of Karbala or Ashura is about the martyrdom of Hussainibn Ali (AS), the third Imam of the Shiites, along with his fellow soldiers against a group of Kufa people, who

\textsuperscript{8}MashhadiAqa Jan was buried next to the AqaSeyyed Muhammad’s holy shrine in She’erhaff neighborhood in Lahijan city.

\textsuperscript{9}1934
fought for Yazid, the second Caliph of Umayyad caliphate, on the tenth day of Muharram in 61 AD. The two armies fought together on the tenth Muharram, known as Ashura, during which Imam Hussain (AS) along with a number of members of the family (BaniHashem tribe\(^\text{10}\)) and his followers (other tribes) were martyred\(^\text{11}\). The armies of Omar ibnSaad galloped on their bodies with their horses. On the evening of Ashura, the Yazid army invaded the tents of the survivors and burned the tents, and then the survivors like Imam Sajjad, son of Imam Hussein, who was not involved in the war due to his disease and was survived along with Zaynab and other women and children, were captured by the Kufa Corps. The army of Omar ibnSaad placed the heads of the martyrs on the spear, and along with the captives, carried them to ObeidollahibnZiad in Kufa and then, to Yazid in Levant.

Here, the painter portrays a narration of sacred but bloody epic on two fronts: a battle in which courage, faith, and sacrifice are placed on the one side, and all the evil tricks and wrongs are placed on the other side. However, in his paintings and scenes, he shows the victory of good on evil, and blood on the sword.

1. A study of the themes of wall paintings of eastern wall:

In the eastern wall, there are two paintings, separated by the eastern entrance door (Figure 4). At the right of this wall, there is a large scene dedicated to the issue of vengeance of MokhtarSaqafi\(^\text{12}\) on Imam Hossein's murderers\(^\text{13}\). Mokhtar, who was in prison during the battle of Karbala at the behest of ObaidollahibnZiad, rebelled to take vengeance of Hussein ibn Ali (AS), accompanied by Ibrahim, the son of Malik Ashtar\(^\text{14}\), and a group of other elders of the Arabs and Shiites of Kufa after his release. In this rebel, he killed ShemribnZi al-Jušan, KholiibnYazid, Omar ibnSaad and ObeidollahibnZiyad. Almost half of the painting has been destroyed, however, the main part of the images that is dedicated to the perpetrators of the murder of Imam Hussein (AS) and his followers is still visible. Here, the picture frame is dedicated to the followers of Mokhtar on the right hand and their enemies on the left hand (Figure 5).

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\(^{10}\)BaniHashemin a name of a tribe attributed to the Prophet of Islam and his family.

\(^{11}\)There is no consensus on the number of martyrs. But in most historical sources, the number of Imams' followers is 72 on the day of Ashura. 18 of them were of BaniHashem and the rest were from other tribes. Of course, in some sources, this number is up to 145.

\(^{12}\)MokhtaribnAbiObaidehSaghafi, (d. 67 AH in Kufa) was the leader of the fourth uprising after the Ashura.

\(^{13}\)MashhadiAqa Jan has painted the revenge of Mokhtar in MollaPir Shams al-Din holy shrine and AqaSeyyed Muhammad’s holy shrine in Licha with some minor differences.

\(^{14}\)During this uprising, Ibrahim ibn Malik Ashtar was the commander of the army and killed Obeid allahibnZiad in Mosul.
In the painting, the images of Ibrahim Ashtar and Kholi are identifiable. The painter has written their name alongside their image. Ibrahim, the commander of Mokhtar’s Corps, riding on an ultramarinet horse is distinctly different from his own troops. He has become the main character of this painting with his headgear and beard. Next to him, Imam’s murderers were portrayed in a terrible situation. Several heads are cut and hanged, and naked bodies enduring terrible torment. They are all hanged from their ears and their bodies are brutally tortured. There are countless bright candles in the body of one of them. Kholi sits and places his hands in his legs. His eyes are horrified like others. According to the book Tofan al-Boka, "Mukhtar cried when he Kholi and then said, "You! Who is the enemy of Allah and the Prophet, where is the spear that you had placed the head of the child of Fatima Zahra on it and turned it in the markets of Kufa?" (Johari, 2012, P. 762), and then, "he ordered to burn that accursed person" (Johari, 2012, P 783).

The left side of the eastern wall is dedicated to crossing the As-Sirāt Bridge. At the bottom of it there are also horrific scenes of punishment of Imam Hussein’s (AS) murderers on the Day of Doom. (Figure 6) Here, as in other paintings, the painter was heavily influenced by the folk narratives of Paradise and Hell and crossing the As-Sirāt Bridge. In a part of a book “The Wall Paintings of Holy shrines in Guilan” written by MahmoodiNezhad, an elderly villager of MotealleqMahalle Village, says: "Those who move on the bridge are of several groups. One group includes those who move forward and have no fear of moving on the bridges, another group includes those who are guilty and fall down at the beginning of the path. The one sitting on the sheep is the one who sacrificed many sheep in this world. Then, on his sheep, he cross the bridge, and there is another group that includes those who cross the bridge cautiously. "(MahmoodiNezhad, 2010, P. 46). Those who cross the bridge are divided into two groups of men and women. The men are naked and the women wear bright veil.

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15 As-Sirat Bridge is equivalent to ČinvatPeretumin in Zoroastrian beliefs. (Azargoshashb, 1993, pp. 204-207)
16 MashhadiAqa Jan has implemented this scene in the AqaSeyyed Muhammad’s holy shrine in Licha Village as well as AqaSeyyed Ibrahim’s holy shrine in BabaJanDarre with a few changes.
At the bottom of the bridge, there are scenes of torment of hellish people. Specifically, the painter seeks out to show a bad result on the day of last judgment. As if he wants to show the punishment of Imam Hussein's killers here. It can be guessed that the villagers were so excited by seeing the punishment of Imam Hossein's enemies in these paintings. The painter, in the scene of the doom of sinners, has created a scary scene by a few heads, which are probably al-Ghashieh snake\(^{17}\). The author of the book, RozatolShohada, calls this snake “Shadid”, and writes about it: "The best and most of all the snakes in the Hell is a snake called “Shadid”, shakes seventy times every day, and venom is thrown out of him, and GOD says that Shadid! What do you want? It says: devolve the punishment of Imam Hossein's murderers to me so that I pour my venom on them; and God says: be calm Shadid! Their punishment is devolved to you. Undoubtedly, you stings all of them and they will be punished for all of their wrongs. "(Kashefi, 2011, P 523). Unfortunately, the lower part of painting has been completely destroyed. The hellish people were painted in the dark colors as they are in three- or four-person groups in the mouth of Shadid, while small snakes are biting their heads, eyes and tongues, and the scorpion (CentruroidesScupturatus\(^{18}\)) also stings them. The interpretation of the folk proverb "due to the fear of the scorpion, he takes refuge in Ghashieh Snake", which means that in the day of doom, the scorpion causes an evil punishment for the sinners that they inevitably seek refuge in the Shadid snake, can be seen in this painting. In the same scene, the image of the angel of divine justice with his scale is recognizable as a sign of a fair judgment at the Resurrection. (Figure 7)

\(^{17}\)It means the snake of resurrection. It lives in hell to suffer the sinner by the God’s order.

\(^{18}\)A very toxic and large yellow scorpion with a tail on the ground. (Amid, 2003, p. 459)
2. A study of the themes of wall paintings of southern wall:

In this wall, two main scenes are visible. The first scene shows the martyrdom of Qasem (AS) with AzraghShami’s sons and the second one is about the going of Ali Akbar (AS) to the battlefield. (Figure 8) This wall is highly visual in terms of its theme and composition, and attracts the attention of the viewer. The painter has artistically separated these two scenes with a cross between them and the Word of God and the painting of two pheasants on both sides of it (Figure 9).

The story of the martyrdom of Qasem (AS) has been one of the most popular subjects for painting among the painters who paint on canvas and wall, and MashhadiAqa Jan, in several other holy shrines, portrayed this battle with small changes. Qasem, the son of Imam Hassan (AS), and his other brothers was placed under the supervision of his uncle, Imam Hussein (AS), after his father's death<sup>19</sup>. As the author Tofan al-Boka narrates<sup>20</sup> Qesim said farewell to his wife when he heard the boast of enemy army and asked Imam Hossein to allow him to campaign. And when Iman Hussein saw that he wanted to go battlefield, he kissed his face, ripped up his clothes and dressed him as the shroud, then gave him his sword and set him on the way. Qasem courageously went to the battlefield while the tears drooped on his cheeks, and he began to read paean. "Omar Sa'ad called AzraghShami, who was commander, and said:" You are a brave man and famous in courage, I mean, go to the battlefield and bring his head to me". Azragh laughed and said: "The troops of Kufa and Levant know my power equal to thousands of riders. You call me to fight with a child, do you want to decry me?" (Johari, 2012, P 476). Omar Saad spoke a little about BaniHashem Tribe and their courage and Azragh, who had four sons, sent his great son to the field. His son threw a few arrows to Qasem, and he defended himself with a shield. Then he turned to Qasem, then he threw an arrow to the cursed man and it struck him at his head. He fell down and then, Qasem galloped on his body. Azragh suspired and sent his sons to the battlefield

<sup>19</sup>“Qasim, on the day of Ashura, was about thirteen years old and, as most historians and writers wrote, he had not yet reached puberty.” (Ayana al-Shi‘a, fourth part. P. 128; Rahmdel, 2007, P. 417)

<sup>20</sup>Of course, the main story is very different from the one narrated in Tufan al-Boka.
and all of his four sons selected the way of Veyl Well\textsuperscript{21} (they were killed).” (Johari, 2012, P. 478). Then, as mentioned in Tofan al-Boka, AzraghShami, who was a brave warrior, had to enter the campaign field. Eventually, he was killed in the battle with young Qasem.

![Figure 8](image1.jpg)  ![Figure 9](image2.jpg)

The studied painting is a reflection of this issue. The lower parts of the painting are severely damaged. Fortunately, the main theme painted in the upper part is healthier. MashhadiAqa Jan selected the most dramatic moment of the story for painting. He has painted the moment when Qasem took the hair of the eldest son of Azragh and raised his body (Figure 10).

Here, the painter has added to the thrill of the scene with the help of a simple trick, i.e. removing part of the leg, hand and sword of Azragh’s son. Qasem is on a red horse that takes offensive action. He holds the horse with his left hand. Under the horse's legs, there is a corpse belonging to the enemy's troops, it is likely to be one of the 35 persons who died before the battle with the son of Azragh. Qasem, in a calm and dignified manner, simply lifts and rotates Azragh’s son above his head with his right hand, and maybe he will hit him on the ground a moment later. The son is seen wearing sword and shields and boots. In accordance with the pattern that MashhadiAqa Jan painted on, Qasem has been drawn with a white face and continuous eyebrows, diamond-shaped eyes, headgear, and the sacred halo around his head. "One of the symbolic elements in the painting is the halo around Qasem’s head, it is in the form of a cedar or leaf, and, of course, is similar to the flame. The history of this kind of halo dates back to the Timurid and Safavid eras and it is consistent with the deep and ancient Iranian thoughts about respecting the plants, especially the sanctity of the cedar. "(MirzaeiMehr, 2007, P. 144).

\textsuperscript{21}Veyl is the name of the valley in hell or the name of the well or gateway in it.
On the left side of this painting, three enemy soldiers were drawn. They are seeing the battle with fear. In the two decorative Toranjs painted in front of them, two of them have been introduced with a typical handwriting: “AzraghShami and Omar ibnSaad”. A painter has broken the frame inside the image with a diagonal line. On the one hand, since they are placed on the second plan, they were painted much smaller than the main them - the battle between Qasem and the son of Azragh. However, they show off as much as objects and people in front of the scene. Even the horse of Azragh’s son is noticeably depicted smaller. Azragh was painted with a long beard and two horns and he is seen to be riding on a dark horse. Behind Azragh, Omar Saad sees the battle surprisingly. Here, however, faces and organs are not depicted on the basis of anatomy, but the psychological quality of people in various moods is well represented. This is true even in animals’ faces. The horses, affected by the violence governing the scene, were depicted with their frightened eyes and open mouth (some of them with tongues come out). Some of them are strangely similar to the horse painted in the Pablo Picasso’ painting called Guernica\(^\text{22}\) (Figure 11).

The painting painted on the left of the southern wall reveals the story of Ali Akbar, son of Hussein ibn Ali, on his horse named “eagle”. According to the story, "When Imam

\(^{22}\)Although there was no time-space connection between the painters of the holy shrines and western works, and basically they did not have access to western image sources, this is a very strange similarity.
Hussein saw that his followers, brothers and relatives were martyred and there was no one to go to the battlefield, he decided to go to the field. When Ali Akbar saw his father that he was going to the field, he came to his father and asked him and said, "O Father! It's never been that I stay in the world without you for one day and one hour. It's a good idea to allow me to go to the battlefield. Imam Hussein (AS) and his sisters and daughters ran out of the tents and asked Ali Akbar not to go to the battlefield. Imam Hussein (AS) did not allow him, and Ali Akbar was crying and swearing him, and his tears were drooping out of the spring of his eyes. So Imam Hussein (PBUH) worn him armor and, and fastened thewaistadim\textsuperscript{23}, which belonged to Imam Ali (AS), around his waist and put a steel headgear on his head, and helped him to ride on his horse. His mother and sisters hang on to the bridle and cried, and Imam Hussein said “allow him to go, he decides to go to the hereafter” "(Kashefi, 2011, PP. 449-450).

This painting shows the farewell of Ali Akbar to his family. He is seen on the horse with the given attitudes that MashhadiAqa Jan used for the Imams. He goes to a battle where he cannot come back while he is no more than eighteen years old. He wears azure shirt and a dark robe on it. He wears two armlets and a leather belt. Like other infallibles, his face is not seen. Like Qasem, a holy halo is seen around his head. He points to something with war weapons, a sword on his waist and an ochre shield on his back at the last minute. Here, the name of scene was written within a Toranj: "Going of Ali Akbar to the battlefield". The painter introduced the characters within a few Toranjs around Ali Akbar to somewhat reduce ambiguity. For example, beside the three women standing behind Qasemm, the names of Ommme Leila and Zeinab\textsuperscript{24} are recognizable. According to the story of Ommme Leila, the mother of Ali Akbar, "she put her hands on the waist, and said:" Oh, mother’s dear, God be with you!" (Johari, 2012, P. 509). In the background, the tents of Imam Hussein's followers are observed. Also, a small cradle is seen in the scene that according to the toranj beside it, it belongs to Ali Asghar. The cradle is depicted as traditional cradles used in the North Iran during the execution of this painting. At the bottom and opposite Ali Akbar, Imam Hussein (AS) is prayed for his beloved son. According to the story of Ali Akbar, he goes to the field a moment late and he will be martyred. (Figure 12)

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Figure12.png}
\caption{Figure 12}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{23}Tanned skin.
\textsuperscript{24}The name of Ali Akbar’s horse
Ali Akbar’s horse (called eagle\textsuperscript{25}) has been decorated as the horses of the kings. As mentioned in the various texts, "he was very similar to the Prophet in face and attributes." (Rahmdel, 2007, P. 460) Kashefi, in RozatolShohada, writes that "when he arrived at the battlefield, the field became enlightened due to his luminous face. Omar Sa'ad’ army was astonished to see his face, and they asked him who to fight against? "(Kashefi, 2011, P. 450).

3. A study of the themes of wall paintings of western wall:

The western wall of this holy shrine has two main scenes separated by a green door, which is one of the two entrances of the building. (Figure 13). On the left side of the wall, there is a painting named "the fight between Abalfazl (AS) and MaredbnSodaif\textsuperscript{26} that a large part of it was damaged. The commander of Imam Hussein’s (AS) army was the Moon of baniHashem\textsuperscript{27}, Abolfazl Abbas, the son of Imam Ali (AS) and the brother of Imam Hussein. The paintings of this part of the wall are in fact a description of the heroic performance of the Moon baniHashem in the battle with MaredbnSodaif. An event occurred before the martyrdom of Imam Hussein (AS) in the Karbala. MaredbnSodaif, of the commanders of the enemy army, was strong and tall and had a large skeleton, and a horrible body. He is a brave Arab man who did not fight with anyone in the battlefeld, unless his opponent was also known for his courage. According to the story, Mared first tried to dissuade Abolfazl Abbas from the battle. Then, he cried out: "O young man, put your sword on the ground and learn that one who has come to you is a man with a heart full of compassion and kindness. I will feel sorry for killing since you are young and famous." And besides, it’s a shame to me to kill a young man\textsuperscript{28}. Abbas was determined to fight with him when he heard the words of Mared. In the painting, Mared is seen as an armored man with conical headgear and mustache. He has been duped with the sword of Abbas, and the blood is flowing from his head. (Figure 14). It could be imagined that the violence of the scene, when the painting was healthy, was affecting the general public, especially the villagers. Abbas was painted on the left side of Mared, riding a red horse with boots. It is likely that this horse is "Tavieh", Mared’s horse, that Abolfazl rides it.

\textsuperscript{25}Zainab, the sister of Hussein ibn Ali, and the third child of Ali and Fatima, who was present at the battle of Karbala, and then, during captivity, played a special role in defending the legitimacy of his brother.

\textsuperscript{26}One whose father was killed by Imam Ali (AS) and he wanted to avenge his father's blood from Abolfazl (AS) and he was killed in the battle of Karbala by Abolfazl (AS).

\textsuperscript{27}The nickname of Abbas ibn Ali "Abalfazl, he was tall and had beautiful face, therefore, he was called the Moon of BaniHashim"(Rahmdel, 2007, P. 442)

\textsuperscript{28}Of course, in some historical sources, the greatness of Abbas was described as follows: "when he was riding on a horse, his legs were dragged on the ground" (Rahmdel, 2007, P. 442)
The theme of the right wall is on the going of Seyyed al-Shohada to the battlefield with Ali Asghar. Here, the main theme is asking water for Ali Asghar aged six months. MashhadiAqa Jan has used a greater number of asynchronous events in the composition compared to other scenes. However, the main theme (Imam Hussein and Ali Asghar) have been tangibly paid attention. It is said: "After all the soldiers of Imam Hussein, including Ansar and BaniHashem, were martyred, the Imam prepared himself for the battle and before the battle with the enemy, for the last farewell, he went to women and children's tents and said goodbye to them. "(Rahmdel, 2007, P. 470) Kashefi in RozatolShohadawrites: They said: "O Messenger!" The cruel time humiliates us, and Ali Asghar mows due to thirst, and the milk is dried up in his mother's breast, and that infant child is nearing death. Imam Hussein said: “Bring him to me”. Zeynab (AS) brought him to Imam Hussein (AS). The Imam got him in his arms and went near the opposing army, lifted him on his hands and said: o people! If you think that I sinned, this child has no sin, make him a sip that there is no milk in his mother’s breast due to thirst. Those heavy fighters said: "It is impossible to give up a drop of water to you and your children without the order of the son of Ziad, and a man of Azad Tribe named HarmalahibnKahel29, threw an arrow towards Imam Hussein (AS), that arrow passed the throat of Ali Asghar and sat in the arm of Imam Hussein. Imam Hussein (AS) took it from the throat of this innocent infallible, and erased the blood flowing from his throat by his robe and did not allow it to be poured on the ground. Then he came to the tent and asked his mother: "Take this martyred child who was drinking from his Kowsar pool." (Kashefi, 2011, P. 457). In other texts, some wrote that after blowing to the throat of that innocent, "Imam put his hand under the throat of Abdullah and filled if from his blood and sprinkle it towards the sky while he said: oh my GOD! It is easy for me to endure such disasters, because I know that you can see them all. "(Rahmdel, 2007, P. 470) MashhadiAqa Jan selected the moment when Imam Hussein entered the battlefield while embracing Ali Asghar and he avoided to depict the dramatic moments leading to the martyrdom of Ali Asghar. Imam Hussein is riding on his horse “ZolJanah30, with a spear in his right hand. His face is covered according to the principles of portraying of the saints and a halo, in the form

29HarmalahibnKahelAsadi was arrested in the revengeful rebellion of MokhtarSaghafi by the Shi’ite army and delivered to Mukhtar and Mukhtar ordered to kill him and fire his corpse (Rahmdel, 2007, P. 442).
30The name of Imam Hussein’s horse
of a cedar tree, is around his head. His head was designed in a way as if he is leaning against the spear. An armlet on his arms, a red shield on his back and a long sword on his waist are seen (Figure 15).

![Figure 15](image)

The sword of enemy is of the swords made in Zand and Qajar era. Ali Asghar was painted with an open face and a halo around his head. His calm and adorable face has increased his innocence. There are two people in front of the Imam's horse. The first person is Dervish Kaboli, who is seen with a red dress, Dervish hat, Kashkol and battle ax. He is giving his full of water Kashkol to Imam. Dervish Kaboli is the one who wanted to go Najaf to visit the Imam Ali tombstone and he came from Kashmir, India, he stopped in Karbala and hears the voices of children who shout out of thirst. He filled his Kashkol from the water of the Euphrates and approached the scene. There, he realized that the voices were from the sons of Imam. He was so much affected by hearing the adventure of Ashura, so he eagerly offer his kashkol to him. But Imam refused to accept water, and after talking with Imam, he decided to fight his enemies. Behind him, and on a little lower level, there is a man with a letter in his hand. According to the texts next to the picture, he is an Arab man who has brought a letter from the sick daughter of Imam who remained in Medina and he presented the letter to the Imam.

There is a tall, vivid purple mountain behind Imam Hussein that has divided the painting space into two parts. The design and coloring of it is reminiscent of the works of the teacher of the Second Tabriz School: Sultan Muhammad. On the two sides of this mountain, there are the group of jinns headed by “ZafarJenni” on the right hand (Figure 16), and in front of them, "Prophet's predecessors" with a tall and white dress and a face covered with halo. (Figure 17) These are the divine prophets from Adam to Muhammad, who heard the call of Imam Hussein at noon of Ashura and they came to help him, but Imam did not accept their

31According to the texts of Ta’ziye, the Imam thankedhim and said “if I want, I can have access to spring anywhere that I point out but I aim to examine the inferiority of the unbelievers and to complete the proof with them”
help. ZafarJenni has a coronal hat on his head and the jinn soldiers have a cone hat on their heads. The difference between the jinns and ordinary people in the MashhadiAqa Jan’s paintings is only in the mustache which is same as the cat’s one. After the martyrdom of Ali Akbar, when the Imam was ready to go to the campaign. Zafar came to the service of the strange Imam, and asked him to delegate the fight to him and his enemies. But Imam says that you cannot be seen by human beings since you are jinns and your war with people is far from marvelous.

After the return of Zafar, "Mansour Malek (angel), with four thousand angels, came to Imam Hussein, and said," By the order of God, we are in charge of your help and your life, so that we take vengeance your families and relatives’ killers." (Johari, 2012, P. 566). Imam cried and refused their help. On the right side of the picture, below the jinn army, the angels led by "Malek Mansur" are also ready to enter the campaign on the orders of Imam. The Mansour Malek’s Corps (here three of them are seen) have crowns on their heads and swords in their hands. A large part of the picture was dedicated to Imam Hussein and ZolJannah and the focus is on them. MashhadiAqa Jan has set several elements and narratives in such a way to direct the observer’s eyes towards the main character. Fortunately, this painting is less damaged than the paintings of other parts.

Aesthetics of wall paintings of the Holy Shrine of AqaSeyyed Ali

One of the factors behind the creation of numerous wall paintings in the holy shrines is the penetration and expansion of folk literature and culture in the Qajar period. "Religious tales came to the lithography books through the Ta’aziye, lamentation, and religious rituals. The structure of these stories is based on the lives of the prophets and the imams and the stories about the battle of Karbala. Rural folk painters have been using the lithographic image for painting on the holy shrines’ walls." (Akhaviyan, 2013, P. 49). The painting has a narrative form and its atmosphere makes it easy for ordinary people to understand it.

The involute structure of wall paintings of AqaSeyyed Ali’s holy shrine is a combination of original stories with secondary stories in the same frame. Like other Iranian artistic forms such as Ta’ziyeh and narrative, here, the painter creates a link between the main
event and his illustrative characters with the secondary characters of the story. Like Ta’aziye, the wall paintings of the holy shrines are the art of interpreting the images and a means of expressing mourning in the form of images. The themes and characters are applied on the walls as if they are prepared for a narrative. "The wall paintings of Holy shrines in Guilan play the same role of Ta’aziye. Taziyeh ceremonies are generally hold in the yard of holy shrines or the square of the towns and villages of Guilan at certain times of the year, such as Muharram and Safar, or after harvesting the rice. The painters of wall paintings of holy shrines of Guilan, probably have been trying to stabilize these themes in the minds of the people of the region by keeping the themes of Ta’ziye stable"(Khakban, 2002, PP. 96-97).

One of the main features of MashhadiAqa Jan’s wall paintings in the Holy Shrine of AqaSeyyed Ali is the struggle between right and wrong (good and evil). The painter has made a distinct difference between these two elements in the design and coloring. The viewer can easily identify the two groups with a quick look at paintings. In these paintings, enemies are depicted with ugly faces. Most of them are painted in awe and wonder with the courage of the hero of the story. The amazement and wandering of subjects are often indicated by placing the index finger on the mouth.

The infallible were painted at the peak of cleanness and unbelievers were painted in disgust. Here, the painter has used his usual principles for the painting of the infallible, such as the continuous eyebrows, the pale skin, Hashmi’s mole, the halo around the head; against the dark skin, the mustache, the tied eyebrows, and surprised eyes for unbelievers. Meanwhile, the imagination of the painter reached its highest level in the display of unbelievers, the jinns, hellish people, and the evil creatures, and horrible places such as Hell and the day of doom. Jinns (Zafar and his corps) are displayed with human bodies. And the only difference is that they have a cat mustache. It seems that like human, they can use their organs. The angels are also depicted here in human body but with a crown.

It seems that war clothing and ammunition including a headgear, a shield, a sword, etc. have been taken from the plays of Ta’azıye and inspired by the Qajar period. (Figure 18) "The appearance, clothing and makeup of people of the two art works were the same. In Ta’azıye, Zeynab is wearing the same dress that she wears in the wall paintings. Also, in Ta’azıye, Qasem (AS) and Abolfazl (AS) also took the same warriors as they use then in fighting with enemies in wall paintings. In the both arts, the women’s faces were covered32. The color of clothing and the symbolism of the color of clothing are in common in both arts. Heroes and anti-heroes are common in both art."(MirzaeiMehr, 2007, P. 122)

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32Except for the several people on the As-Syirát Bridge on the eastern wall
The basis of composition is a decentralized in the wall paintings and the hero is prioritized in it. In these paintings, Aqa Jan episodically combined the events. The closed combination of images in the wall paintings is such that there is no free space between the scenes, and the characters (main and minor) and the scenes are arranged tightly that moving from scene to the next one is done quickly. "This kind of moving from a time and a place to another time and place and leaving the description of the main event for addressing parallel and secondary events is called "escape" in folk literature, as well as in the artistic behaviors of the preachers and panegyrists. The preacher may escape to Karbala (means mentions the battle of Karbala) when describing any event. This kind of visual composition can be measured in parallel with the escape of the preacher." (MirzaeiMehr, 2007, P. 144) Each category of the general themes includes the minor scenes, and on each wall, the painter connects different themes alongside each other and in the longitudinal range of the wall with special techniques that may seem initially irregular and chaotic, but they are completely familiar for those who know the stories. Different scenes on the same wall are separated by charting technique which is similar to what previously used in miniature. The upper part of the paintings, also according to another tradition of holy shrines of Guilan, has been decorated with religious inscriptions such as Aba Abdullah Hussein and some of the poems of MohtashamKashani within the Toranjs. (Figure 19)

Figure 19

MohtashamKashani (born in Kashan in 905 AH- died in Kashan 996 AH), Mohtasham is one of the most important poets of the Shi'ite. The composition of "Against this rebellion what is in the creation of the universe," is the most famous marsiya for the martyrs of the battle of Karbala in Persian literature.
"Sometimes the painter is impressed by the surrounding environment and invents something. For example, he has used the simple role of symbol used for the ceremony in Muharram to restrict the images. The painter also uses the themes in the paintings according to the traditions of the region, for example, he has used the cradle, which is traditional in Guilan, or the image of local animals and birds to decorate the paintings." (Khakban, 2002, P. 98). In this case, it can be mentioned to the image of pheasants which was of the local birds in Guilan.

Tempera painting technique is implemented on plaster, and the painter has used limited colors to paint the paintings. The colors used in the studied paintings are blue, azure, green, black, red, ochre red, ocher yellow and yellow that are well placed next to each other.

The painter usually avoided to use the colors in perspective or represent the scenes naturally. The line drawing plays a very important role in contrasting static energy in the image. The lines include the flat colors and link the elements together.

"Principally, religious folk paintings have the same characteristics that they can be mentioned in these works. Some general features are simplicity of motifs and shapes of bodies, use of conventional colors, symmetrical composition, strong line drawings, use of bright colors, sharp contrast, lack of observance of the depth and painting in the two-dimensional space, use of decorative textures for filling the scene and or background, positional composition through magnifying important characters and lessening the characters corresponding to their material or spiritual identity, etc." (Shad, 2010, P. 19). For example, the main characters in paintings, including Imam Hussein (AS), Ali Akbar and Qasem are painted larger than others. The artist also placed the main theme of the story in the first plan in the three walls of the holy shrines.

Conclusion

The painter of the wall paintings in the holy shrines depicts deep and profound concepts such as love, sacrifice, freedom and truth, and endeavors to lead the observer to the reality of the story with a cursory look at historical events and resorting to the symbolic and visual signs. His religious beliefs, and using popular culture in drawing the characters in the paintings are important points of these paintings.

The narrations painted on the walls of the Holy Shrine of AqaSeyyed Ali, like other religious arts, are about Ashura and the promises of the followers of Imam Hussein (AS). MashhadiAqa Jan depicted what he wants to express in wall paintings of the Holy Shrine of AqaSeyyed Ali, directly, simply and unpretentiously. In his works, nothing prevents the immediate expression of this feeling and understanding of the subject. He shows all what he wants regardless of the abusive limitations of academic writing.

Like the past artists (painters), he adheres to two-dimensional level of paper and does not use false depths. Here, the similarity between the painter's work and the work of miniature painter is in avoiding naturalism. He clearly applies the rules and frameworks used in his past works. The faces and elements of the image are all in accordance with the conventional characteristics, and the patterns have been repeated not only in this holy shrine, but also in other paintings of MashhadiAqa Jan. The good division of the narrations, the taste and skill in the designing of different characters of the story and the unique coloring with the minimum number of colors are the main characteristics of Aqa Jan’s paintings.
Here the painter has not only described the story, but also honestly reflected his feelings, and like any skilled artist, expressed the contents of the event in compliance to the condition and the quality of his theme and story desired, but the importance of the truth of the event was also not reduced and he has used the precise points ensuring the artistic features in the paintings of this holy shrine. He has placed a combination of faith, feeling and imagination in his work. The artist has clearly shown the scenes of victory of the good to evil. Even though the observer knows that all these heroes are martyred, he chooses the scenes in which they are shown in the position of power. His heroes are pre-winning as kings. On the eastern wall, he has depicted the punishment of the murders of Imam Hussein, with two scenes of Mokhtar’s revenge and the Day of Doom, and thus the villager, after seeing the enslavement of unbelievers and the sinners, leaves the holy shrine happily.

References


