

## **The Manifestation of the Name Ali in Applied Arts during the Timurid to Qajar Epochs**

### **Abstract**

The continuous support of Iranians for the Shia religion in the Timurid to Qajar periods caused prayers and hadiths related to imams to be a valuable subject for the occupation of calligraphers and inscribers; hence, the artists used these subjects to decorate practical objects and dishes such as plates, bowls, and candlesticks made of metal, marble, stone, wood and fabric. For this reason, in Islamic Iran from the 10<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (9<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> Hegira), Shi'ah themes gradually became the mainstay of artists' work. They used calligraphy and inscription in applied arts not only as a decorative element, but also as a tool to propagate and strengthen the high values of Shiism. Among the religious subjects used in the calligraphy of practical works of these historical periods, mentioning the name of Ali (PBUH), the first Imam of Shiites, is one of the examples of the association between art and religion. Mentioning his name alone or next to Allah, Mohammad (PBUH) and the Infallibles, two Shiite martyrdoms, the hadiths of the Prophet in his Manqbat, and parts of the graceful prayer of Nad-e Ali prayer are among the topics that not only show devotion to this holy Imam, but also reveals the tendency of Iranian towards the Shi'ah belief. The method of data collection is documentary and library research and the method of organizing the article is descriptive, analytical and historical.

### **Research aims:**

1. Investigating the differences and similarities of the appearance of the name Ali (PBUH) in the calligraphy of applied works from the Timurid to Qajar periods.
2. Exploring the reasons for the devotion of artists to choose themes in the portrait of Imam Ali (PBUH) considering his personality.

### **Research questions:**

1. What is the position of calligraphy and inscription in Islamic art and its relationship with Shi'ah religion?
2. What are the subjects of the expressions in the description of Ali (PBUH) in the calligraphy of applied arts?

**Keywords:** Calligrapher, Ali (PBUH), applied arts, Timurid period, Qajar period.

## **Introduction**

Iranian art, both before Islam and during the Islamic period, had fixed indicators and values, the most important of which is the relationship between art and spiritual customs resultant from religion. In visual arts of the pre-Islamic period, decorative aspects were often emphasized and symbolic concepts were included. Therefore, this art has appeared in the Islamic period along the same path, with decorations and symbolism. Undoubtedly, nothing can best express the notion of thinking and artistic taste as much as "decorations" in Islamic art for if the meaning is completely expressed in the form, it may not be understandable to the general public, but then again, decoration at first sight attracts the viewer and leaves its impact. Therefore, during the fourteen centuries of history of Islamic arts, various decorations have been of special importance and throughout the Islamic era, artists have spared no efforts in its development and evolution. One of the reasons for the decorative and symbolic nature of Iranian art is, in fact, the spirit of Islam and spiritual customs that drives the nature of artists in this direction. Qudsi art deals with the manifestation of the letters and sounds of the Holy Book, and in the field of visual arts, it is more than anything else manifested in the form of calligraphy.

Calligraphy and inscriptions are among the features that have been abundantly applied in decorating various branches of art. Surviving works of Muslim calligraphers and the themes of the scripts used testify to the solid connection of calligraphy with Islamic culture and civilization, and also display the contribution of calligraphy in the development of Islamic culture and literature, which arose from the culture and beliefs of the society of its time. Paying attention to the verses and traditions received in this regard, emphasizes the prominence of calligraphy and its sanctity clearer than before. Throughout the history of Islamic art, the art of calligraphy has continually been manifested in the field of applied arts. Inscription decorations have always created beautiful and original combinations by being placed next to various plant and geometric motifs and shapes. This issue is very visible in the creation of various types of decorative glass, metal and pottery.

In Islamic society, in addition to Quranic topics, prayers and hadiths have been widely used in decorating works of art. It has been customary to use the names of elders and pious men to bless their names and to show the interest and devotion of Muslims. In Iran, since the officialization of the Shi'ah religion, the name of Ali (PBUH) found a special place in the inscriptions of practical objects. Although before that, Shiites in different eras have decorated their works with this holy name at every opportunity.

Today, there are many fields for studying these works. Considering the high status of Imam Ali (PBUH) in Islam and especially the Shi'ah religion and the extensive use of this name on applied arts, in this paper, it is sought to investigate the calligraphy and writing methods of the blessed name of Imam Ali in the artworks remaining from different periods of Islamic art. The current research was carried out using descriptive and analytical method by relying on data from library sources.

In this article, we will first discuss the importance of calligraphy and inscriptions in Islamic art, then examine the personality dimensions and position of Imam Ali (PBUH) among the Shiites, and then examples of applied arts that include the name of Imam Ali (PBUH) will be analyzed. The inscriptions are divided based on their content. In this study, the inscriptions are divided into five categories: "Ali's name", "Ali's name next to the name of Allah, Mohammad (PBUH) and the Infallibles", "Two Shiite martyrdoms", "Hadiths of the Prophet in the predicament of Imam Ali (PBUH)" and the prayer of "Nad-e-Ali".

### **Conclusion**

In this article, the position of the inscription and its types in terms of content and decoration in the applied arts of the Timurid to Qajar period was discussed, and two separate groups of inscriptions, prayer and Hadith inscriptions, the main subjects of this article, were deliberated upon. The section of prayer inscriptions includes the praise of God, The Prophet Mohammad, Imam Ali, Hazrat-e Fatemeh and their sons Imam Hassan and Imam Hussein, and includes examples based on which Muslims praise and invoke the Twelve Imams. After the topic of inscriptions, a brief description of the personality and titles of Hazrat Ali (PBUH), which is the subject of this article were discussed, and after that, examples of inscriptions bearing the name of Imam Ali (PBUH) in applied and decorative arts were introduced and investigated. The praise of Imam Ali (PBUH) is found in words with separate forms, on many surfaces of buildings and objects that have been engraved during different periods, and occasionally alongside the name of God and the Prophet, in some cases separately and at times continuously. The use of Shiite inscriptions in general and the use of inscriptions in which the name of Ali (PBUH) is seen in particular is more common in the Timurid and Safavid periods than in other historical periods of Iran, and the variety and number of examples in the Safavid period are more than the Timurid period both in general and in the field of applied works. Looking at the history of the Timurid and Safavid eras, this will not be so strange or far-fetched.

During the Timurid era, although the tendency, policies and beliefs of the Timurid rulers were towards Islam, the royal family desired to show their appearance as people loyal to the religion, and for this reason, they undertook an ambitious plan including the construction of buildings with Shiite inscriptions. Therefore, the use of the name of Ali (PBUH) can be seen in the calligraphy of this period. However, during the Safavid era, the application of the name Ali (PBUH) was applied in arts as a sign of praise and glorification of Imam Ali (PBUH) and introducing him as the true leader of the Shiites. The Safavid era is a turning point in the history of Iran, because with the emergence of the Safavids, Shia religion became the official religion of Iran. Hence, the existence of inscriptions containing the name of Ali and the deep respect of the Safavids for Imam Ali displays his essential position in that period. Through such inscriptions and calligraphy, the Safavids confirmed and established the cultural status of Shi'ah and brought the Shi'ah society of that day together with their goals and intentions. Moreover, many works remaining from the Qajar period convey the devotion of the Shiites to Imam Ali (PBUH).

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