

A Comparative Historical Reading of Shah Suleiman Safavi's Coronation in a Woven Artwork Attributed to Kashan

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

Sam Mirza, the son of Safi Mirza, ascended to the throne as the sole legitimate heir at the age of eighteen, just eight days after the death of Shah Abbas the Great in 1038 AH. A significant event occurred when he was sixteen, which profoundly altered his destiny: a eunuch arrived on behalf of Shah Abbas I, bringing exquisite brocades as a gift for the prince. These fabrics did not suit Sam Mirza's taste and refrained from expressing any satisfaction or gratitude, even after learning about the source of the gift. This behavior deeply concerned Shah, as he feared that the prince's excessive freedom and his unchecked, natural arrogance could end up in perilous consequences. Consequently, Shah ordered his son to be confined in a remote estate.

Sam Mirza, who had been named after his great ancestor "Safi Mirza" in childhood—as it was customary for many Safavid princes—initially ascended the throne under the same name during his first coronation ceremony. However, on the advice of his ministers and courtiers, a second coronation was held approximately two years later, at which he selected the name "Shah Suleiman."

The coronation ceremony of Shah Safi was not only reflected in the written records of that era but was also immortalized in the works of art. One of the most prominent examples is a gold-woven (Zarbaft) textile, attributed to the weaving workshops of Kashan, which portrays the coronation scene with masterful artistic delicacy.

Materials and Methods

This study is descriptive, analytical, and historical in nature and was conducted using a qualitative approach. The research adopted a synchronic comparative method. The statistical population of the study consisted of Safavid-period luxury textiles, from among which a single piece of brocaded fabric attributed to Kashan weavers, which depicted the coronation scene of Shah Safi, was selected through purposive sampling.

Data collection was carried out through documentary and field-based methods. A section of the study, using field research and relying on two main pillars—direct observation and interviews with experts—examined the technical and structural characteristics of the fabric under study, which was housed in the Tar-o Pud Museum of Yazd. In the first stage, a careful observation grounded in technical details—including the type of weave, warp and weft density, and the visual features of the work—was conducted, and the necessary visual documentation for structural analysis

was recorded. In the next stage, specialized interviews were conducted with several experts and senior scholars in traditional textile weaving in order to complement the data obtained from direct observation and to achieve a deeper understanding of the technical subtleties and production history of the work.

Finally, the data were analyzed using content analysis and comparative analysis methods. As a result, the visual content of the fabric and historical texts were interpreted and compared simultaneously in order to identify their points of similarity, differences, and the reasons for them. This analysis helps better understand the role of art in representing historical events and the extent to which the different aims of media shape narratives.

Conclusion

A comparative study of the historical narrative of Shah Suleiman Safavid's coronation and the exquisite textile attributed to Kashan reveals that both sources—despite their differences in medium and intended purpose—have highlighted the central theme of the ceremony: namely, the status of the monarch and his divine legitimacy. The historical text of the coronation—by emphasizing the presence of court dignitaries, officials, and elaborate rituals—underscores the importance of the “Divine Glory” (Farrah-e Izadi) and divine support in bolstering the Shah's power. It provides precise details regarding Shah's countenance, the royal throne, the plane trees, and formal rites, such as the reading of royal decrees and sermons.

The textile in question also portrayed a visual representation of this ceremony while preserving its symbolic and ceremonial elements. These variations reflect the influence of each source's intended purpose. Moreover, due to the delicacy of the weave and the constraints of the loom's width, the number of figures and visual elements has been reduced compared to the actual event, as an adaptation to suit the artistic composition of the piece.

Keywords: Safavid Period, historiography, Shah Safi (Suleiman) Safavi, coronation, Kashan brocade textile