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## Original Research Article

# An Investigation of the Process of “Assimilation” in The Safavid Society: An Examination of Clothes, Instruments, and Moods in the Paintings of the Three Schools of Teimurian, Tabriz and Estrabad\*

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### Abstract

Comparing the paintings of the Safavid period with former schools shows that the Safavids, following the assimilation policies of the government, were looking for the trends of assimilation of the society by adopting culture through clothes, instruments, and manners. Such assimilation two thousand years after the achaemenid assimilation is unique in Iran. Also, centuries after the Sassanids, assimilation did not occur with the official single religion. During the Safavid era, when Iran was politically unified to some extent and the official religion was Shia, this point was also reflected in the appearance of the people. However, this social change was less felt in the provinces and cities due to the distance from the center of power, and this issue is evident in the study of the paintings of the “state” and “courtly” schools of the Safavid era. In this article, an attempt is made to investigate the process of “assimilation” in the Safavid society by referring to the visual sources of the schools of Herat Teimuri, Tabriz II, and the state school of Estrabad during the Safavid period. The current research is based on an analytical approach and library studies with reference to historical texts. The investigations obtained in comparing the pictorial resources of the Herat school, as a pre-Safavi school, the court school of Tabriz, and the state school of Estrabad as two painting schools of the Safavid period, show that the process of “homogenization” in the Safavid society, as opposed to “multiplicity” before It has led to the formation of a trend and a general tendency to pretend to be uniform and united in terms of clothing and even body language.

**Keywords:** *Safavid, painting, Assimilation, Herat school, Tabriz II school, Estrabad school.*

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## Introduction

Safavids after nine hundred years of the extinction of the Sassanid empire were able to form and rule a centralized Iranian kingdom over the entire Iran of that time. The religious conversion of Iranians from Sunni to Shia took place during the 16th to 18th centuries and turned Iran into the center of Shiism in the world. This action created a clear distinction between the Safavid government and the Ottoman Empire, which was the major power of the Islamic world, and thus gave the Safavid government a territorial and political identity (Ghasemzadeh et al., 2018). Thus, for the first time after nine centuries, the Safavid dynasty established the political unity of Iran in the larger part of Sassanid Iran. In other words, with the help of the kings of this dynasty, especially Shah Ismail I and Shah Abbas I, Iran regained its identity and political unity (Parsadoost, 1995, 177).

The re-emergence of Iran as an independent political unit in the Safavid period was an attempt to recover the national identity before Islam. At this time, which is known as a “historical moment” from a discourse point of view, the two factors of religion and nationality came together and accepted the national identity as the “supreme” sign (Hosseinzadeh, 2003, 39) of the newly established Safavid government. Based on this, it can be claimed that the Sufis and disciples of Sheikh Safieddin Ardebili, by choosing Shiism and separating themselves from the religious dependence on the Ottoman caliphate in the west and the Uzbeks in the east, started an effort to establish a national government in Iran (Yousefi, 2001, 17). The new political unit was based on features that made it different from all Iranian nationalist efforts after the rise of Islam.

The formation of the Ottoman government in the west of Iran and its totalitarian claims to lead the Islamic world under its banner required the formation of a national government in Iran (Heintz, 1997, 7,8). After the rapid Ottoman expansion towards the Balkans and Greece, it was very likely that the eastern lands in the Caucasus, Iran, and Central Asia would be among the next targets of this nascent empire. In fact, there was a very clear horizon ahead for such a goal. Because there was no powerful government or force to control the power of the Ottomans. With the slogans of the

Islamic caliphate, they could easily defeat the governments of Qaraqyunlu and Aqqyunlu and enter the vast plains of Central Asia. However, the rapid formation of the Safavid government disrupted this equation. With the emergence of the Safavids, a government was formed that was full of religious enthusiasm and supported the religious ideals of the people (Mirahmadi, 1989, 37).

In such an atmosphere, the effort of the Safavid government to assimilate all the ethnic groups within its borders had led to the formation of a special form or fashion which, based on the surviving evidence and documents from that period, can be recognized at all levels (speech, deed, thought, clothing, etc.). It is a review. This issue is evident in the works of art, especially the surviving paintings from this period. This is despite the fact that such a systematic process is not seen in the examination of clothing in pre-Safavian art schools. In fact, two thousand years after the Achaemenid rule, the Safavids showed signs of unification of clothes, instruments, and manners in all the land of Iran, which is a sign of the reproduction of Iranian culture and identity to distinguish itself from other contemporary powers in a noticeable way. Another point in examining the process of assimilation of governments is the issue of fashion. From this point of view, fashion represents the “last difference” (Bourdieu, 1993) and the “right moment for action” (Agamben, 2009) and is the identifier and representative of a person in his ability to adapt to the rhythm of society. Whether this song was adopted out of passion and freedom or out of reluctance and compulsion. If trends and fashion in today’s societies have a short and fleeting life and they are created with the same previous awareness, but in the past this process was creeping and lasting and sometimes even its followers and converts did not clearly understand the changes. The outcome and result of the government’s assimilation approach in most cases leads to the establishment of a specific clothing style, behavioral habits, speech, and thinking. Usually covering trends or something which is known as fashion today, is more tangible than other trends. Following the fashion introduces the possibility of presenting a person as being normative and having a special social position, and of course, it can also tell the opposite.

Clothing and technical and theoretical issues related to it are among the fields of interest for humanities and art researchers. The evolutions and changes of clothing in the cognitive studies of various scientific fields such as social sciences and cultural, economic, ideological, and art studies provide meaningful data for the accurate understanding of the conditions of the study site. The reason is that each of these components in the mentioned sciences has negative or positive effects on the way of use, form, and role of clothing. Therefore, the aspect under study should be specified (Saunders, 1990, 2).

Clothing is one of the three basic human needs, after food and shelter, in the biological needs group of Maslow's pyramid. In many periods of history, such as today, and among some strata of society that have been at a higher level of social welfare, clothing was not only fulfilling a need but also brought aspects of pride and beauty. In a wider scope, clothing is also considered an indicator of identity, culture, religion, and social level in any society. Clothing is considered to be a set of signs and symptoms that together form a single system based on specific definitions (national, patriotic, historical, mythological) to instill a single definition and identity (Matin, 2003, 39).

In this research, based on the painting sources of that period, which can be considered as visual sources of that time, the result of the policy and process of assimilation in the appearance of the Safavid society is evaluated. In the first step, an image from the pre-Safavi period (Herat School) was discussed, and in the second step, two Safavid era images, one from a metropolitan perspective (Tabriz II School) and another from a provincial school (Estrabad School) were examined and this question was answered. It is given that the process of all-round assimilation of the Shia Safavid government can be recognized in the paintings of the art schools of that period.

## Materials and Methods

The upcoming research is an analytical research based on library-documentary studies. The statistical population of the research is selected from three different places and times but from a similar space. These cases include Herat during the

Teimurid period, Tabriz during the Safavid capital period, and the province of Estrabad in the middle of this period as an important province. In all three of them, a common scene of the kingdom can be seen from the three Shahnamehs of Baisongqori, Tahmasabi, and Estrabadi. The data collection is in the form of micrographs, and Max Quda and MS Word software are used in image analysis and shape drawing.

## Findings

### • Examining clothes and moods in painting

#### - Bahram painting from the Herat Teimurid school (before the Safavids)

Before Shah Ismail, I declared the royal wore a crown and the Shia religion as the official religion of Iran in 907 AH, the land of Iran was the arena of successive conflicts between power claimants. During the centuries that passed after the Mongol invasion, this land was still deprived of achieving independence and territorial unity and, accordingly, an independent political identity (Eshraghi & Alavi, 2010).

The era of the Teimurids is undoubtedly one of the most important eras in the history of Iran, but in the 9th century of the Hijri (14th AD), in addition to the appearance of the Teimurids in the east of Iran, two Turkmen clans named Qaraqyunlu and Aqqyunlu also came to power in the west, and these two clans are always in competition and in the political struggle for power (Mirjafari, 2001). This shows that the three parts of Iran during the era of Teimurids and Turkomans were the main obstacle to unification. In such a period, there was no single understanding of the concept of "Iranianity" and "being Iranian" and in fact, it was an idealistic, historical, and subjective concept. It is obvious that in the atmosphere of multiple dishes, the possibility of assimilation policy was formed and along with the possibility of following the trend, a particular taste and fashion was far from expected. The selected sample for investigating the multi-taste and lack of assimilation policy before the Safavid period is a picture of Baysonqori's Shahnameh (Fig. 1).

The space of the painting shows a scene from Bahram Gur's court. This painting shows a scene from Baisanqormirza's throne and bar in Herat (or a similar space in the same place and time). The king sits on the throne in a bigger stature than



Fig. 1. Herat School, The variety of forms in a pre-Safavi space in a leaf of Shahnameh Baysongori. Source: Ferdousi 1971, 505.

others. Under his bed, samples of carpets and upholstered textiles of that period are covered, and the ground around him - as evidenced by the flowering bushes - although it can be considered spring, like the plains of Central Asia, it covers a sterile, semi-arid and rough plain. 16 people surrounded the king. Based on the not-so-big territory of the Teimurids during the period of Baysonqormirza, this small number should not be representatives of many nations and ethnicities. They lived in an environment where they had a common culture, and this intellectual and cultural unity should have been evident in their stature and robes when they appeared in the court of their king, and not like the public bar scene at the Gate of Nations in Persepolis, showing their diversity and plurality.

In terms of clothing, 5 categories can be seen among them. Group A-1, which includes the Shah, wears short-sleeved robes and under it, a shirt that rises to the wrists. The similarity of the king's clothes with those present shows that

the clothes do not indicate the determination and personality of any of them. Group A-2 consists of three people wearing black patterned armbands. Group A-3 contains a single person and his robe with long sleeves and his underwear can be seen from his open collar. Category A-4 includes only two women in the parliament, and of course, both of them have different clothes with different laces, and finally category A-5 includes three people whose clothing status is not clear and due to the variety of clothing, They are not included in the previous categories. Because it could represent one or more different categories.

The second item should include three categories and represent the behavioral state and human movements based on the psychology of the general culture of individuals. In category B-1, two people have their hands covered in opposite sleeves. In category B-2, four people have one hand on the waist and one hand on the opposite shoulder. (which is probably a sign of obedience). In category B-3,

two are seen with free hands. The women of Majlis and the king himself are also different from the others, the first case is because they are busy doing something and the second case is because they are beyond any custom and ritual.

The clothing of the Teimurids, like that of the Mughol patriarchs, included Iranian costumes under the influence of Chinese paintings and art (Song and Yuan periods), which were originally designed for princes and courtiers but were also popular among the people. However, carefully in the illustrations of Rashid al-Din Fazalullah's *Jame al-Tawarikh* book, in addition to Chinese elements, we can see examples of Iranian clothing and ornaments, which are very similar to elements such as Qaba and loose trousers found in the illustrations of the Seljuk school (Gheibi, 2008).

#### - Keikavus court painting from the Shahnameh of Shah Tahmasb (Tabriz School II)

As mentioned in the research literature, in the visual sources of the Safavid period, a noticeable movement at the level of the society for assimilation and homogenization can be observed from two aspects: clothing make-up, and body language. This trend is clearly evident in big cities or metropolises, or in other words, in court schools. But it is not visible in the provinces. In this section, we first take a look at a case of metropolises and then examine a case of provinces. Both cases have been selected from a larger statistical population, which are in complete agreement with each other. The reason for choosing these examples was the compatibility of the subject, scene, and space with each other. Assimilation policies often originate from larger communities. Where the dominant force of the society (the government) is based and the results of the policies should be observed from there. During the Safavid era, the cities of Tabriz, Qazvin, and Isfahan respectively experienced this situation. At the beginning of his reign, following his father Haider, Shah Ismail, to unify the clans and tribes of Qezelbash, ordered all of them to wear the red hats of the Twelve Turks - as a sign of the Shiism of the Twelve Imams - and because of this, these people were known as Red Heads (Sarvar, 1994, 33). This was the beginning of the implementation of assimilation policies in Tabriz. They wanted all their subjects to be Shiites to have aspects of the

native culture that was the origin of the Qezelbashi force, and to have an orientation towards "Iranian culture". In this way, other items, such as the type of clothing and weapons, became uniform and decorated. These were the cases that separated the territory of the Safavid kingdom from the territory of the Ottoman sultan. In the absence of such policies, it was feared that the Ottoman sultan would ask for submission and obedience from his various eastern parts in his pan-Islamic claims - by resorting to coercive force or propaganda force - and transform them gradually.

The example chosen to investigate the policy of assimilation in Safavid metropolises is an illustration of Tahmasabi's *Shahnameh*, which was started in the workshop of Tabriz. This *Shahnameh* completely has the main indicators of the court school of Tabriz II. For this reason, it is a good example to study the changes in the appearance and style of the characters. About 42 people can be seen in the selected frame of this picture. As in the first case, we examine them from the two items of clothing (A) and body language (B).

In terms of clothing, four categories can be identified. Category A-1 indicates a garment with a full robe from the shoulders to the feet, with short sleeves from which the undershirt protrudes. This category includes 18 people. It is obvious that this dress limits the possibility of manual work and it seems that these people generally include sheiks, elders, white beards, and people with intellectual and managerial jobs. While noting the point that the king himself also wears a garment of the same form. In category A-2, which includes 12 people, we see a garment with a short robe to the knees, with slits and a lining. The appropriate form of clothing for manual work indicates that they must be soldiers, courtiers, and servants of the kingdom. And of course, the very important point is that except for the shortness of the bottom of the robe to the knees, the rest of their clothes are the same as category A-1.

Category A-3 is the largest and most important category of this item. White robes or robes on which the red hat of Qezelbashi stands out. This hat with twelve cracks was a characteristic of melting in the cultural furnace of that period. Having such a characteristic could save a person from being accused and prosecuted by Essan. Regardless of whether a

person is in the first or second category, having this special symbol was a sign of disobeying the government’s policy of assimilation. The Qezelbashi hat of this period should be seen as the symbol of Ibn al-Zaman of that period; People with extraordinary spirit and the ability to change their appearance and harmonize themselves with a song that has the head of servitude and tyranny. It should be noted that this sign did not primarily contain the message that a person believes in certain principles dictated by the government; Rather, it was a symbol of pure submission and obedience to the person of the king. As in this painting, the king himself does not have a Qizlbashi hat, which means that he does not obey “any person” and that those who do not have a Qizlbashi hat are among the servants and are never subject to the curiosity of the apparatus. The fourth category of this subject is A-4, whose clothing details are not known and they cannot be placed in categories 1 and 2. In the group of 42 people, there are only two groups in terms of clothing, and ignoring the slight difference in the form of clothing or

due to the similarity in having Qezelbashi hats, they can all be placed in one major group (Fig. 2).

The second subject in this study is subject B or body language. Category B-1 consists of 9 people with free and moving hands. It is said that the widespread habit of “helping hands to express content” was common in this period and, unlike some court rituals, it was not considered an obscene gesture. Group B-2, with 3 people, represents an Eastern “mannerism” tradition in which individuals would stand with both hands clasped in front of elders or authority figures as a sign of pure obedience and obedience. The third category, B-3, with one person, is the only single position in the crowd, standing with both hands on the chest as if showing knowledge. As Saadi says in a verse: “With the iron hand of roasting the dough - from the hand to the chest in front of the Amir”. The rest of the people present in this picture cannot be categorized and they actually have their own hand gestures. Most likely, the desire for



Fig. 2. School of Tabriz II, Variation of form in a metropolitan space of the Safavid period in a leaf of Shahnameh Tehamasbi. Source: Canby 2014, 116.

assimilation and assimilation policy was not directed at such movements at all and was satisfied with the beauty of the appearance according to established patterns and norms (Fig. 2).

#### - The image of Kikavus court from Shahnameh of Estrabad (Estrabad State Library)

It is obvious that the government assimilation policy and the spirit of assimilation were formed in the Safavid period. But as it was said, this was not the case in the provinces, like the metropolises and capitals. Although Tahmasabi's Shahnameh showed the government's desire for the "existing situation" or an idealized form of the "optimal situation", the situation was not like that in the new school of Estrabad, which was an important province in terms of geopolitics or Suq al-Jishi. Estrabad was an important city in the north of Khorasan and, like Mashhad and Herat, it was one of the important cultural bases (with all its political and military aspects) for the government. The concentration of a part of the ruling force in this sector served as a point of gravity against the tribes and governments based in Central Asia (such as Turkmen and Uzbeks). Among the many exquisite copies of the Shahnameh over several centuries, in different schools, some of these copies belong to or are attributed to Esterabad, which was produced in the second half of the 10th century and the first half of the 11th century AH. have been produced These editions indicate the existence of a small book-making center in this region, which illustrated its editions with native characteristics and has been active for at least a century (although intermittently). However, for almost two decades in the second half of the 10th century and two decades in the first half of the 11th century, with the application of the power of the central government, internal security prevailed in Estrabad and the conditions for dealing with cultural issues have been prepared. Shahnamehs obtained from Estrabad also belongs to these two periods (Robinson, 2004).

Studying the images of the Shahnamehs of Estrabad, which are mostly kept in British museums, and only 15 images of a fragmented version of the Shahnameh in the Malek Museum of Tehran are in our possession, shows that some specific characteristics are repeated

in all of them. Considering that repetition is one of the main rules in transferring the heritage of art schools, Estrabad can be considered an art school with principles and rules that have continued for at least a century. These features include things like; Placing the image among the text, choosing a close-up view of all events, choosing a specific color range, and having two types of composition at the same time.

The concentration of forces in each of the three points of Herat, Mashhad, and Estrabad encouraged the gathering of artists in them and formed their art schools. The desire of the rulers to show a cultured, polite, and art-loving personality of themselves, constantly led to the formation of a circle of intellectual elites around them, who praised him to receive a reward and a worthy gift. Astarabad province was not an exception to this rule. But the situation there was the result of the declining star fortune of artists in the Qazvin school. After Shah Tahmasb, as a result of his mental disturbances, ordered the closure of the Qazvin Artists' Association, the artists whose livelihood came from that association had to stop traveling and the storm of the accident took each of them away from the other country. A group of them came from the same city of Estrabad, and they were appreciated and placed on top. Even though the Art Assembly of Estrabad, who also founded the art school of this city, came from the Safavid capital, it seems that they did not adhere to the traditions of this metropolis, Qazvin. What if they were rejected and pushed away from that great gate and it was natural that what was to the taste of the lord of affairs there, would not be to their taste here? Another noteworthy point is that after many disputes among Qezelbash leaders over the governance of Estrabad, Shah Abbas finally chose a non-Qezelbash ruler from the Circassian family for this region. Feridun Khan Circassians, who had the support of Shah Abbas, deposed the Qazalbashians in all the branches of the government, and this is the reason why there is not even a single example of a Qezelbashi hat in the paintings left from Estrabad, although the types of clothing and tools are preserved (Sakhtemangar & Sharifzadeh, 2022).

The case chosen to evaluate the effectiveness of institutionalization of the policy of assimilation and homogenization in the provinces is a page from the Shahnameh of Estrabadi Mahfouz in Malik Library. The painting "Rostam in the Keikavous Court" can be

a scene from the throne of the Amir of Estrabad with its author's additions and imagination. 16 people can be seen in this frame, which can be recognized in the two items of "clothing" and "body language". Item B-1 has a special letter There is nothing to say. Most of the attendees are speaking in a crowd of elders, and the common way of using hand gestures to express the speech can be seen in them. Item A-Clothing includes 4 categories. Group A-1 shows the common clothing of the Safavid period that was mentioned in the previous picture: a long robe from the shoulders to the toes. There are 5 people in this group whose full body shape is known. Category A-2 is only one person, and in this painting, he is meant to be Rostam, who has a short robe that was worn by crews, Sepahians, and servants in Tahmasbi's paintings. Group A-3 shows three ladies in the left corner of the picture in matching clothes looking at the Majlis. Category A-4 is a group of six people whose clothing is not completely clear; But according to evidence, they can be placed in category A-1. Because the details of their upper bodies are in complete agreement with the latter category. Therefore, it can be concluded that the policy of assimilation has resonated here as well and has melted everyone into one bush. But a very important issue that expresses a kind of resistance and difference is the absence of Qezelbashi's red helmets, who used to focus on themselves in a government group like Tabriz and Qazvin. In this painting, except for the women, whose headscarves are not visible, each person in the crowd is wearing a different hat and almost all of their hats are different from each other. This is an important point; That is, the voice of the assimilation policy and the voice of the assimilation process in the provinces have almost been heard; But there is a kind of reaction against the governmental aspect of it. The unpleasant memory of the artists who were expelled from the court and the location of the city in the religious borders, which were followed by the Sunni lands, can be a reason for this. Such important features and characteristics make artists insist on certain artistic styles and contexts and fuel their independence from other art schools. It was in such an atmosphere that the Estrabad School insisted on preserving its artistic experiences and emphasized preventing integration into larger schools. However, those who were striving for the formation of the Estrabad school were the forerunners of the larger schools that came from there (Fig. 3).

## Conclusion

Based on the results obtained in the examination of the image samples presented in the research, "multiplicity" and "multipleness" prevailed in the clothes and moods of the people and society of Iran before the Safavid era. This situation can be justified due to the political situation and fragmentation of Iran at that time. In this way, there are no signs of uniformity in the clothing, weapons, colors, and behavior of the characters in these pictures. It seems that in the pre-Safavi period, there was no motivation and effort to unify the society and the mass of people with a special image. For example, in the painting that was examined as an example from the Teimurid Herat period (before the Safavid era), several styles and variations of covering and appearance can be recognized.

Two thousand years ago, the Safavids were the Achaemenids who sought unification in their vast territory. However, by examining the pictorial signs from the Achaemenid period to the Safavid period, such assimilation does not occur. Even the Sasanians, who declare the official single religion, do not witness this assimilation. During the Safavid era, when Iran was politically unified to some extent and the official religion was Shiism, this point was also reflected in the appearance of the people. But by examining the two paintings (court and state) of the Safavid period, we see a trend and a general tendency to show off in a special form of clothing and even body language, which is unique compared to the era before and after. In these two paintings, one of which is related to the court school of Tabriz II and the other to the state school of Estrabad, the clothes, hats, weapons and body movements of the people have convergence (with slight differences). This convergence can be seen in these two paintings, which are geographically, Estrabad (East) and Tabriz (West), and with a time interval of half a century. Since the Safavids came to work with a specific and different ideology from their eastern and western neighbors, they have made an effort to unify the army and the courtiers, and consequently, the people, to create an outward difference in addition to the religious difference. Historical

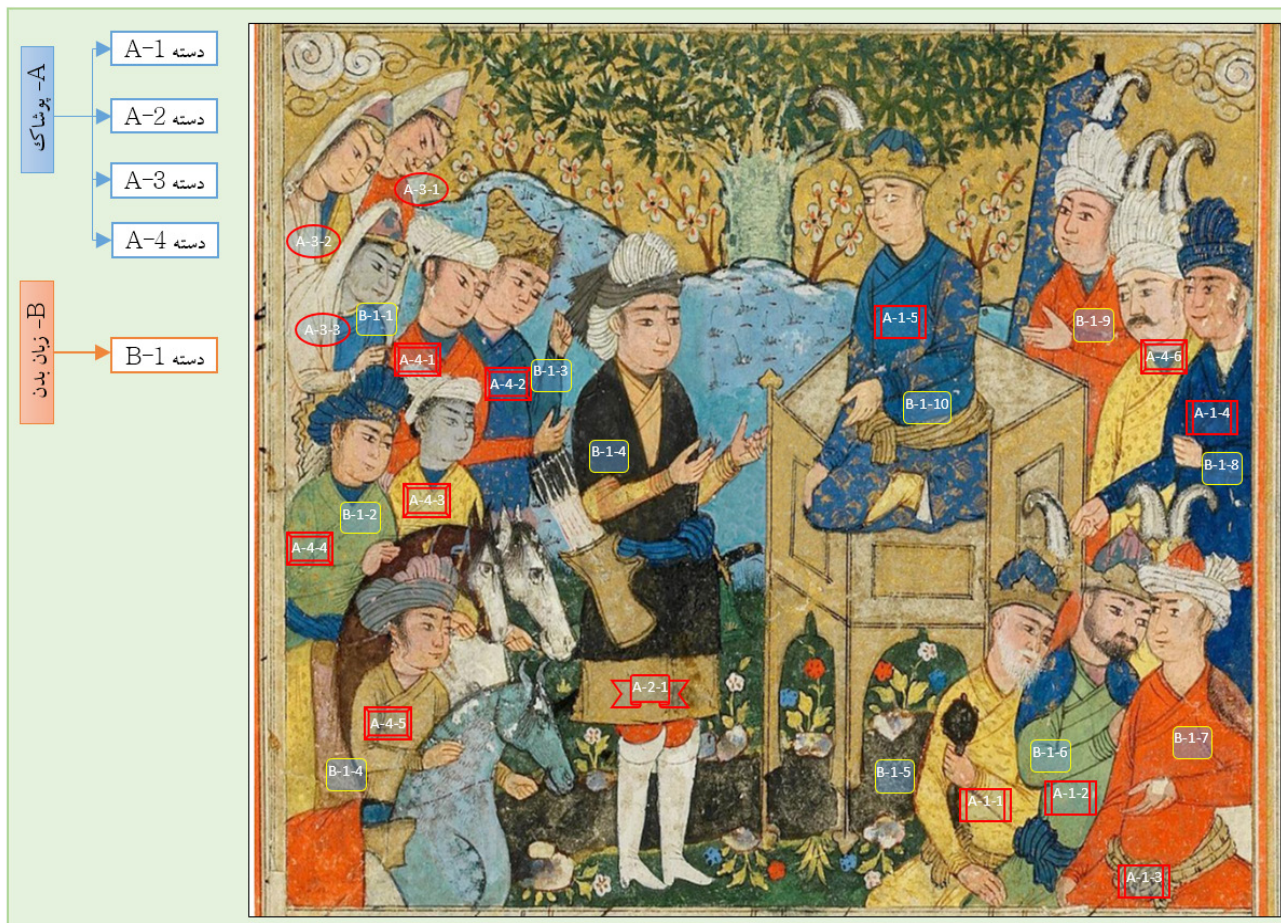


Fig. 3. Estrabad School, Variation of form in a Safavid period state space in a leaf from the Shahnameh of Estrabadi, Rostam in Keikavous palace. Source: <http://malekmuseum.org/saloon/artifact/1393.02.00005>.

written sources are also aligned with this approach. In this way, most of the scattered lands of Iran, during the coming to power of the Safavids, were under the command of a king, a decree, and an army, which was the ideological support and, as a result, an ideology and worldview with a special reading of the Shiite religion. Now that the large parts of the society are all trying to unite, people try to align themselves with the currents ruling the society, willingly or unwillingly. This characteristic can be seen at its highest level in the paintings of Tahmasabi's Shahnameh (Tabriz II), which was considered a government project or masterpiece. This situation prevails to a large extent in the provinces (Astrabad); But compared to big cities, the rate of convergence and integration is less. Finally, we can conclude that:

1. In the Safavid period, there are clear signs of the government's will to assimilation, cultural acceptance,

and assimilation for the people.

2. From the Safavid era, when Iran was politically unified to some extent and the official religion was Shiism, it also showed its unification in the appearance of the people.

3. The paintings of the Safavid era are solid and reliable sources for studying the foundations of their society, and they correspond to the cases that were recorded by court scribes and clerks.

4. The models of provincial schools in the sense that there is less control, supervision, and dependence compared to the imperial projects of large schools.

They had a capital, they had much more credit to touch the lower levels of society.

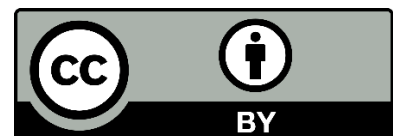
5. The pictures of provincial schools show that the rhythm of assimilation, assimilation, and acculturation in the provinces has been slow, slow, and perhaps accompanied by implicit and mild resistance.

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