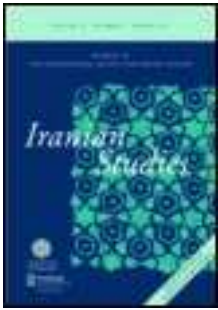


This article was downloaded by: [American University of Beirut]

On: 31 December 2013, At: 04:18

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Iranian Studies

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cist20>

### Shi'i Piety and Dynastic Legitimacy: Mashhad under the Early Safavid Shahs

May Farhat

Published online: 10 Dec 2013.

**To cite this article:** May Farhat , Iranian Studies (2013): Shi'i Piety and Dynastic Legitimacy: Mashhad under the Early Safavid Shahs, Iranian Studies, DOI: [10.1080/00210862.2013.860323](https://doi.org/10.1080/00210862.2013.860323)

**To link to this article:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00210862.2013.860323>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

May Farhat

## Shi'i Piety and Dynastic Legitimacy: Mashhad under the Early Safavid Shahs

*Mashhad, the site in northeastern Iran of the shrine of the eighth Shi'i imam, is arguably one of the largest and wealthiest sacred shrines in the world. The gilded dome over the imam's mausoleum stands amidst an expansive complex of courts, monumental gateways, libraries, museums, guesthouses, and administrative offices that cater to thousands of pilgrims each year. This paper examines the period, under the aegis of the early Safavid shahs, when Mashhad was established as the preeminent Shi'i pilgrimage center in Iran. Appropriating the Timurid ecumenical vision for the shrine, the Safavid shahs refashioned the holy city into a site that celebrated the triumph of Twelver Shi'ism in the Safavid realm and reinforced Safavid claims of legitimacy. While highlighting Shah Tahmasb's personal devotion to Mashhad, and his privileging of the shrine within Safavid sacred topography, the paper focuses on Shah 'Abbas's urban reshaping of Mashhad and the architectural and institutional expansion of the shrine during his reign, thereby enhancing its status as the leading spiritual center in the Safavid empire.*

### Introduction

The imposition of Shi'ism in 907/1501 as the religion of the newly conquered empire of Shah Isma'il Safavi (reigned 907–30/1501–24) introduced profound political and religious changes that anchored Shi'ism, and Shi'i forms of devotion in the Iranian population. As sites of Shi'i devotion and repositories of charismatic power, Mashhad—the burial place of the Eighth Shi'i imam, 'Ali al-Rida (died 203/818), in northeastern Iran—and the Shi'i imams' tombs ('*atabāt*) in Iraq assumed political and religious importance for the early Safavid shahs. Central to Safavid ideology as it evolved in the sixteenth century was the status of the Safavid shahs as *sayyids*, descendants of the Prophet through Musa al-Kazim (died 183/799), the seventh Shi'i imam.<sup>1</sup> With this connection to the Mashhad shrine, the Safavid shahs transformed the holy city into an arena where orchestrated displays of piety, the dispensation of charitable acts through the establishment of endowments, and architectural embellishments enhanced

---

May Farhat is Assistant Professor at the American University of Beirut. May Farhat would like to thank Sussan Babaie and the anonymous reviewer for commenting on an earlier version of this article. Special thanks are due to Nancy Eickel and Colin Mitchell for their editorial suggestions.

<sup>1</sup>For a discussion of Safavid genealogy with a review of the literature on the subject, see Kazuo Morimoto, "The Earliest 'Alid Genealogy for the Safavids: New Evidence for the Pre-Dynastic Claim to Sayyid Status," *Iranian Studies* 43 (2010): 447–69.

the shahs' spiritual kinship with the Shi'i imams, reinforced their political claims as heirs of the imamate, and strengthened the position of Shi'ism in their realm.

Rudi Matthee has argued that the Safavids, while never giving up their claims over 'Iraq-i 'Arab and the Shi'i shrines of Iraq, did not exert themselves militarily in an effort to hold on to this territory.<sup>2</sup> Unlike the Iraqi *'atabāt*, which were located in an Arab-speaking environment, Mashhad developed in the crucible of Persianate culture and was heir to the cultural achievement of the Timurids.<sup>3</sup> Controlling Mashhad against the counterclaims of the Sunni Uzbeks and establishing their own authority over the tomb of the imam was of paramount importance to the Safavids. In what follows, I broadly chart the policies of Shah Tahmasb (reigned 931–84/1524–76) and Shah 'Abbas (reigned 996–1038/1588–1629) with regard to Mashhad, profiling the impact of their actions on the refashioning of a regional Islamic shrine into a sacred locus of a Shi'i empire. The Safavids, I contend, appropriated a venerable shrine that had been at the center of an 'Alid piety, that not only permeated the Turko-Iranian sphere but also transcended sectarian divisions and religious affiliations. Both Timurid and Uzbek rulers performed pilgrimages to the shrine in recognition of the saint's charisma and authority.<sup>4</sup> With performative acts of devotion at the shrine, combined with various administrative and architectural interventions, Shah Tahmasb and Shah 'Abbas contributed toward the symbolic, spatial, and institutional construction of Mashhad as a distinctly Safavid Shi'i place of pilgrimage.

### *The Pre-Safavid Shrine*

The phenomenal transformation of the eighth Shi'i imam's tomb (*mashhad al-rida*) into Khurasan's holy city of Mashhad constitutes a long and eventful history.<sup>5</sup> 'Ali b. Musa al-Rida, imami pretender<sup>6</sup> and heir-apparent of the 'Abbasid caliph al-Ma'mun, died in the year 203/818 in the district of Tus in Khurasan.<sup>7</sup> Following

<sup>2</sup>Rudi Matthee, "The Safavid–Ottoman Frontier: Iraq-i 'Arab as Seen by the Safavids," *International Journal of Turkish Studies* 9, nos. 1–2 (2003): 157–73.

<sup>3</sup>Maria Eva Subtelny, "The Timurid Legacy: A Reaffirmation and a Reassessment," *Cahiers d'Asie Centrale* nos. 3/4 (1997): 9–19.

<sup>4</sup>Shah Rukh (reigned 779–855/1377–1427) performed six pilgrimages during his reign. Ulugh Begh carried out a pilgrimage in 952/1446 during a campaign to subdue Khurasan. Mirza Abu'l Qasim Babur made a pilgrimage after recovering from a severe illness in 860/1455–56. He died in 861/1457 in Mashhad, and was buried in Shah Rukh's *madrasa*. Sultan Abu Sa'id visited Mashhad and other shrines of Khurasan in 872/1468, before starting the campaign against the Aqqoyunlu. See May Farhat, "Dynastic Legitimacy and Islamic Piety: The Shrine of 'Ali b. Musa al-Rida in Mashhad" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2002), 82–110.

<sup>5</sup>See *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup>'Ali al-Rida's imamate was not unanimously accepted. See Heinz Halm, *Shiism* (Edinburgh, 1991), 31–2.

<sup>7</sup>See Michael Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography. The Heirs of the Prophets in the Age of al-Ma'mun* (Cambridge, 2000); and Deborah Gerber Tor, "An Historical Re-Examination of the Appointment and Death of 'Ali al-Rida," *Der Islam* 78 (2001): 103–28, for an exhaustive discussion of the circumstances leading to the death of 'Ali al-Rida.

al-Ma'mun's instruction, al-Rida was laid to rest next to the tomb of his father, Harun al-Rashid, who had died ten years earlier and was buried in a country estate in the village of Sanabad.<sup>8</sup> Mashhad al-Rida emerged as a site of visitation during the late tenth century and assumed increasing importance in the religious landscape of eastern Khurasan. The Timurid historian Hafiz-i Abru's succinct description of Mashhad in the early fifteenth century fittingly encapsulates the holy city's history and underscores its significance in Khurasan.

The place known today as Mashhad was once a village of the name of Sanabad. Owing to the presence of the blessed shrine [*mazār*] of the Sultan of Khurasan, 'Ali b. Musa al-Rida, it had acquired fame, and descendants of the Prophet [*sayyids/sadāt*] have settled in its proximity. Rulers and sultans have honored the tomb, and spared its inhabitants from trouble. By means of their blessing, it achieved a high reputation, and today, it is among the great cities of Khurasan.<sup>9</sup>

Although Hafiz-i Abru's entry eschews Mashhad's Shi'i association, the shrine was deeply revered by Shi'is, whose presence at the shrine sporadically surfaces in sources predating the Safavid period.<sup>10</sup> The popularity of the shrine, however, drew largely on the widespread devotion and love for the Prophet and his family (*ahl al-bayt*) among the Irano-Turkic populations of Khurasan and Central Asia.<sup>11</sup> Pilgrims who sought the blessing (*baraka*) of the saintly imam, and the *sayyids* who oversaw the management of the tomb, came from diverse religious affiliations, and numerous Turkish and Mongol rulers visited and patronized the shrine.<sup>12</sup> In the religiously fertile landscape of Khurasan, Mashhad was one of many in a constellation of sacred places, such as the shrines of Ahmad-i Jam and Abu Sa'id Abu'l Khayr, as well as the tombs of other Sufi shaykhs and scholars.<sup>13</sup> Al-Rida commanded spiritual sovereignty over the province as the "Sultan of Khurasan."<sup>14</sup> The spectacular Friday mosque built at the command of the Timurid queen Gawhar Shad and finished in

<sup>8</sup> Abu Ja'far Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari, *The History of al-Tabari XXXI: The Reunification of the 'Abbasid Caliphate*, trans. Clifford Edmond Bosworth (Albany, NY, 1987), 84.

<sup>9</sup> See Dorothea Krawulsky, ed., *Hurāsān zur Timuridenzeit nach dem Tārīḫ-e Ḥāfeẓ-e Abrū*, 2 vols. (Wiesbaden, 1982), 96–7.

<sup>10</sup> Ibn Babawayh (d. 381/991–92), author of the hagiography of al-Rida, visited the shrine in 352/963 to collect *akhbār* for his '*Uyūn akhbār al-Ridā*', ed. Mahdi al-Husayni al-Lujavardi (Qum, 1377/1958). Ibn Battuta, who visited the shrine during the middle of the fourteenth century, described *rafidis* kicking the tomb of al-Rashid and greeting the imam. Ibn Battuta, *Rihlat ibn Battuta* (Beirut, 1960), 388.

<sup>11</sup> See Robert McChesney, *Waqf in Central Asia: Four Hundred Years in the History of a Muslim Shrine 1480–1889* (Princeton, NJ, 1991), 34.

<sup>12</sup> See Farhat, "Dynastic Legitimacy and Islamic Piety," chap. 2, "Mashhad-i Tus: Historical and Architectural Settings (10th–14th century)," 22–72.

<sup>13</sup> For the religious landscape of Khurasan in the fifteenth century, see Beatrice Manz, *Power, Politics and Religion in Timurid Iran* (Cambridge, 2007).

<sup>14</sup> See Clavijo, *Embassy to Tamerlane, 1403–1406* (New York and London, 1928), 185; Mu'in al-Din Muhammad Zamchi Isfzari, *Rawdāt al-jannāt fī awṣāf-i madīnat-i Harāt*, 2 vols., ed. Muhammad Kazim Imam (Tehran, 1338–39/1959–60), 2: 182–6.

821/1418,<sup>15</sup> and the regal ceremonial halls—Dar al-Siyada and Dar al-Huffaz—fashioned the shrine into a quintessential Islamic pilgrimage center which was not only ecumenical in its reach but conceived also as a surrogate to Mecca. The mainstay of its wealth was the extensive cultivated land and urban properties that constituted the endowed estate of the imam. Under the administration of eminent Razavi and Musavi sayyids, as well as a staff of expert administrators and accountants, the Mashhad shrine played an important corporate role in the management of the irrigated and cultivated lands, waterworks, and urban landholdings in eastern Khurasan,<sup>16</sup> and it continued to play that role under Safavid rule. On the eve of the Safavid conquests, the Uzbek ruler Muhammad Shaybani Khan (reigned 905–16/1500–10) put an end to Timurid rule in Khurasan, and in 913/1508 he undertook a pilgrimage to Mashhad to lay claim to the shrine’s spiritual capital.<sup>17</sup>

#### *Khurasan Contested: Mashhad in the Sixteenth Century*

Shah Isma‘il’s successful eastern campaign in 916/1510 against the Uzbeks established a tenuous hold over Mashhad and Khurasan, one that was repeatedly challenged by the Uzbeks over the course of the sixteenth century.<sup>18</sup> In this contested territory, Mashhad rapidly assumed a rhetorical and symbolic significance for the nascent Safavid state. If Herat, the former and prestigious Timurid capital, was the coveted prize, Mashhad’s religious importance, as the sole burial place of a Shi‘i imam outside of ‘Iraq-i ‘Arab and Medina, was no less significant for the Safavids. In the diplomatic exchange between Shah Isma‘il and Muhammad Shaybani Khan, the Safavid shah boastfully announced his desire to perform a pilgrimage to Mashhad “to adorn the tomb of Imam ‘Ali al-Rida with 70 *vazn* [unit of weight] of jewels,”<sup>19</sup> thus challenging the Uzbek ruler to a military confrontation. In this politically turbulent period, Muslim rulers deployed “competing rhetorics of legitimation,”<sup>20</sup> and the contest between the Uzbeks and Safavids played out in their diplomatic exchanges in hostile religious polemics that exacerbated and sharpened the Sunni–Shi‘i divide.<sup>21</sup>

In Mashhad, the Safavids appropriated a prosperous shrine, which had been promoted and patronized earlier by the Timurids with substantial endowments; a beautiful

<sup>15</sup>For the works of Gawhar Shad, see Bernard O’Kane, *Timurid Architecture of Khurasan* (Costa Mesa, CA, 1989), cat. no. 2; Lisa Golombek and Donald Wilber, *The Architecture of Iran and Turan*, 1: 328–31; Mahdi Sayyidi, *Masjid va mauqūfāt-i Gawharshād* (Tehran, 1386/2007).

<sup>16</sup>Maria E. Subtelny, *Timurids in Transition. Turko-Persian Politics and Acculturation in Medieval Iran* (Leiden and Boston, 2007), 207.

<sup>17</sup>Fazlullah b. Ruzbihan Khunji, *Mihmān-namā-i Bukhārā* (Tehran, 1976), 338–9.

<sup>18</sup>Martin B. Dickson, “Shah Tahmasb and the Uzbeks. The Duel for Khurasan with Ubayd Khan: 930–946/1520–1540” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1958).

<sup>19</sup>Colin Mitchell, *The Practice of Politics in Safavid Iran* (London, 2009), 36.

<sup>20</sup>Markus Dressler, “Inventing Orthodoxy: Competing Claims for Authority and Legitimacy in the Ottoman-Safavid Conflict,” in *Legitimizing the Order. The Ottoman Rhetoric of State Power*, ed. Hakan T. Karateke and Maurus Reinkowski (Leiden and Boston, 2005), 152.

<sup>21</sup>Mitchell, *Practice of Politics*, 63–79.

architectural legacy was left behind. In contrast, few, if any, major architectural interventions occurred during the sixteenth century,<sup>22</sup> although endowments were conveyed to support various charitable activities at the shrine.<sup>23</sup> This dearth of architectural evidence notwithstanding, Mashhad benefited from the personal attention of Shah Tahmasb, who proclaimed a deep devotion to the holy city and its *sayyids* throughout his reign. A young prince when Shah Isma'il appointed him the titular governor of the province of Khurasan, Shah Tahmasb was raised in Herat and was keenly aware of the cultural weight and strategic importance of the province. The relationship he developed with the holy city conveyed his deep religiosity and his sincere attachment to the Shi'i imams, which he consciously cultivated throughout his reign.<sup>24</sup> This relationship was forged during the first phase of his reign, in the context of the Safavid–Uzbek struggle over the control of Khurasan and against an unstable internal situation full of tumult and betrayal.<sup>25</sup> Between 1524 and 1536, Shah Tahmasb, who was young, insecure, and hemmed in by powerful Turkmen Qizilbash amirs, undertook four major military campaigns to wrestle Khurasan from the Uzbeks. Six pilgrimages to the Mashhad shrine were performed as a way for Shah Tahmasb to seek spiritual fortitude from the imam. In his memoirs, written forty years later, Shah Tahmasb profiled a spiritual journey toward saintliness, one marked by a series of dreams in which Imam 'Ali appeared to him at crucial moments of his life, extending protection, support, and approval.<sup>26</sup> His first military victory at the Battle of Jam (935/1528) against the Uzbeks was credited to 'Ali, an encounter in which military victory was the result of divine support and approbation.<sup>27</sup>

Shah Tahmasb's most symbolic act occurred during the third royal campaign of 939/1533. While in the holy city, Shah Tahmasb contemplated the unprecedented conquest of Transoxiana and ordered the gilding of the dome of the shrine, most likely in anticipation of a military victory.<sup>28</sup> Caught between an on-going campaign against the Uzbeks, the news of an Ottoman attack on the western border, and a sedition brewing within his court, Shah Tahmasb experienced a series of dreams in

<sup>22</sup>Sussan Babaie, "Building on the Past: The Shaping of Safavid Architecture, 1501–76," in *Hunt for Paradise. Court Arts of Safavid Iran 1501–1576*, ed. Jon Thompson and Sheila Canby (Skira, 2003), 27–30.

<sup>23</sup>The endowments of the Mashhad shrine cannot be addressed adequately in this article. Suffice it to say that the most important documents date to the Afsharid period, such as the *tumār* (tax scroll) of 'Adil Shah Afshar, which lists the shrine's endowments confiscated by Nadir Shah Afshar. See Mansour Sefatgol, "The Question of Awqaf under the Afsharids," in *Matériaux pour l'histoire économique du monde iranien*, ed. Rika Gyselen and Maria Szuppe (Paris, 1999), 209–32. The earliest surviving Safavid *waqf* document is dated to Jamadi II 931/April 1525, established by 'Atiq 'Ali Munshi Urdubadi, the *munshi* of Shah Isma'il, who built his tomb near the *madrasa* of Shah Rukh. See V. Minorsky, *Calligraphers and Painters. A Treatise by Qadi Ahmad, son of Mir Munshi (ca. A.H. 1015/A.D. 1606)* (Washington, DC, 1959), 87–8.

<sup>24</sup>Kathryn Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs: Cultural Landscapes of Early Modern Iran* (Cambridge, MA, 2002), 295–334.

<sup>25</sup>See Dickson, "Shah Tahmasb and the Uzbeks," 253–95.

<sup>26</sup>Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs*, 309.

<sup>27</sup>Shah Tahmasb Safavi, "Tazkirah-i shāh Tāhmasb," ed. P. Horn, *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 44 (1890): 583.

<sup>28</sup>Abdi Beg Shirazi, Zayn al-'Abidin 'Ali, *Takmilat al-akbbār*, ed. Abd al-Husayn Nava'i (Tehran, 1369/1990), 90.



which he was ordered to repent all sins so as to prevail against his enemies and achieve victory. Despite resistance from his senior Qizilbash amirs, the shah proceeded with his act of repentance in front of the window of the tomb of Imam al-Rida, as instructed in his dreams.<sup>29</sup> By renouncing his sinful behavior, Shah Tahmasb entered into a covenant with God, his Prophet, and the twelve imams to abide by religious law and to uphold the law's strictures in his realm. In return for this devotion, divine support would be granted for the shah's temporal and spiritual endeavors.

Originally commissioned in anticipation of a military victory over the Uzbeks, the golden dome of Mashhad acquired a different meaning following Shah Tahmasb's act of repentance and the successful consolidation of his rule. It symbolized his triumph over his internal and external enemies and the consolidation of his authority over his empire.<sup>30</sup> It stood for the alliance between the Safavid house and the Shi'i imams. In Safavid sacred topography, Mashhad became the site where this holy alliance was celebrated and reaffirmed. Following the conversion of a Georgian ruler to Islam in 966–67/1559–60, Shah Tahmasb sent an order to Mashhad, commanding the playing of music for three consecutive days. His engagement in Georgia was construed as *ghazā*, and the conversion of the Georgian ruler was seen as a sign of the imminent return of the Mahdi.<sup>31</sup> A subtle shift in the definition of Safavid authority was taking place, bringing it more in line with Twelver Shi'i doctrine. Unlike his father Isma'il, Shah Tahmasb shied away from claiming "mahdihood" for himself and instead assumed the role of the representative of the imams, and whose military victories paved the way for the return of the Mahdi.<sup>32</sup>

Following the fourth and final royal campaign in Khurasan in 941–44/1535–38, the shah performed no more pilgrimages to Mashhad. With the eastern frontier secured, he turned to address the Ottomans on the western front, where three campaigns had been waged by Sultan Sulayman I (reigned 926–74/1520–66) between 938/1532 and 961/1554. During this period, Tahmasb focused on two projects: the planning of a new capital city in Qazvin, and the restoration and expansion of his family's ancestral shrine and political base in Ardabil, which he visited for the first time in 939/1533.<sup>33</sup> Shah Tahmasb's multiple identities as Sufi *pīr*, custodian

<sup>29</sup>Shah Tahmasb Safavi, "Tadhkira-yi shāh Tāhmasb," 599–600.

<sup>30</sup>Mahmud b. Hidayat Allah Natanzi, *Naqāvat al-āthār fī dhikr al-akbyār*, ed. Ihsan Ishraqi (Tehran, 1350/1971), 12.

<sup>31</sup>Fazl b. Zayn al-'Abidin al-Khuzani al-Isfahani, *Afzal al-tavārikh*, British Library Or. 4678, ff. 230–31.

<sup>32</sup>In an inscription in the main *ivan* of Isfahan's Friday mosque dated to 938/1531–32 and commissioned by his *sadr* Mu'iz al-Din Muhammad Isfahani (d. 952/1545–46), Shah Tahmasb is referred to as the commander of the army of al-Mahdi (*sāhib al-zamān*); see Abu al-Qasim Rafi' Mihrabadi, *Athār-i milli Isfahān* (Tehran, 1352), 537–8. A similar shift can be observed in Safavid historical narratives in the rewriting of Safavid origins, in which the early Safavid shaykhs are represented as practicing Twelver Shi'is. See Shohleh Quinn, *Historical Writing during the Reign of Shah 'Abbas: Ideology, Imitation, and Legitimacy in Safavid Chronicles* (Salt Lake City, UT, 2000), 65, 75. Similarly, the rewriting of Safavid genealogy in Ibn Bazzaz's *Safwat al-Safā* (ca. 751/1350) by Abu al-Fath al-Husayni reinforcing the Safavids' status as *sayyids* takes place in 940/1533.

<sup>33</sup>Kishvar Rizvi, *The Safavid Dynastic Shrine. Architecture, Religion and Power in Early Modern Iran* (London, 2011), 76.

of the imamate, and Perso-Islamic monarch drew their legitimacy from the charismatic powers embedded in Mashhad and Ardabil. As he was consolidating his power at this juncture of his reign, the refashioning of the Ardabil shrine bolstered the prestige of the dynasty and articulated a new imperial image. Ardabil presented a cultural and spiritual milieu that was different from Mashhad; here the ritual life of the shrine was infused with Turkmen Qizilbash militancy and the practice of Sufi rituals of devotion around the tomb of Shaykh Safi. Shah Tahmasb's reconstruction introduced a large domed structure, the Jannatsara that marked for the ceremonial appearance of the shah to his Sufi and Qizilbash devotees.<sup>34</sup> The addition of a Dar al-Hadith for the teaching of Prophetic traditions introduced orthodox religious learning in a milieu known for its extremist beliefs.<sup>35</sup> A royal decree, placed in the courtyard of the shrine, reiterated injunctions and prohibitions issued by Shah Tahmasb following his repentance, which aimed to curtail transgressions of religious law. Shah Tahmasb's efforts to modulate religious behavior at these shrines and in his realm, however, remained unsuccessful. The need to intervene in the affairs of the Mashhad shrine as a way to curtail the power of Qizilbash governors continued to be a constant challenge for the shah.

Following the signing of the 1555 Treaty of Amasya with the Ottomans, and the transfer of the capital to Qazvin, Shah Tahmasb once again became directly engaged in the affairs of the holy city. According to the account of Qadi Ahmad Qummi, it occurred to the shah that all the favor he enjoyed was on account of his support of the sacred tombs of the imams; consequently, they should enjoy the highest prosperity, in particular the blessed shrine of Mashhad.<sup>36</sup> Unsettled by reports of the failure of Mashhad's governors to enact his royal decrees,<sup>37</sup> he removed the governor of Mashhad, Hasan Sultan Rumlu, from office, and set out to appoint his nephew, Ibrahim Mirza, in his place.<sup>38</sup> He also organized to have his son, Sultan Sulayman Mirza, appointed *khādim-bāshī*, or head attendant of the shrine. Tahmasb's second act of repentance in 1555 marks a new period of deepened commitment to Shi'ism and the enforcement of a Shi'i orthodoxy grounded in legal and scriptural foundations.<sup>39</sup> From the confines of his palace in Qazwin, he supervised the administration of the shrine by appointing and dismissing governors, superintendents, religious officials, and teachers and by conveying gifts and funds.<sup>40</sup> His appointments to the shrine administration, chosen from non-local *sayyid* families—such as the Astarabadi

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 91–3.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 83.

<sup>36</sup>Qazi Ahmad Qummi, *Khulasat al-tavarikh*, 2 vols, ed. Ihsan Ishraqi (Tehran, 1980–1984), 1:380.

<sup>37</sup>Sources do not mention the reasons for Shah Tahmasb's displeasure. In one instance, prior to the accession of Shah 'Abbas to the throne, a Qizilbash governor of Mashhad confiscated the shrine's treasury to raise a large army. Tapping into the shrine's endowments and treasury was a constant threat in a cash-strapped country. Iskandar Beg Munshi, *History of Shah 'Abbas the Great*, trans. Roger Savory, 3 vols. (Boulder, CO, 1978), 1: 406–7.

<sup>38</sup>Qummi, *Khulāsāt*, 1: 382.

<sup>39</sup>Rula Abisaab, *Converting Persia. Religion and Power in the Safavid Empire* (London, 2004), 24.

<sup>40</sup>Qummi, *Khulāsāt*, 1: 380; 2: 598



*sayyids*<sup>41</sup> and the Khalifa *sayyids* of Isfahan—as well as ‘Amili scholars<sup>42</sup> and clerical notables, brought about a new series of changes; new elements were thus introduced which curtailed local autonomy, enhanced Shi‘i teaching, and established an oversight of the shrine’s fiscal management.

Weighing heavily on Shah Tahmasb’s mind was how to enforce Shi‘i orthodoxy. In 961/1554, he appointed Asad Allah Isfahani (died 971/1564) as the superintendent of the shrine and *shaykh al-Islam* of Mashhad; Asad Allah was from the prominent Khalifa *sayyids* of Isfahan and known for his supercilious piety that matched Shah Tahmasb’s own obsessive concern with religious legality.<sup>43</sup> Proper Shi‘i devotional practice was observed and well integrated into Safavid public piety, as seen in Qummi’s long description of Ibrahim Mirza’s pilgrimage to the shrine.<sup>44</sup> Royal Safavid burial practices were also affected by this; a shift from Ardabil to Mashhad and to the Iraqi ‘*atabāt* took place. In 956/1549 the body of Bahram Mirza, Shah Tahmasb’s uterine brother, was interred at the foot of the imam.<sup>45</sup> A magnificent gold tomb cover, donated by Tahmasb in 956–57/1550–51, may have been gifted to the shrine on this occasion. Likewise, royal women were particularly active in their support of shrines and often performed pilgrimages to Mashhad. Shah Tahmasb’s daughter, Zaynab Bigum, who was buried in Mashhad, willed the bazaar of Amir Chaqmaq in Yazd toward the shrine’s maintenance.<sup>46</sup> Shah Tahmasb’s favorite sister, Shahzada Sultanum (died 967–68 /1561–62), donated her private collection of ceramics and jewelry, along with other precious objects, to the shrine. She also commissioned the gold windows and bejeweled vaults of one of the domes in Mashhad.<sup>47</sup>

By all accounts, Mashhad prospered during the later period of Shah Tahmasb’s reign. The establishment of Ibrahim Mirza’s court in Mashhad in the late 1560s and 1570s brought many members of the Safavid chancellery, as well as prominent

<sup>41</sup>Mir Muhammad Ashraf Astarabadi acted as legal deputy for Shah Tahmasb on official visits to the shrine. Ibrahim Astarabadi was the official *munshī* of the shrine. Minorsky, *Calligraphers and Painters*, 89–90. Amir Dust Muhammad Husayni Astarabadi was the *kitābdār*. See Elahé Mahbub Farimani, *Tarikhcha-i kitābhkhana-yi āstān-i Quds-i Razavī bar payā-yi asnād-i Safavī tā Qajarīya (907–1344)* (Mashhad, 1390/2011), 70. On the ascendance of the Astarabadi *sayyids*, see Mitchell, *Practice of Politics*, 107.

<sup>42</sup>Shaykh Lutfallah Maysi (d. 1032/1622–23) was appointed as *mudarris*; Shaykh Husayn ‘Abd al-Samad (d. 984/1576), *shaykh al-Islam* of Mashhad, ca. 971–74/1563–67.

<sup>43</sup>Qummi, *Khulāsāt*, 1: 438–9. Asad Allah Isfahani was Shaykh Husayn b. ‘Abd al-Samad’s patron, whom he met in Najaf. Husayn b. ‘Abd al-Samad replaced him as *shaykh al-Islam* of Mashhad upon his death.

<sup>44</sup>Qummi, *Khulāsāt*, 1: 384.

<sup>45</sup>Bahram Mirza, his wife, Zaynab Sultan, and their son, Ibrahim Mirza, were buried at Mashhad. For a list of the royal Safavid family members interred in Mashhad see Ghulam Riza Jalali, *Mashābir madfūn dar ḥaram-i razavī*, 4 vols. (Mashhad, 1387/2008), 4: 212–86.

<sup>46</sup>Maria Szuppe, “La participation des femmes de la famille royale à l’exercice du pouvoir en Iran Safavide au XVIe siècle,” *Studia Iranica* 23 (1994): 250–51.

<sup>47</sup>Qummi, *Khulāsāt*, 1: 430–31. She was buried first at the Shrine of Ma’suma in Qum. Her body was transferred to Najaf at the order of Muhammad Khudabanda in 993/1585.

painters, calligraphers, and illuminators,<sup>48</sup> thus generating considerable courtly activity in the holy city. At about the same time, a cultural renaissance was occurring in Herat, which was recovering some of its former glory under the rule of the able Qizilbash governor, Muhammad Sharaf al-Din Oghli Takalu (died 964/1557).<sup>49</sup> The aging governor extended his patronage to Mashhad, where he requested a Herati artist to decorate the imam's mausoleum chamber, and he arranged for his own burial in the tomb built by the great Timurid vizier 'Ali Shir Nava'i in Mashhad.<sup>50</sup>

When Shah Tahmasb passed away in 984/1576, his body was conveyed to Mashhad at the order of Shah Isma'il II.<sup>51</sup> It was interred within the imam's funerary complex, where it joined the final resting place of other members of the Safavid family, senior Qizilbash amirs, viziers, sadrs, and a host of *sayyids*, religious scholars, painters, and calligraphers who elected to be buried in Mashhad.<sup>52</sup> Rumors exist of the desecration of the late shah's remains during the decade-long Uzbek occupation of Mashhad (997–1006/1589–98) at the beginning of Shah 'Abbas's reign, but the truth of these reports is unverifiable.<sup>53</sup> Until recent renovations in the mausoleum, *suffa-yi shah tahmasbi* marked the location of the tomb, and unpublished documents from the shrine archives refer to the *khadim* of the tomb and to the Qur'an readers associated with it.<sup>54</sup> It is impossible to determine whether the bones of the shah remained undisturbed, or if they were removed and reburied somewhere else, but the original place of his burial within the tomb of the imam was preserved and identified well beyond the Safavid period.

### *Mashhad in the Safavid Imperium*

Writing in the later part of Shah 'Abbas's reign, Iskandar Munshi described Mashhad as the most prosperous city of Khurasan.<sup>55</sup> Building on his grandfather's devotion to Mashhad, Shah 'Abbas deployed a consistent and deliberate policy of public devotion toward the city. His designs for the redevelopment of the holy city were implemented in stages concomitant with the gradual consolidation of his power and the deployment of his authority over his empire. Internal military and economic reforms as well as territorial expansion overlapped with the reconfiguration of Isfahan as his capital

<sup>48</sup>See Maria Shreve Simpson, *Sultan Ibrahim Mirza's Haft Awrang: A Princely Manuscript from Sixteenth-Century Iran* (New Haven, CT, 1997).

<sup>49</sup>Maria Szuppe, "Kingship Ties between the Safavids and the Qizilbash Amirs in Late Sixteenth-Century Iran: A Case Study of the Political Career of Members of the Sharaf al-Din Oghli Tekelu Family," in *Safavid Persia*, ed. Charles Melville (New York, 1996), 79–104.

<sup>50</sup>Minorsky, *Calligraphers and Painters*, 186–7.

<sup>51</sup>Iskandar Munshi, *History of Shah 'Abbas*, 1: 324.

<sup>52</sup>See Ghulam Riza Jalali, *Mashahir madfun dar haram-i razavi*, 4 vols.

<sup>53</sup>Iskandar Munshi, *History of Shah 'Abbas*, 2: 705.

<sup>54</sup>An unpublished document, no. 27511 in the archives at the Directorate of Documents and Publications of the Central Library of Astan-e Quds-e Razavi dated Jumadi II 1010/December 1601, mentions Hajj Hasan Beg, the servitor (*khadim*) of the tomb (*maqbara*) of Shah Tahmasb.

<sup>55</sup>Iskandar Munshi, *History of Shah 'Abbas*, 2: 705.

city and with the administrative and infrastructural changes taking place in Mashhad. His policy toward the city can be summarily discussed in relation to three events: the reconquest of Khurasan in 1006/1598, which permanently brought Mashhad and Herat into the Safavid fold; his celebrated pilgrimage on foot three years later in 1010/1601; and the recasting of the shrine a decade later within an architectural and urban setting that matched his imperial ambitions as a Safavid Shi'i ruler.<sup>56</sup>

Encouraged by the breakdown of order that preceded the accession of Shah 'Abbas to the throne in Qazvin, the Uzbek ruler 'Abd Allah Khan (died 1006/1598) launched an invasion to reconquer Khurasan, taking over Herat in 996/1588 and Mashhad a year later in 997/1589. Shortly before this attack, Shah 'Abbas had ordered the bodies of Isma'il II and his mother, Mahd-i 'Ulya, to be brought to Mashhad for reburial.<sup>57</sup> It is not clear, however, if the transfer took place. An exchange of letters between the Shi'i scholars of Mashhad and the Sunni scholars of Bukhara signaled the further solidifying of the sectarian divide. Due to its Shi'i/Safavid association, the Uzbek scholars refused the petition brought by Mashhadi scholars to safeguard the shrine and its endowments from destruction and plunder, and deemed it to belong to the abode of war. There was an increased incidence of killing and looting,<sup>58</sup> with many of the shrine's resident scholars massacred during the subsequent invasion and occupation.<sup>59</sup>

After 'Abd Allah Khan died in 1006/1598, Shah 'Abbas was presented with a golden opportunity to re-assume control of Mashhad. He approached the holy town from the plain of Tus, where he had earlier set up camp. Upon seeing the dome, the shah dismounted and prostrated himself in a show of humility, then "proceeded, barefooted, and bareheaded to the shrine."<sup>60</sup> He amplified the demonstration of humility by assuming the duties of chief attendant at the shrine. During a month-long stay in Mashhad, Shah 'Abbas reorganized the administration and staffing of the shrine—"on the basis laid down by Shah Tahmasb"<sup>61</sup>—and replenished the shrine's storerooms with gold and silver chandeliers, candlesticks, carpets, and essential pots and utensils. He oversaw the organization of the shrine's various departments (*buyūtāt*) and engaged in supererogatory acts of piety, such as sweeping the carpets of the sanctuary.<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup>Sussan Babaie, *Isfahan and Its Palaces. Statecraft, Shi'ism and the Architecture of Conviviality in Early Modern Iran* (Edinburgh, 2008), 86–7.

<sup>57</sup>Qummi, *Khulāsāt*, 1: 889–90.

<sup>58</sup>See Aboulala Soudavar, "A Chinese Dish from the Lost Endowment of Princess Sultanum (925–69/1519–52)," in *Iran and Iranian Studies. Essays in Honor of Iraj Afshar*, ed. Kambiz Eslami (Princeton, NJ, 1998), 125–36.

<sup>59</sup>Iskandar Munshi, *History of Shah 'Abbas*, 2: 588–90.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, 2: 752.

<sup>61</sup>This statement by Iskandar Munshi confirms the important role Shah Tahmasb played in the shrine's organization, although documents from his reign related to the changes he introduced are lacking in the shrine's archives.

<sup>62</sup>Iskandar Munshi, *History of Shah 'Abbas*, 2: 764.

In the year 1010/1601, in preparation for a military campaign to conquer Balkh from the Uzbeks, Shah 'Abbas decided to perform a pilgrimage on foot to Mashhad in an effort to solicit divine support from the imam.<sup>63</sup> This unprecedented display of devotion and humility was designed by the shah to bolster his authority and to reinforce his claims as the vice-regent of the imams on earth. Symbolically as well as physically, Shah 'Abbas's march drew a line joining Isfahan, the new capital of the Safavid Empire, with Mashhad, the empire's religious center, and thus underscoring the primacy of the pilgrimage to the tomb of the Shi'i imam.

Following his arrival in the city, Shah 'Abbas spent three months in various acts of piety such as keeping vigil from evening until sunrise on holy days and performing menial tasks in the shrine. He initiated a few changes within the tomb chamber, such as constructing a new door, painting its walls, hanging jewelry, and installing a pair of doors encrusted with precious stones. A large square fountain was built in the shrine's courtyard.<sup>64</sup> A *waqf* was drawn, endowing the use of the land around the mausoleum for burial.<sup>65</sup> Most significantly, the shah decided to re-gild the dome, which was a conscious reiteration of Shah Tahmasb's act and therefore a symbolic reinforcement of Safavid dynastic legitimacy. The outcome of the renovation, finished in 1016/1607, survives in an extraordinary inscription by 'Ali Riza 'Abbasi that commemorates the shah's pilgrimage on foot and proclaims the shah's charismatic lineage to Musa al-Kazim, father of 'Ali al-Rida.<sup>66</sup>

The organization of the shrine underwent a phenomenal growth under Shah 'Abbas as documented in thousands of fiscal and administrative records from the period.<sup>67</sup> The shrine maintained an extensive custodial staff of attendants, carpet spreaders, gate keepers, and shoe attendants, who were organized in three shifts (or *keshik*).<sup>68</sup> In addition to the religious, administrative, and teaching staff, large numbers of beneficiaries—*sayyids* and their families, orphans, and needy individuals—drew regular salaries from the shrine's treasury. A large portion of these documents pertains to the shrine's workshops (*buyūtāt*), which took care of supplies and provided

<sup>63</sup>Charles Melville, "Shah 'Abbas and the Pilgrimage to Mashhad," in *Safavid Persia*, 191–229; see also Caroline Mawer, "Shah 'Abbās and the Pilgrimage to Mashhad," *Iran* 49 (2011): 123–47.

<sup>64</sup>Iskandar Munshi, *History of Shah 'Abbas*, 2: 801; Jalal al-Din Yazdi, *Tarikh-i Abbasi, ya ruznama-yi Mulla Jalal*, ed. S. Vahidniya (Tehran, 1987), 281.

<sup>65</sup>Robert McChesney, "Waqf and Public Policy: The Waqf of Shah 'Abbas, 1011–1023/16002–16," *Asian and African Studies* 15 (1981): 169–70.

<sup>66</sup>P. Sykes, "Historical Notes on Khurasan," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1910): 1138.

<sup>67</sup>An archive composed of thousands of documents—the earliest dating to 998/1589—has survived and records the shrine's fiscal operations over the Safavid, Afsharid, and Qajar periods. See Abol Fazl Hasanabadi and Elaheh Mahbub, "Introducing the Safavid Documents of the Directorate of Documents and Publications of the Central Library of the Holy Shrine at Mashhad (Iran)" *Iranian Studies* 42, no. 2 (April 2009): 311–27. I consulted these archives in 2009.

<sup>68</sup>The *keshik*, a Mongol institution, refers to an imperial guard corps that functioned as royal bodyguards and supervised the princely household. It survived into the Il-Khanid imperial government. See Subtelny, *Timurids in Transition*, 20. The meaning of *keshik* under the Safavids requires further investigation. Its usage to refer to a corps of caretakers at the Mashhad shrine, however, indicates that the administration of the sacred shrine was most likely structured along the administration of the imperial household.

essential services, such as cooking, baking, and butchering; more specialized production workshops, included such things as an apothecary; a tailoring department; a hospital; a guest house; and a library which was staffed by a bookkeeper and assistants specialized in book repair. Inventories from the Safavid period that list the holdings of the library along with the names of donors suggest Shah ‘Abbas’s donation of religious and scientific books to the shrine in 1015–16/1607–8,<sup>69</sup> while exceptional in size, was not unusual.<sup>70</sup> These books must have been used by the teaching staff, and consulted by itinerant scholars, who often penned their work while staying in the holy city.

Two important tombs must have been commissioned at that time by two prominent members of the court: the grand vizier Hatim Beg Urdubadi (died 1610/11),<sup>71</sup> and Allahverdi Khan (died 1018/1610–11), a Georgian slave (*ghulām*) who converted to Islam and rose to become commander of the Safavid army.<sup>72</sup> These tombs are exceptional not only because they follow Timurid practice, but also because neither Shah Tahmasb nor Shah ‘Abbas built such mausoleums for themselves.<sup>73</sup> Undoubtedly, they were permitted in recognition of each man’s loyalty and extraordinary contributions to the restructuring of the Safavid state under Shah ‘Abbas. They point to the emergence of a changed polity that drew its identity not from Sufi-inspired bonds of loyalty but rather from allegiance to the Safavid shah and Twelver Shi‘ism.

The tomb of Hatim Beg—adjacent to the saint’s tomb along the eastern side—is a rectangular hall with three small *muqarnas* vaults covered with mosaic tiles serving as a roof. It has no inscriptions from the Safavid period, while its space was integrated into the hall of Dar al-Sa‘ada as some point during the Qajar period (1796–1924). The tomb of Allahverdi Khan, on the other hand, displays extensive inscriptions. An architectural gem, the tomb comprises a large octagonal structure located to the northeast of the saint’s tomb. It is hemmed in on all sides by other halls. Two sets of superimposed *ivans* articulate the eight sides of the tomb. A *muqarnas* dome soars above, pierced by small windows that allow some light into the dark interior. The *muqarnas* dome does not project to the exterior, so as not to compete with the dome above the imam’s tomb. Mosaic tiles and inscription bands decorate the facades and interior sides of the eight superimposed *ivans*. The combined text of the inscriptions is a manifesto of Twelver Shi‘i creed. It combines well-known Shi‘i traditions, such as the

<sup>69</sup>McChesney, “Waqf and Public Policy,” 174. See also Sheila R. Canby, “Royal Gifts to Safavid Shrines,” in *Muraqqa‘e Sharqi: Studies in Honor of Peter Chelkowski*, ed. S. Rastegar and A. Vanzan (Milan, 2007), 57–68; Sheila R. Canby, *Shah ‘Abbas. The Remaking of Iran* (London, 2009).

<sup>70</sup>See Mahbub Farimani, *Tarikhcha-i kitābkhana-yi āstān-i Quds-i Razavī*, 57.

<sup>71</sup>For Hatim Beg’s exceptional contributions to the Safavid chancellery and the restructuring of Safavid administration, see Mitchell, *Practice of Politics*, 179–83.

<sup>72</sup>See Sussan Babaie, Kathryn Babayan, Ina Baghdiantz-McCabe, and Massumeh Farhad, *Slaves of the Shah. New Elites of Safavid Iran* (London, 2004), 92–4.

<sup>73</sup>For a discussion of Shah ‘Abbas’s cenotaph in Kashan, see Javad Golmohammadi, “The Cenotaph in Ḥabīb b. Mūsa, Kashan: Does it Mark the Tomb of Shah ‘Abbas,” in *Sifting Sand, Reading Signs: Studies in Honor of Geza Fehervari*, ed. Patricia Baker and Barbara Brend (London, 2006), 61–9.

“hadith of the mantle,”<sup>74</sup> the “hadith of the two weighty matters,”<sup>75</sup> and the “hadith of the Safina”<sup>76</sup> (Noah’s ark). Other sayings exalt the status of Mashhad and the merit of its pilgrimage, as well as providing the names and dates of birth of all twelve imams.<sup>77</sup>

In the saying affixed to the foundation statement of the main entrance, the Prophet declares, “A part of me will be buried in the land of Khurasan, and Paradise will be incumbent upon every believer who visits it, and his body will be saved from fire.”<sup>78</sup> This is echoed by other hadiths, transmitted by the imams, which are affixed in the other seven *ivans* of the tomb. These state that the tomb in Khurasan is a piece of Paradise inhabited by angels until the day of Resurrection; moreover visiting Mashhad is more meritorious than performing the hajj itself, and it will enlist the imam as an intercessor. On the authority of Imam al-Rida himself, one pilgrimage to Mashhad equals one thousand pilgrimages to Mecca. Its visitation is enjoined over and above the pilgrimage to other Shi‘i imams’ tombs. Many of these sayings first appeared in Ibn Babawayh’s tenth-century hagiography of the eighth imam, *‘Uyūn akhbār al-Ridā*. In the context of Shah ‘Abbas’s reign, these traditions could be seen as being directed toward promoting Mashhad over and above the Iraqi *‘atabāt* and the holy places that were under Ottoman control at the time.

Shah ‘Abbas’s last major intervention in Mashhad occurred in 1020/1611. By that date, the long protracted war with the Ottomans had come to a halt, and the territorial integrity of the Safavid Empire was completely restored. The construction of a new congregational mosque on the main square (*maydān*) of Isfahan was underway, completing Shah ‘Abbas’s reconfiguration of Isfahan as the capital of a Safavid Shi‘i empire. During a nine-day visit, Shah ‘Abbas decided to increase the prosperity of Mashhad by restoring its dwellings and enhancing the approach to the mausoleum. He also ordered the creation of a monumental four-ivan courtyard surrounded by an avenue. Outside the holy city, Shah ‘Abbas commissioned the reconstruction of two extant shrines—Qadamgah and that of Khwajah Rabi‘—to create specialized satellite shrines that commemorated particular events in the life of the imam. As in Isfahan, Shah ‘Abbas was devising new public spaces, large avenues, and gardens that formed loci of social interaction in Mashhad and fostered a renewed collective identity through the wide-scale performance of tomb visitations and commemorative rituals.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>74</sup>Qur’an, 33: 33.

<sup>75</sup>“The Apostle of God said: I have left among you two weighty matters which if you cling to them you shall not be led into error after me. One of them is greater than the other: the Book of God which is a rope stretched from Heaven to Earth and my progeny, the people of my house. These two shall not be parted until they return to the pool of [Paradise].” Moojan Momen, *Introduction to Shi‘i Islam* (New Haven, CT, 1985), 16.

<sup>76</sup>“My Family among you are like Noah’s Ark. He who sails on it will be safe, but he who holds back from it will perish.” See *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>77</sup>The inscriptions on the tomb of Allahverdi Khan are given in ‘Ali Mu’taman, *Tārīkh-i Astān-i Quds-i Razavī* (Tehran, 1348/1969), 150–56.

<sup>78</sup>*Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>79</sup>Babaie, *Isfahan and Its Palaces*, 65–70.



Extending along an east–west axis perpendicular to the axis of Gawhar Shad’s mosque, the courtyard formed a nucleus for the shrine complex. A double-storied arcade provided a uniform and ordered exterior to the disparate structures located behind it. Large monumental two-sided gateways, built in the center of each side of the court, linked the courtyard to the bazaars and thoroughfares of the city. All *ivans* have since undergone extensive restorations, and remaining traces from Shah ‘Abbas’s period are rare. An inscription by ‘Ali Riza ‘Abbasi on the western *ivan* incorporates three Prophetic traditions that proclaim the special status of the *ahl al-bayt* to the succession of the Prophet. The first one is the “hadith of the Mantle,” followed by the verse of the Purification (Qur’an 33:33) and ending with a prophetic saying extolling the special status of Fatima.<sup>80</sup> The tiling of the courtyard’s façade and *ivans* was probably not finished during Shah ‘Abbas’s lifetime, whereas the northern *ivan* was finished by Shah ‘Abbas II (reigned 1052–77/1642–66).

An avenue (*khiyābān*) that extended from the eastern and western *ivans* toward the city’s walls carved out a new public space and concourse in the densely built city. A water canal ran in the middle of the avenue and brought water from the source, Chashma-yi Gilās, to Mashhad from the west. A *waqf* regulated both the use of the water as well as the revenue derived from its sale.<sup>81</sup> Mashhad’s urban reordering was a simple but autocratic act that recreated in a metaphoric fashion Shah ‘Abbas’s march on foot toward the shrine. The shading trees and watercourse through the shrine must have conjured up paradisiacal images that echoed the Shi‘i hadiths on the walls of the shrine.

Qadamgah—located about twenty-four kilometers east of Nishapur—is a small shrine built on top of a hill. Inside the shrine is a black stone marked with large footprints; these are believed to be those of Imam al-Rida, who allegedly stopped at the nearby spring to perform his ablutions.<sup>82</sup> The small shrine is the main focus of a large public garden, which is laid out on the hill. A series of canals channels water from the spring to pools along a central axis. The lower level of the garden included rooms for the use of pilgrims. A tree-lined *khiyābān* led to the gateway of the garden.

The last building commissioned by Shah ‘Abbas is the tomb of Khwajah Rabi‘, which is located about two kilometers north of Mashhad.<sup>83</sup> Al-Rabi‘ b. Khuthaym is identified as one of the prominent followers (*tābi‘ūn*) of the Prophet. Shaybani Khan visited this tomb on his way to Mashhad, which suggests the tomb at least dates to the Timurid period, if not earlier.<sup>84</sup> The building, a large cubical structure, is surmounted by a tall drum and dome. An inscription by ‘Ali Riza ‘Abbasi,

<sup>80</sup>Mu‘taman, *Tarikh-i Astān-i Quds*, 180.

<sup>81</sup>McChesney, “Waqf and Public Policy,” 181–2.

<sup>82</sup>For a plan of the garden see Ya‘qub Daneshdoust, “Islamic Gardens in Iran,” in *Islamic Garden. ICOMOS-IFLA, Granada, Spain 29 Oct–4 Nov. 1973* (Granada, 1976), 71–4. For a celebrated manuscript illustration of the footprints of the imam, see Massumeh Farhad and Serpil Bağci, *Falnama. The Book of Omens* (Washington, DC, 2009), 136–7.

<sup>83</sup>See P.M. Sykes, “Historical Notes on Khurasan,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 42 (1910): 1120–29.

<sup>84</sup>Khunji, *Mihmān namā-i Bukhārā*, 329–39.

located along the dome's drum, consists of a Qur'anic verse on the subject of *walāya* (guardianship), followed by a sermon of 'Ali b. Abi Talib. Inside, in a lengthy Shi'i hadith reported by a companion of the Prophet, Jabir b. 'Abd Allah (died 77/697), the Prophet reveals the names of his successors, the twelve imams. It is a potent hadith in which Shi'i claims to the imamate are sanctified by divine revelation.<sup>85</sup>

The Arabic religious texts adorning Shah 'Abbas's new buildings in Mashhad outlined the main tenets of the Shi'i creed and mark the extent of the shi'ification of the Safavid Empire under Shah 'Abbas. Initiated by Shah Tahmasb, the imposition of Shi'i orthopraxy with the assistance of Arab clerics from Jabal 'Amil, received further support from Shah 'Abbas.<sup>86</sup> A substantial increase in the shrine's endowments supported and empowered an expanding Shi'i clerical establishment and financed the performance of Shi'i rituals. Its *mutawallī*, directly appointed by the shah, held an exalted status at the Safavid court, and the description of his duties in *Dastūr al-Mulūk*, an administrative handbook from the late Safavid period, reveals the size and economic might of the institution over which he presided.<sup>87</sup> A European visitor, Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, commented that the shah attempted to increase the popularity of Mashhad, and he discouraged pilgrims from going to Mecca in order to stem the drain of gold coins from Iran.<sup>88</sup> Pilgrimage centers and commerce have always gone hand in hand, and surely the pragmatic shah had economic benefits in mind. Economic, religious, political, and dynastic motives came together in shaping the centrifugal movement created by Shah 'Abbas toward Mashhad.

Even though incidents of royal pilgrimage to Mashhad were rare for later Safavid shahs,<sup>89</sup> its symbolic importance as the site of the compact between the Safavid shahs and the imams remained undiminished until the fall of the dynasty in 1134/1722.<sup>90</sup> When an earthquake on Safar 1084 (30 July 1673) struck Mashhad, the gilded dome collapsed. Repairing it became a matter of great urgency, and Shah Sulayman (reigned 1076–1105/1666–94) ordered his chief goldsmith to produce new gilt tiles. A commemorative Arabic inscription by Muhammad Rida Imami was drawn on the dome, reiterating the Safavid shah's charismatic lineage with the Prophet as the

<sup>85</sup>Sykes, "Historical Notes," 1125–6.

<sup>86</sup>Abisaab, *Converting Persia*, 141.

<sup>87</sup>Mirza Rafi'a, *Dastūr al-Mulūk*, ed. Muhammad Taqi Danish-pashuh, in *Majalla-yi Dānishkada-yi Adabiyāt-i Danishgāh-i Tibrān* 16 (1347 SH/1968–69), 66–8; Willem Floor and Muhammad H. Faghfoory, trans., *Dastur al-Muluk. A Safavid State Manual by Mohammad Rafi' al-Din Ansari* (Costa Mesa, CA, 2007), 5–7.

<sup>88</sup>Melville, "Shah 'Abbas and the Pilgrimage to Mashhad in 1601," 216.

<sup>89</sup>The most spectacular is the pilgrimage of the last Safavid ruler, Shah Sultan Husayn (1694–1722), which took a year to finish. Interestingly, Shah Sultan Husayn stipulated in a number of *waqfiyyas* that three pious Shi'i Muslims should each perform the visitation to the Mashhad shrine, the Iraqi shrines, and the *hajj* on behalf of his three predecessors, Shah Safi, Shah 'Abbas II, and Shah Sulayman. See Maryam Moazzem, "Shi'te Higher Learning and the Role of the Madrasa-yi Sultani in Late Safavid Iran" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2011), 131.

<sup>90</sup>See Melville, "Shah 'Abbas and the Pilgrimage to Mashhad in 1601," 215–20.

propagator of the creed (*madhhab*) of his forefathers, the infallible imams, and the reviver of the rites of his excellent fathers. In Mashhad's shining gold dome that was commissioned by Shah Tahmasb, Safavid sovereignty and the imam's ineffable and divine majesty were successfully and convincingly fused.<sup>91</sup>

---

<sup>91</sup>A poem by Va'iz Qazvini celebrating the restoration of the Mashhad dome by Shah Sulayman beautifully fuses the characteristics of the dome, the shah, and the imam. See Paul Losensky, "Coordinates in Space and Time. Architectural Chronograms in Safavid Iran," in *New Perspectives on Safavid Iran. Empire and Society*, ed. Colin Mitchell (London, 2011), 205–6.