A Survey of the Persian Historic Bathhouses from the Safavid to the Qajar Period (With an Emphasis on Decorations and Architectural Features)

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Decoration plays an important role in Islamic-Persian architecture. Being a synthesis of ancient traditions, Islamic instructions, and different periods' developments, this style of architecture applies various kinds of ornamentation that convey spiritual values and concepts besides beauty. Although in Islamic lands and civilization, mosques have constantly been the focus of religious attention with magnificent decorations, other places such as bathhouses (*hammām*)—being in direct connection with ceremonious purification—enjoyed such characteristics as well. Despite the fact that there have remained few pre-Safavid samples of historic bathhouses, such buildings abound from this period on. Studying these works acquaints us with the ornamental styles of the traditional bathhouses and makes us familiar with the evolution of decorations in later periods. The present study, conducted using analytical-descriptive and historical-comparative methods, aimed to investigate the developing trends emerged and continued in bathhouses with an emphasis on such decorative elements as tilework, wall painting, lime work, etc. from the Safavid era to the Qajar era. The results showed that Safavid architects' achievements in bathhouses decorations were manifested, as in other fields of art and culture, in those of later periods, especially the Qajar era. By increasing the motifs and expanding the spaces, Qajar artists extended and applied those methods and innovations in some ornamental elements preserving the decorative tradition of Islamic-Persian architecture, particularly in public bathhouses.

Keywords: *Bathhouse, Architecture, Iran, Safavid, Qajar, Decoration*

Introduction

Islamic architecture has passed a long way from its very beginning to the stage of development and heyday. Despite being a synthesis of other subordinate nations' architectural styles, this field acquired an independent identity. The main characteristic of Islamic art and architecture is the employment of symbolism and other spiritual dimensions in the process of creation. Such a feature was first manifested in mosques as the first structures of Islamic architecture and as centers for Muslims' assembly. As the territory of Islam was expanding and the populations of different areas were growing due to migrations, other buildings including palaces, houses, walls and fortifications, gates, and the like were also put up. In these constructions, besides observing.

the aesthetic principles, Islamic teachings and the divine art recognizable too, i.e. the appropriate designing, harmony of ornaments and, generally, the application of Islamic teachings symbolically. Here, abstaining from employing or depicting human motifs in mosques and religious buildings, at least in word and theory, led to the appearance of certain methods of representation among which are stylization, symbolism, and inanimate forms. The development of some certain decorative elements as the product of Islamic architecture in this respect like colorful tiles, geometric motifs, and other similar elements conveying the Islamic identity has strengthened this field.

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In addition to the sanctities in Islamic art, current traditions and customs in different areas, common social relations in such regions, and other factors gave a building multifunctional purpose. This matter was influential in the process of construction. Bathhouse in here is a case in point, because the study of social history of bathhouses shows that they had some other social functions rather than mere bathing[1]. As Islam has put emphasis on the simultaneous purification of body and soul, this matter highlights the role of bathhouses from two prospects[2]. Hence, the bathhouse—besides the mosques —as a place with personal and social functions became the center of various decorative elements manifestation. When people went to bathhouses for bathing and ceremonial washing, the beautiful and attractive ornaments could also purify their minds and hearts. In fact, the Islamic essence of these ornaments was indicative of the beauty of the other world manifested in worldly architecture.

Evidence reveals that bathhouses of the Safavid and post-Safavid eras have increased in quantity in the course of time. There are many cases remained from this period on, the study of which indicates their patrons and architects' consideration for stability and decoration. The present article reports a study conducted on the trend of architectural development and ornamental elements during the Safavid and Qajar dynasties and a comparison of the architecture of such places. In order to obtain a better conclusion, the research was divided into two parts. First, the most important and common ornaments of the places were considered after having a review of bathhouses history; and second, an analysis of the decorations was done in the most well-known bathhouses of the Safavid and Qajar eras.

Methodology

The methodology of the present study is based upon descriptive-analytical and qualitative approaches. Furthermore, information and facts have been gathered using library research method. In order to complete the facts and achieve valid references, in some cases field study, in the form observations and taking photos, has been adopted. In selecting the bathhouses of the Safavid and Qajar eras, being the subjects of the research, some features have been considered, including history, situation, and particularly ornamentation. The realm of such ornamentation is mostly based on lime work, stucco, tilework and murals. Here, various bathhouses from the vast geographical territory of Iran are included such as Ganj-alī-khān (Kerman), Alī-qulī-āqā (Isfahan), Shāh (Isfahan), and Shāhzādehā (Isfahan) from the Safavid era; and Chāhārfasl (Arak), Ibrāhīm-khān Zahīr-ad-duleh (Kerman), Mehdī-qulī-beik (Mashhad), and Mīr-ahmad (Kashan) from the Qajar era. Occasionally, some other complementary samples and materials are also presented to clarify the issue. Although the foundation of some bathhouses like Mehdī-qulī-beik had been set up during the Safavid dynasty, its decorations as the main subject of research refer to the Qajar era, so that it will be categorized and studied under the latter period. The same goes true about Ganj-alī-khān bathhouse where some decorations in the portal and tilework belong to the Qajar era despite the foundation following the Safavid pattern.

[1] Hanābandān (henna ceremony) and childbirth bathhouses were some of the ceremonies held in these places. Some European travelers have described the long and tiresome ceremony of using henna by the Iranian women in bathhouses (see: Serena 1983:154). Rubbing henna on hands and feet of the brides and bridegrooms has been customary in weddings from past times. Hanāband, the person who used and rubbed that substance on skin, applied it on the head and hands of the bride. It was called hanāyi sar-angushtī. Then she covered it by lachack, small triangular cloth (Shahrībāf, 2004). The bridegroom was also taken to bathhouse in the morning of his wedding ceremony. Masseur rubbed henna on his hands and feet (Salur, 1995 vol.5: p.4017; Katīrāyī 2005:176). Childbirth bathhouse was another important ritual for women. Therefore, before taking the mother to bathhouse, other women would prepare all kinds of meals and foods as well as certain medicine (Mūnis-ad-dūleh 2001:88-89). If they had a baby girl, the mother would be taken to the bathhouse after seven days, and if it was a baby boy, the same would be done in the tenth day. Onions that were put beside the mother at the time of giving birth would be thrown in running water on the day of going to bathhouse (Āqā-Jamāl 1970:16; Mūnis-ad-dūleh 2001:83; Khadīsh 1999:270).

[2] The famous hadith - the record of the words, actions, and the silent approval, of the Islamic prophet Muhammad - "Cleanliness is next to godliness" emphasizes this matter (see: Nūrī 1988 vol. 16:319).

Literature Review

Much research has been done up to the present time on the subject of bathhouses and their role in the Islamic-Persian culture. One of the most important of such studies is the collection of articles of the Bathes in Iranian culture conference. (by a group of authors 2005). Different aspects of bathhouses such as the history, introduction, construction and restoration, customs, and cultural and religious dimensions are among the issues discussed in the mentioned source. Such topics and subjects are also discussed in the following sources in other ways with certain purposes: Baths in Iranian-Islamic cities (Mahjour 2003:60-67) on the significance of public and private bathing buildings in Islamic cities and their architecture; Bathroom decorations and arrangements (Mukhlesī 2003:106-114) on the historical background of decoration and their patterns in such places; Baths in the view of time (Fakhar Tehrani 2000) with the purpose of examining the physical purification issue in bathhouses; The evolution of tiling in Safavid architecture until today (Zamarshidi 2012).

A thematic review of these books indicates that the development of decorations in historic bathhouses from the early Safavid era up to the Qajar era has not been taken into consideration seriously; hence, the need for an independent research. Regarding the mentioned background, the present article is aiming to pursue a more detailed investigation into the development of Safavid architecture of bathhouses right into the Qajar period.

The Components and Characteristics of Historic Bathhouse Architecture

The construction of bathhouses required special complicated principles. Being constantly subject to water and moisture with different temperature from surroundings, such structures needed to be designed differently, both in terms of construction principles and materials. The intelligent Persian architects tried their best in this respect despite all restrictions[1]. These constructions are among the most outstanding samples in the Islamic world from the viewpoint of stability, architecture techniques, and aesthetic principles. There are still more cases, apart from the Persian ones, to be considered in this vast territory; still, the mentioned examples in Iran enjoy considerable solidity and beauty in researchers' opinions, especially those of foreigners[2].

As mentioned above, one of the most obvious characteristics being typical of the historic bathhouses is stability and resistance to certain conditions. Using mortar and other materials like stone and brick could mount resistance to moisture. Two kinds of pattern or scheme could be recognized in the juridical rules and beliefs influential in designing bathhouses: first, those applied in all Islamic constructions; and second, those dedicated to bathhouses. The main function of a bathhouse, i.e. physical purification besides removing impurity, made architects adopt certain policies in this respect. Here, they accomplished this purpose by setting up different levels in the apodyterium or cloakroom (*sarbīna* in Persian), creating various basins for washing activities (regarding the religious regulations of Islam), determining the situation of water fountains, etc. (Mahjour 2003:63). The architects could introduce innovations, too. For instance, spiraling columns, in addition to conveying beauty, prevented the leakage of water drops overhead. They led the drops downward restraining from the annoyance of people after taking a bath (Fig. 1).

In addition to the issue of physical wash and purification, historic bathhouses contained hygienic matters, joy, entertainment, health improvement, and other benefits. Most of such buildings were wide and well-designed containing the "triple houses" (*boyūt-e salāseh*). The first house (*sarā*) would function as cooling and soaking room, the second as warming and softening room, and the third one as warming and drying room. In each of

[1] These restrictions include: fuel, carrying water to bathhouse, carrying away sewage, washing hierarchy, purification, etc. (see: Fakhar Tehrani 2000:98).

[2] For more information about architecture, mechanism, crew and servants, and other related matters to bathhouses in other parts of Islam world, see: Ekushar 1985:10 and pages after; Ali 2006:17; Abd-or-razzāq Muavviz 2013:13 and pages after; Erdoğan 2013:19.

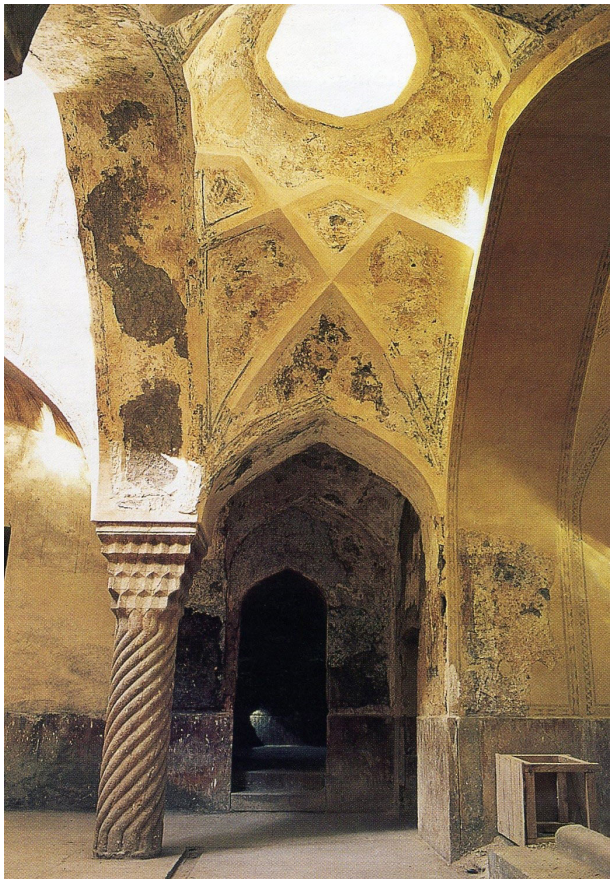


Fig. 1 : *A spiraling column, Vakīl Bathhouse, Shiraz (After: Ganjnāmeh 2004: 80, vol. 18)*

the bathhouse sections and chambers, architectural delicate principles and decorative elements were observed.

The first and foremost part of bathhouse architecture was its portal. The entrance was usually a gated vestibule opened at an angle in order to avoid the inner space being seen from outside. Meanwhile, entrances of some bathhouses are somehow unusual. For example, the entrance of bathhouse in the village of Kurdasht, Ahar (Northwest of Iran), is accessed from the roof through eleven stairs.

The portal was followed by an apodyterium called *bīna*, *sarbīna* or Jāmikan in Persian (see Dehkhoda 4:5292). The apodyterium is a quadrilateral enclosure with a vaulted ceiling together with opaque glass or marble vault lights called *Jāmigāh* or *guljām* (Mahjour, 2003:62-63). There were several platforms or benches for changing clothes around the apodyterium. These parts were sometimes empty and hollow to put shoes inside. There was often a shallow small pool (*howz*) on the surface of the apodyterium containing pure and cool water. The pool was used for dipping and washing feet (*pāshūyeh*) after coming out of the hot chamber (*garmkhāneh*) at the end of ablution or bathing (Fig. 2).

The apodyterium was led to the hot chamber through a corridor (*sarsarā*). There were situated some chambers in the corridors for the customers to use different substances, especially a synthesis of orpiment[1] and lime for removing body and pubic hair. The corridor had platforms for placing bathing cloth (*lung*) and other accessories. Toilets could be accessed through this place[2]. Hot chambers had different sections for rubbing, water reservoir (*khazīneh*), playing and swimming pools. There was also a private place dedicated to dignitaries. For example, Ganj-alī-khān bathhouse, dating back to the Safavid period with Qajar ornamentation, had a hot chamber divided into smaller sections, including a dais (*shāhnishīn*) built higher than the hot chamber ground. Being situated at the end of the hot chamber, water reservoir was separated from that part by low walls. The body of reservoir was completely insulated[3].

Bath stove (*gulkhan or tūn*) was located at the back or under the water reservoir, like that of Chāhārfasl Bathhouse in Arak. This chamber could be decorated; however, the apodyterium looked more conspicuous than other parts in terms of measurement and decoration. It was usually quadrilateral or octagonal surrounded by platforms and the apodyterium. Beneath the platforms were empty spaces for putting shoes (Kiani 2005:170). Since the apodyterium played an important role in maintaining and equalizing body temperature, and

[1]A chemical name for "arsenic", a stone called hertāl in Persian and Indian. It has five varieties, i.e. yellow, red, white, green and black. Its varieties are poisons found in different colors. When mixed with lime, it can be used for the removal of body and pubic hair. Zarnīkh is the Arabicized form of the Persian Zarneh.

[2] For more information, see: Pirniya 2001:199; Sotoudeh 2003:30.

[3]For more information, see: Zaker-amuli and Esfanjari 2005:382.

since the constant comings and goings of customers happened at this place, much time would pass there. Therefore, most of wall paintings and tile works besides pools and other decorative elements were often seen in that chamber (Figs. 3, 4, 5).

In some bathhouses the entire walls of the apodyterium were decorated with motifs of foliage, arabesques, birds, fruits, drinking cups, and religious or heroic scenes all in resistant material of mortar. Sometimes, delicate circular stone-troughs (*sangāb*)[1] were placed for adorning the space of the apodyterium. The four circular marble troughs decorated with lion reliefs in Haj Mohammad-Rahim Bathhouse (Qazvin), or the troughs of Ganj-

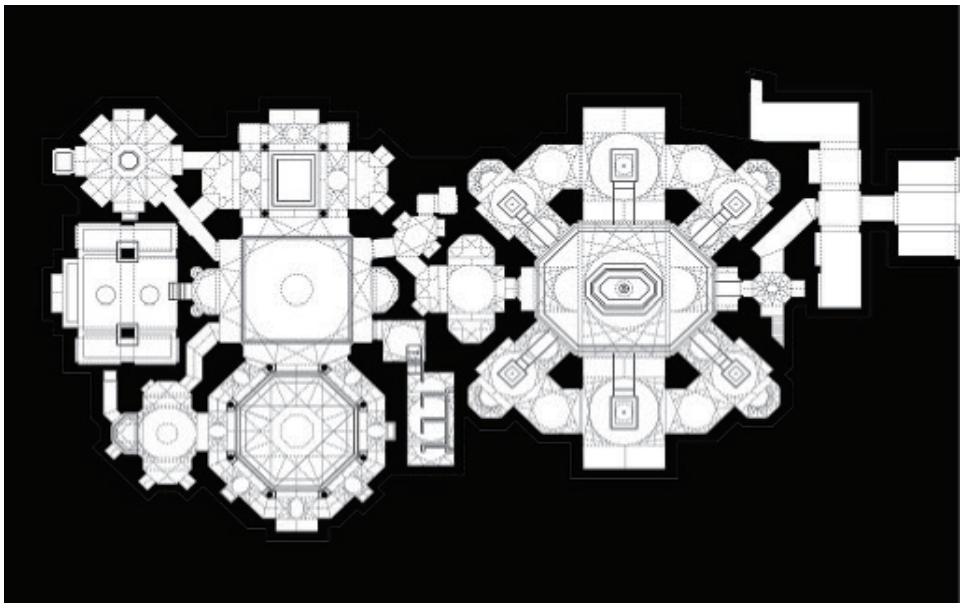


Fig. 2: *Ganj-alī-khān Bathhouse plan (After: Ganjnāmeh 2004: 115, vol. 18)*



Fig. 3: *The apodyterium of Chāhārfasl bathhouse, Arak, Markazi Province*

[1] For more information about the stone troughs, see: Afzal Tousi & Mani 2013:52 and pages after.



Fig. 4: *The apodyterium of Ali-quli-āqā bathhouse, Isfahan*



Fig . 5: *The apodyterium of Zahīr-ad-duleh bathhouse*

alī-khān Bathhouse[1] , Alī-qulī-āqā and Khūsrū-āqā bathhouses (Isfahan) are some cases in point (Figs. 6a & 6b). Furthermore, sometimes water current in bathhouses allowed artistic creations like when making fountains or statues pouring out water[2]. Bathhouse inscriptions were other significant additions introducing builders together with verses on purification, trustworthiness, etc[3].

There is little information about pre-Safavid bathhouses, but henceforth, as the heyday of Persian art and architecture[6], there have remained plenty of buildings. Such bathing places have been constructed at the maximum degree of stability and beauty being regarded as models or prototypes for designing post-Safavid samples.

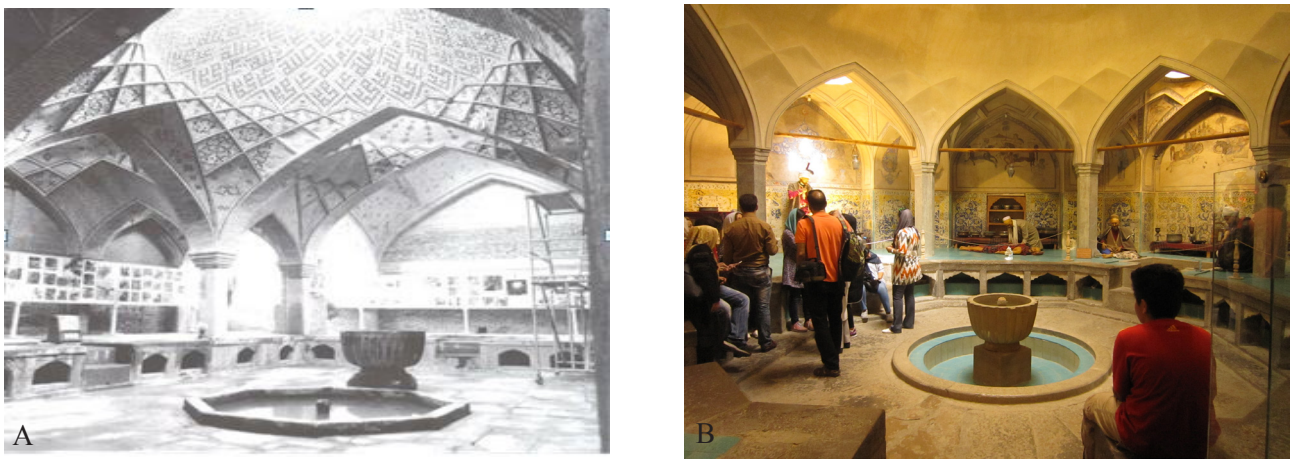


Fig. 6 A: *The circular stone trough of Khūsrū-āqā bathhouse, Isfahan (After: Ganjnāmeh 2004: 31, vol. 18)*

B: *The circular stone trough of Alī-qulī-āqā bathhouse apodyterium, Isfahan*

Evolution and Continuation: The Role of Decoration in Safavid and Qajar Historic Bathhouses

Although ornamentation of bathhouses had been forbidden in religious juridical rules and ethics[4] , different decorations had an obvious manifestation in the Safavid era. The Iranian paid full attention to the construction and architecture of bathhouses, especially to the issue of solidity and beauty, more than any other nations. In addition to purification, bathhouses were places to experience joy, entertainment and visual pleasure, so that people sometimes spent much time having conversation and rest in apodyteriums or hot chambers. The issue of using decoration in bathhouses had already been considered by some early authors; however, they did not just suffice to the apparent or superficial forms. Malek-ol-Attibbā, the renowned Qajar physician, as an instance, has raised some important points about the essence of illustration in bathhouses[5]. It seems that different opinions in this respect have attracted more attention towards the significant position of bathhouses. This matter made architects try their best in designing and decorating such buildings.

Today, there is no special example of the early architecture in Tabriz and Qazvin, the two capitals of the Safavid before Isfahan (Alām 2003:272). Most of the valuable works of this period refer to the

[1] See: Golriz 1989, vol. 1:324; Tabasi 2002:102. The issues of size (expansion) and attraction (beauty and magnificence) of the apodyteriums are also referred to in some the Safavid travel accounts. For example, see: Drouville 1988:61.

[2]For more information, see: Mohammad Abdul-mun'am Jamal 2004:134.

[3]See: Najafi 1985:437; Mohammad Abdul-Mun'am Jamal 2004:133; also, for more information about bathhouses inscriptions and their themes in the Safavid and Qajar periods, see: Lutfi & Masjedi 2011:106 and pages after.

[4]Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali has forbidden painting in a bathhouse prohibiting people from going there in case of having such elements. An-Nawawi, a renowned Shafiite jurist, regards the act of representing living creatures as a condemned attempt to rival the power of God in the process of creation, hence forbidding it. However, he has allowed the representation of those images with decorative aspects and purposes and therefore authorized the imagery of human motifs in bathhouses, because the intention of such an action would be mere beautification, not rivaling God's act of creation (see: Okasha 2001:7).

[5]See: Malik-ol-attibbā, 2003:126-127.

[6]For more information about architecture of the Safavid Isfahan, see: Yavari & Bavafa, 2011: 145 and pages after.

magnificent reign of Shah Abbas I and afterwards. Many buildings such as mosques, palaces, monuments and schools were built in this period, each of which decorated with different ornamental elements and media. Safavid bathhouses were decorated with such ornamentation as tilework, *kārbandī*, muqarnas and lime work, so that we can regard this time as the cultural and architectural climax of Persian bathhouses. The architectural and ornamental evolution of this era was to be continued in later periods, i.e. Zand and Qajar. But in the late Qajar period, as western manifestations began to appear in Persian art and life, some aspects of that culture did so in the bathhouses. The imitation of plaster palettes[1] in Chāhārfasl Bathhouse after those of the European architecture is an example of such influences. Nevertheless, western styles did not exert dramatic effects on the nature and structure of such constructions, as the forms and methods of Safavid bathhouses can be seen up to the end of the Qajar era, except with some slight changes.

Qajar bathhouses were built larger than the Safavid precedents as a result of the growth in population, especially in Tehran, in later periods[2]Migration was another factor in population increase; hence, it entailed that more constructions of public utility be built.[3] Here, evolution and changes in the ornamentation of the Safavid bathhouses architecture and those of later eras can be examined in some qualities and characters of some bathhouses as examples. Having been appeared on different surfaces as walls, columns, and ceilings, the existence and transformation of such motifs and ornaments were due to different reasons and factors. Tilework and wall painting are two forms of decoration with a long history in the Persian architecture. These arts have been used widely in historic bathhouses. Lime work and mortar work are other decorative media developed after the Safavid era in bathhouses. Generally, historic bathhouses' decorations can be categorized into two main groups: "structural" and "supplemental". In the first category, ornaments are embedded into the body of building, but in the second one, they are added or affixed only after work (Tabasi 2007:165) (Fig 7). Each of these two classes would be used in the process of beautification in appropriate places and situations, if required.

Columns' decorations

The application of stone columns in the apodyteriums and hot chambers is considered a structural element in bathhouses sometimes adopting a decorative aspect. Timurid documents and illustrations show that the pre-Safavid bathhouses were devoid of stone columns, so the dome and ceilings were directly placed on the arches of four platforms. But the employing of stone columns became common in Safavid architecture and continued in the Zand and Qajar periods (Mukhlesi 2003:108). The shafts of some columns were cylindrical made of a single block of stone. Yet, there were many columns in the forms of pentagon, hexagon, and octagon. Most of these columns, especially in hot chambers, were simple and plain. Sometimes, some delicate oblique lines or spiraling carvings were engraved on them. The most elegant stone columns carved in this style could be seen in Zand bathhouses, like Vakīl Bathhouse, Shiraz (see Fig. 1). Examples of such architectural elements are also visible in Ibrāhīm-khān Zahīr-ad-duleh Bathhouse, Kerman (Fig. 8).

Columns of Nubar Bathhouse in Tabriz, dating back to the Qajar era, have been decorated with geometric designs. The designs are traced in three levels on the columns. The ceiling is stood up on a series of pillars. In Kurdasht Bathhouse of Julfa, from the Safavid era, there are also hexangular geometric columns (muqarnas). The shafts in this place are decorated with geometric forms mostly similar to floral designs. They are connected to the muqarnases of the capitals (Figs. 9 & 10).

[1] A type of stuccowork in which canvas is changed into plaster plates and then installed in the place.

[2]For more information about Tehran's urban and social development in the Qajar period, see: Hassan-beigi 1998:17 and pages after; Shahrībāf 2004, vol. 1:13 and pages after.

[3] For example, it is said about the motivation behind the construction of Chāhārfasl Bathhouse in Arak that 85 Jewish families migrated to Sultan-abad during the reign of Nasir-ad-din Shah and established a neighborhood. This group of people had urban facilities like cemetery and school but lacked a bathhouse. Dignitaries of the minorities referred to Haj Mohammad-Ibrahim Khansarī and the religious authorities of the city. He started to build the Chāhārfasl (meaning "four seasons" in English) Bathhouse on the basis of four religions (Quoted from Hamzehlou & Valāshjirdī 2007:364).

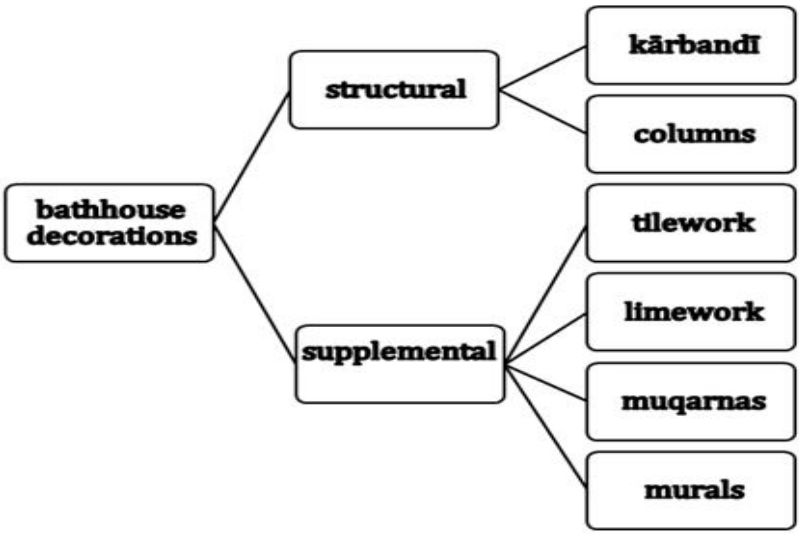


Fig. 7: *Main decorations in historic bathhouses*

The upper area of columns where two adjacent arches joined to make a triangular surface (spandrel) could be used for applying ornamentation, especially wall paintings (Fig.11). Pilasters or engaged columns were other decorative elements to be used for placing necessary devices on, including lights (Figs.12, 13, 14).

The columns of Chāhārfasl Bathhouse, Arak, are among the most beautiful instances in Iran. In this place, decorative solid spirals are used in the columns of the apodyterium. The men's apodyterium columns are highly decorated with polychrome tiles. The human motifs of the tiles are probably the portrait of Ahmad Shah, the last Qajar ruler, in military costume. Rather than the mentioned ruler (Figs. 15, 16, 17), there are other military figures as well as some natural landscapes and floral motifs painted on the tiles above the portraits (Fig. 18).

In Chāhārfasl Bathhouse, the matter of continuation is discernible together with evolution. This matter is visible in all kinds of decoration used from the Safavid period. But evolution can be traced in the quality of ornamental elements. The decoration of the columns in this bathhouse is in a higher degree than other similar places. The abundance of tilework in Chāhārfasl Bathhouse, especially on the columns, indicates that ornamentation was of great significance in the architects' view. Applying



Fig. 8: *A column in Zahīr-ad-duleh Bathhouse with spiraling decoration*

representational forms such as portraits and figures, as an ornamental quality of columns in the Qajar era, can be seen much in this bathhouse.

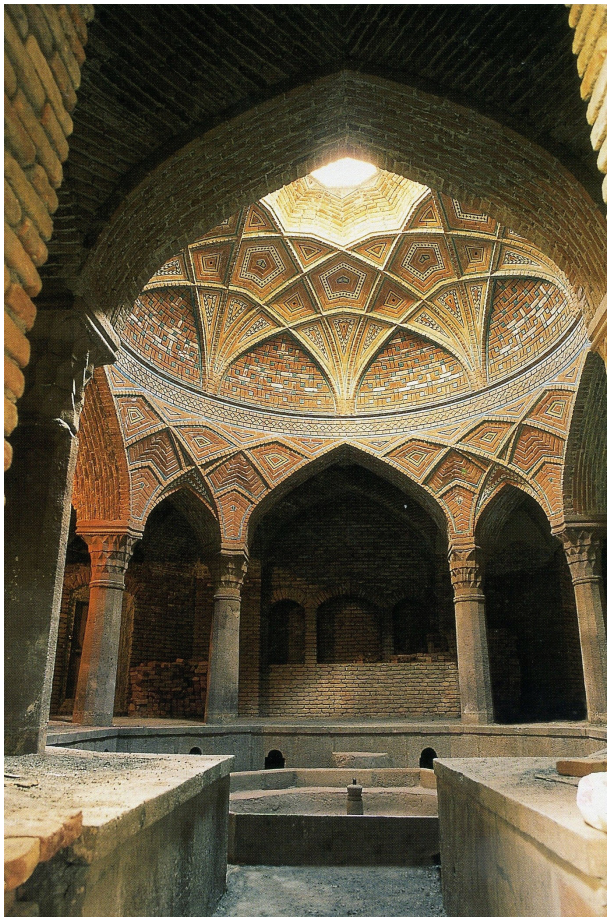


Fig. 9: *Nubar Bathhouse, Tabriz*
(After: Ganjnāmeh 2004: 65, vol. 18)



Fig. 10: *Kurdasht Bathhouse (After: Ganjnāmeh 2004: 69, vol. 18)*



Fig. 11: *Wall paintings with human and animal motifs, spandrels of Alī-qulī-āqā Bathhouse, Isfahan*



Fig. 12: *Stone pilasters, Ganj-alī-khān Bathhouse apodyterium, Kerman*



Fig. 13: *A closer view of the former picture*

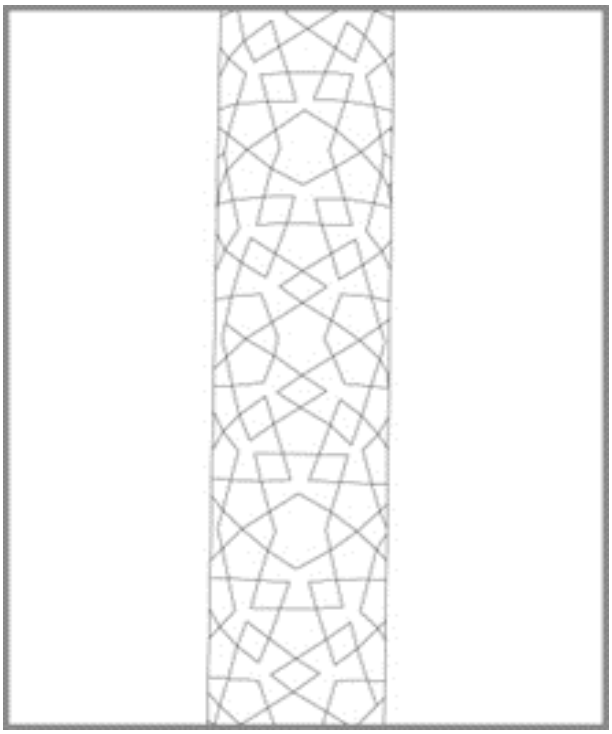


Fig. 14: *A sketch of the surface of pilaster decoration, Ganj-alī-khān Bathhouse; see: Fig. 13 .*



Fig. 15: *Decorative columns of Chāhārfasl Bathhouse with military figures and other accessories*

Mortar work and lime work

Mortar work became common since the Safavid era. Lime work is a decorative method that creates deep and embossed motifs by replicating them on walls and ceilings. It seems that lime work has been an imitation of plasterwork, however with more resistant material for moist places. Carving and projection of lime motifs' layers are about half to one centimeter performed by simple contours (Kiani 2005:292). As lime could function effectively in buildings and constructions like water reservoirs, bathhouses and other damp places, it was used in great quantity. In order to use the lime in powder, some water is poured on it to slake. After reactions and processes of drying, it is sieved to yield a soft, pure powder. Mortar is an effective and resistant substance too; however, it has been replaced by cement at present. A synthesis of ash, lime and reedmace, *Daymeh* is a famous kind of mortar with best function when being close to water (Bozorgmehri 2002:133). For achieving more variety of mortar motifs, mineral colors will be added. They are mixed with mortar and each color



Fig. 16: *Decorative columns of Chāhārfasl Bathhouse with military figures and other accessories*



Fig. 17: *Decorative columns of Chāhārfasl Bathhouse with military figures and other accessories*



Fig. 18: *Tiles with natural landscapes and floral motifs*

will be applied in wall paintings under arches and domes (Kiani, 2005:294).

In preparing and using mortar and mortar work in damp places, much decoration was applied some of which can be seen in bathhouses. In this process, natural materials were used to produce colors. Some of them are as follows: lapis lazuli for indigo, soot for black, ocher for brown, red and yellow, and so forth. (Zamarshidi 2012:80). Carved motifs created in mortar work are two dimensional without the quality of high reliefs, a distinction between this style and that of stuccowork. There are still more decorative motifs and elements in historic bathhouses to be mentioned: simple geometric and

interlaced fretwork such as all kinds of octagons, roundels, lozenges, triangles, circles and semicircles in borders; different types of arabesques like *sareh-ham-savār,* simple and dahan-azhdarī; shah-abbasī flowers and the foliated, besides butterfly-shaped flowers, and *lāleh-abbasī*; successive medallions; vase designs with scattered flowers and other floral motifs like cypress, or zoomorphic ones such as birds, as well as lion, usually accompanied by the sun (*shīr va khusrshīd*).[1]

There are good examples of lime work and mortar work to be seen in the Safavid and post-Safavid periods. We can see some of these ornaments in Kurdasht Bathhouse in East Azerbaijan Province, dating back to the Safavid or Qajar eras. There are two private chambers (*khalvat*) in the hot chamber with lime work decorations. They contain similar ornamentation, including arabesques, Cathays and birds. We can also pursue lime decorations in Vakīl Bathhouse, Shiraz. Other types of such ornamentation are observable in Rahnān Bathhouse. They are arabesques and geometric patterns in white, black, and red. The red color applied in the lime work is a combination of red pigments with lime, and the black one is a mixture of soot with lime (Zaker-amuli and Esfanjari 2005:382). Shāhzādehā Bathhouse is another example in which all varieties of lime mortars with certain applications have been exerted[2].

Sultan Mir-Ahmad Bathhouse in Kashan is a place containing such structural ornamentation. Here, the surrounding spaces of the apodyterium have low ceilings. In this space, the niches and recesses around have formed more private corners. The ceiling and walls in this part have lime decorations (Fig. 19). The lime work includes floral and vase designs together with different birds such as nightingales and peacocks in different modes with geometric borders and palmettes. Furthermore, other designs and motifs appear: hunting, feast and battle scenes, crowns and angels amid spirals, and foliage in some parts of the apodyterium. The walls decorated with lime work have colored background in blue, green, ocher, and red. This has made the milky lime motifs more conspicuous. The water reservoir and other interior decorations are followed by the apodyterium. We can also see lime motifs in these chambers like foliage, vases, and candlesticks with fruit branches whose background is painted in black (Figs. 19, 20, 21, 22).



Fig. 19: *Sultan Mir-Ahmad Bathhouse, Kashan*

[1] For more information, see: Kīānī 2005:298.

[2] The lime work and other decorations in this bathhouse have been put under careful chemical examinations. See: Heydarī et al 2013:85 and pages after.



Fig. 20: *Lime decoration, Mir-Ahmad Bathhouse apodyterium, Kashan*



Fig. 21: *Lime decoration, Mir-Ahmad Bathhouse apodyterium*



Fig. 22: *Lime motifs, Mir-Ahmad Bathhouse*

Tilework and wall painting

Tile working technique expanded to a considerable extent in decorating the Safavid buildings. Bathhouses tilework, as in other buildings, was of great significance in that milieu. Painting on tiles is regarded as an important characteristic whereby Safavid artisans created valuable works in that period.[1]

Ganj-alī-khān Bathhouse is a historic place where extensive application of tiled ornaments has been manifested. As in most of the classic bathhouses, this building consists of two main sections: the apodyterium and the hot chamber. The dados in here have been covered up to almost one meter high with geometric flowers (Fig. 23). The motifs can be categorized into two collections. In the first group, a flower motif has been executed in two colors, one time in a combination of turquoise and white, the other time in lapis lazuli. In the second group, a flower motif is in lapis lazuli and turquoise, almost similar to the former pattern. The first group contains stylized flowers with four petals resembling those of tulips or poppies. The flowers are juxtaposed horizontally.

There is an arcade in the chambers surrounding the middle space of the apodyterium. High dados are of polychrome tiles with colorful floral motifs. A part of the dado has rectangular tiles with illustrations similar to miniature painting; hence, connoisseurs have estimated them to be dating back to the Qajar period with regard to their motifs, coloring and firing techniques (Elm 1995: 87-88).

The appearance of human motifs to a greater extent in Qajar bathhouses is considered a notable achievement. They include different cases from simple, popular figures like masseur (*dallāk*) and clothes keeper (*Jāmehdār*) to mythological, heroic characters such as Rustam, as well as the contemporary Qajar rulers and princesses. Chāhārfasl and Ibrāhīm-khān bathhouses are two



Fig. 23: *Ganj-alī-khān Bathhouse tilework, Kerman*

[1]See: Seyf 1997:25 and pages after. The Safavid tiles were produced in various techniques. See: Zamarshidi 2012:66 and pages after.

cases in which the mentioned points are fairly noticeable. Wall painting in Qajar bathhouses, besides tilework, should be considered another decorative medium the evidence of which is best manifested in Mehdī-qulī-beik Bathhouse, Mashhad (Figs. 24, 25, 26, 27).

Ibrāhīm-khān Bathhouse, a complex constructed during the reign of Fat'h-Ali Shah Qajar by Ibrāhīm-khān Zahīr-ad-duleh, the then governor of Kerman, has some pictorial tiles at its portal. They can be presented into three groups, i.e. inscription, semi-carpet design, and *qābqeābī* (repeated frames) pattern. Here, the lapis lazuli tile inscription separates tiled decorations from the upper stucco in the portal. Verses from the holy Quran (surah Furqān) in white thuluth script on lapis lazuli background of tiles are other visible ornaments (Kian 2012:196). There are still three more tile panels in the portal façade: two rectangle panels installed in parallel having mihrab design with vase and birds motifs (almost symmetrical) in Qajar style. Furthermore, there is a rectangular panel placed horizontally between two mihrab-designed tile panels in the portal. Some tiles with frame-like patterns on a lapis lazuli ground flank the entrance. The motifs in here resemble medallion (*turanj*) and star-crossed designs. The inside ornamental motifs of these frame-like patterns are the rose motifs in Europeanized style painted on a lapis lazuli, white and turquoise ground. The battle of Rustam and the White Div scene measuring about 229×180 cm composed of 96 pieces of square tiles is among the most beautiful tile panels in the apodyterium of the bathhouse (Fig. 28). In this tile panel, Rustam is presented in full, long, two-horned beard with a feathered helmet on the head like a tragedian in the ritual passion plays of Iran (Fig. 29). This physical resemblance demonstrates the influences of current religious affairs and beliefs of the day on the realm of art.



Fig. 24: *Tile with the theme of clothes keeper, Ibrāhīm-khān Bathhouse*



Fig. 25: *Tile with the theme of masseur, Ibrāhīm-khān Bathhouse*



Fig. 26: *Tile with the theme of Rustam and his son, Suhrāb battle, Ibrāhīm-khān Bathhouse*



Fig. 27: *Shirin and Farhad mural, Mehdī-qulī-beik Bathhouse*



Fig. 28: *Tile panel depicting the battle of Rustam and White Div, Ibrāhīm-khān bathhouse*

The tilework of Chāhārfasl Bathhouse, Arak, is another interesting field to be studied. Constructed in the late Qajar era, this building is regarded as the climax of ornamentation in traditional bathhouses. Although the decorations are in Qajar style, they follow their Safavid precedents. In fact, we can trace the development and evolution of ornamentation in the styles and methods dating back to the Safavid period. The ornamentation of Chāhārfasl Bathhouse mostly encompasses polychrome and mosaic tilework. Such tile panels contain floral, zoomorphic, and human motifs in different formats of square, molded and *fītīli'ee*. They also have arabesques with Cathay, geometric and stylized motifs. These spiraling and floral elements include scrolls, foliage, and leaves. The human figures are soldiers in Qajar costumes. Generally, the themes of tiles as the dominant decorative medium chiefly include stylized scrolls and fruits as well as cypress and spruce trees with some landscapes of the seasons all being indicative of their tile-makers' great dexterity and amazing artistic talent. In addition to the abovementioned decorations, there are two tile panels measuring 25×25 cm depicting Bahman and Isfandīār in relief. The entire dados of porches and chambers of the apodyterium are covered with tiles in arabesque designs, floral and geometric motifs or



Fig. 29: *A photo of the tragedians in heroes clothing:, Qajar era (After:www.harvardartmuseums.org)*

lozenges outlined by various colors such as blue, red, gold, lapis lazuli, white, and ocher yellow. In some parts of *yazdībandī*, the decorative plaster or lime architectural elements under the ceiling, polychrome and mosaic tile working is executed in various colors with high mastery. The entire ceiling decorations, in the form of *yazdībandī*, are a combination of stuccowork and tilework giving the whole place a dramatic effect[1]. A summary of the Decorative characteristics of the Safavid and Qajar bathhouses (case studies) can be seen in (Table.1).

[1] For other samples of tilework in historic bathhouses, see: Baqeri 2003:158 and pages after; Ajurlou & Nami Garmi 2014:80 and pages after.

Table 1. *Decorative characteristics of the Safavid and Qajar bathhouses (case studies)*
(After: Mansouri Joz-abadi et.al 2017:75 and some Modification by authors)

Safavid Period	Bathhouse	City	Era	Builder/ Patron	Address	Decorations	Extra Information
	Shāh	Isfahan	Safavid era, probably coincident with the reign of Shah Abbas I	unknown	Tufangsāzhā Bazaar (Registry No. 7649)	wall painting, lime work, polychrome, under glazed and monochrome tilework	–
	Shāhzādehā	Isfahan	Safavid era, probably coincident with the reign of Shah Sulayman	Shahrbanou-beigam (Shah Sultan Hussein's daughter)	Shāhzādehā alley, Rangrazhā Bazaar junction, Masjid-i Hakīm St. (Registry No. 1115)	polychrome and monochrome tilework, wall painting, lime work, stonework	–
	Ali-quli-āqā	Isfahan	Safavid era, probably coincident with the reigns of Shah Sulayman and Shah Sultan Hussein	Ali-quli-āqā (a famous beneficent servant)	Ali-quli-āqā complex, Bīd-ābād Neighborhood	wall painting, lime work, stonework, polychrome, monochrome, and relief tilework, under glazed tilework	–
	Ganj-alī-khān	Kerman	coincident with the reign of Shah Abbas I	Ganj-alī-beik (Governor of Kerman)	Ganj-alī-khān Square (Registry No. 829)	portal wall paintings, muqarnas, tilework with geometric, floral and human motifs, *mu'aqeli* tilework, inscription, stone pilasters, stone shallow pool	Safavid foundation with Qajar additions
Qajar Period	Mehdī-qulī-beik	Mashhad	coincident with the reign of Shah Abbas I	Mehdī-qulī-beik (Shah Abbas I's stable superintendent)	at the end of the Carpet Bazaar, the end of Andarzgou St. No. 13, Imam Reza Shrine (Registry No. 1374/3)	mostly wall painting, tilework	Safavid foundation with Qajar additions
	Chāhārfasl	Arak	late Qajar era, coincident with the reign of Ahmad Shah	Hāj Mohammad-Ibrahim Khansari	Shahīd Duktur Bihishtī St. (Registry No. 1339)	polychrome and, mosaic tilework	–
	Zahīr-ad-duleh	Kerman	coincident with the reign of Fat'h-Ali Shah	Ibrāhīm-khān Zahīr-ad-duleh (Kerman governor)	the southern side of Qeysarīyeh Bazaar	square polychrome tilework in the form of inscription and carpet design, as well as frame-like designs, muqarnas arch	–
	Mir Ahmad	Kashan	perhaps coincident with the reign of Nasir-ad-din Shah (or probably dating back to Safavid or even Seljuk era)	unknown	Sultan Mir Ahmad alley, Alavī St. (Registry No. 1351)	lime work and mortar work with decorated ceiling, muqarnas, tilework	perhaps dating back to 1092 A.H. but local people regard it as a Seljuk building

Discussion and Conclusion

Persian historic bathhouses have undergone changes and development in their decorations from the Safavid to the Zand and Qajar periods. The expansion of spaces and chambers as well as the consequent increase in ornamentation are the main effects of such developments. In fact, bathhouses were built larger in the Qajar period in comparison with their past counterparts as a result of urban expansion and migrations. Today, there has remained no significant work of architecture from the early Safavid period in the two former capitals of Iran, i.e. Tabriz and Qazvin, while most of them go back to the reign of Shah Abbas I in Isfahan, the third capital.

The Safavid bathhouses were adorned with many decorative elements such as tilework, *kārbandī*, muqarnas, and lime work so that we can regard this period as the heyday of Persian bathhouses construction. With the advent of the Western manifestations in Qajar dynasty and society, some of this civilization's characteristics and properties, as in other social and cultural fields, were introduced in the bathhouses. Having been adopted from western architecture repertoire or western painting, the application of plaster palettes in Chāhārfasl Bathhouse of Arak is an instance in this respect. It is to be noted that western fundamental styles and manners did not have great influence on the structures and basic principles of Qajar bathhouses as just little foreign changes can be traced in this connection.

The evolution of ornamentation issue in the architecture of mentioned samples in the Safavid era and afterwards can be examined in some characteristics. The ornaments and motifs appear on different surfaces such as walls, columns and ceilings in different decorative styles. Tilework and wall painting are two techniques used in the classic architecture of Iran, especially in the bathhouses in substantial quantity. Mehdī-qulī-beik Bathhouse, Mashhad, is among the several places where a large number of wall paintings are on its surface and inner layers. These paintings offer a wide range of subjects and themes, from epic and mythological to cultural and social.

Lime work and mortar work are other decorative forms that developed in the Safavid era and expanded later. Such a decorative style is best manifested in Mir Ahmad Bathhouse, Kashan. It seems that lime work has been an imitation of stuccowork but with more resistant material for moist places. Using low-relief motifs in two-dimensional representation without any distinguished projection is the most obvious difference between mortar work and stuccowork. The Safavid lime work and mortar work apply arabesque and geometric motifs, while no significant change happens in this field in the Qajar period. Undergoing a remarkable expansion of this decorative element in the Qajar bathhouses is the only important point to be noted.

Of the remained Timurid documents and illustrations, it seems clear that bathhouses were devoid of stone columns so the dome and ceilings were directly placed on the arches of four platforms. However, the application of such architectural elements became common from the Safavid era in bathhouses continuing into the Zand and Qajar eras. The use of arabesque, floral and geometric motifs became widely practiced in Safavid and Qajar eras besides the extensive use of tilework. Meanwhile, Qajar ornamentation became widespread and more elaborate in bathhouses' columns with more details and designs in tilework and other decorative media. Chāhārfasl Bathhouse is considered a good example in here.

The cloakroom or apodyterium (*sarbīna* in Persian) constitutes an essential architectural part in Persian bathhouses. Since this chamber played an important role in maintaining and equalizing the body temperature of customers, and because of the customers' traffic and hesitation at this place, a considerable length of time would go by there. That is why most wall paintings and tile decorations as well as the shallow pools and other ornaments were usually worked in that chamber. Tilework is the chief element of decoration in most apodyteriums and, generally, all chambers of bathhouses. Tilework, on the one hand, insulated surfaces increasing resistance to moisture, and on the other, played the role of an ornamental element. In Isfahan bathhouses, some of which were studied in this article, a great amount of ornamentation was

dedicated to tilework; however, in the bathhouses of other cities in Iran, such a trend was chiefly inclined towards lime work and wall painting.

The themes of Isfahan bathhouses' decorations include geometric, floral, zoomorphic, and human motifs as well as inscriptions and architecture landscapes. Some of the most important results of this research are as follows: using miscellaneous designs, especially floral motifs; applying principles of the contemporary Isfahan miniature painting in tiles; the continuation of Safavid painting properties in Qajar tiles; limited use of zoomorphic or animal motifs; and introducing innovations such as painting urban landscapes on large-scale tiles. Of the abovementioned motifs and designs, the quantity of floral species used as ornaments is a case in point. Furthermore, the absence of some motifs as heroic ones and a limited application of women representations are other characteristics in the bathhouses of Isfahan.

The Qajar developments in bathhouses' decorations were mostly manifested in tilework where a greater amount of such elements was applied. Additionally, scenes taken from the heroic and mythological narratives like those of Rustam and Suhrāb battle or Rustam and White Div were enthusiastically welcomed. Representing portraits, whether of the common or rulers and princesses, and a wide use of polychrome tiles, are among other ornamental subjects in the bathhouses of this period.

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