

SAFAWID EPIGRAPHY IN ISFAHAN:

THE MASJID-I SHAH

by

NUHA NAIM NASRALLAH KHOURY

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Anthony Welch


Siri Gunasinghe


Eike-Henner Kluge

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Supervisor: Professor Anthony Welch

ABSTRACT

The New Isfahan of Shah 'Abbas I is a reflection of his plans for a new Iran. Shah 'Abbas adopted Isfahan as his capital in 1597-98 and developed the provincial city into a sophisticated urban center. In 1611 A.D. the Royal Mosque or *Masjid-i Shah* was added to Isfahan. In a city known as 'half the world', this mosque was regarded as 'the second Ka'ba.

The *Masjid-i Shah* conforms to the four-eyvan plan typical of large mosques. Its distinguishing feature is the vast body of epigraphs which covers its surfaces. These epigraphs are scattered over the portal, the minars, the eyvans, domes and mihrabs. Collectively, they form a strong argument in support of Shah 'Abbas' Safawid regime, his national and international reforms.


The inscriptions of the Royal Mosque rely on both *hadith* and Qur'an. The *hadith* is composed of various incidents in support of the caliphate of the Prophet Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law and the Safawids' chief ancestor: 'Ali b. Abi Taleb. The Qur'anic citations are used as proof for the arguments of the *hadith* and as evidence of 'Ali's superiority. The main purpose of the entire program is the reinstatement of both temporal and religious authority to one deserving person, a descendant of the Prophet and protector of Shi'ism, Shah 'Abbas.


While Shah 'Abbas and his dynasty adhered to the *Ithna 'Ashari* Shi'i sect, their primary enemies were orthodox or Sunni Muslims. The wars between the Safawids and the Ottomans were declared holy *jihad* by

each of the opposing parties. As each empire struggled to maintain its legitimacy within an Islamic context, religious argument played an increasingly important role. Religious opinions became a form of propaganda performing the double purpose of upholding one regime while attacking the other.

It is in this period that the *Masjid-i Shah* was built and complemented with its epigraphs. From the information offered by the inscriptions we may begin to see that the epigraphs are not the only form of propaganda, rather the mosque itself is a monument built for the propagation of Shah 'Abbas' ideals and as a reflection of his power.

Examiners:


Anthony Welch


Siri Gunasinghe



Eike-Henner Kluge

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DEDICATION

To my family and to
Erica Kruikshank Dodd.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Since medieval times the Great Mosque, or *Jami'*, has been the center of the Islamic city. Built in the heart of the town, it was surrounded by commercial complexes or *bazaars*, and connected to theological seminaries or *madrasahs*.¹ In it Muslims gathered for prayer, learning, and social interaction. The mosque was then, as it is today, the kernel of the Muslim community. Within it are unified the religious, intellectual, and social aspects of the Islamic entity.¹ ^X

In early seventeenth century Isfahan, the *Masjid-i Shah* is such a mosque, (figs. 2-3). Situated on the south side of the great *Maydan*, or *Naqsh-e Jahan* (Picture of the World) square, the Royal Mosque is the focal point of a vast complex. On the west is the 'Ali Qapu palace which housed the Shah's residence and administrative offices, while to the east is the smaller, more personal mosque, the Shaykh Lutfallah. Both mosques are tilted on an axis so as to counter the north-south orientation of the *Maydan* and face the proper *Qiblah*, Mecca,² (figs. 1, 4). On the north side, facing the *Masjid-i Shah*, is the *Qeyseriyya*, portal of the royal *bazaar*. The *bazaar* constitutes the utilitarian aspect of the square and an integral part of the plan of the entire complex and the economy of the empire.

The building of the complex was begun in 1597-98 when Shah 'Abbas shifted the capital of Iran from Qazvin to Isfahan. The commencement of work on the 'New Isfahan' is commemorated by the chronogram "The sapling bore fruit in accordance with the Shah's wishes."³ Among the numerous architects, engineers and artists recruited for the

implementation of the Shah's wishes, two stand out as being of special significance. Muhibb 'Ali Beg Lala, whose name appears in the portal inscription of the Royal Mosque,⁴ was the chief supervisor of the construction of the Royal Mosque and co-donor of its waqf (religious endowment).⁵ Shaykh Baha' al-Din Muhammad 'Amili, known simply as Shaykh Baha'i, an eminent scholar, was Shah 'Abbas' "right-hand man" in the planning of the new capital.⁶ These men were entrusted with the task of transforming the previously provincial city into an earthly Paradise which came to be known as 'half the world'.⁷ The process extended over several years and continued even after Shah 'Abbas' death in 1626 A.D. The entire scheme, however, is described by Shah 'Abbas' historian Eskandar Monshi, as "the product of the Shah's fertile imagination".⁸ Indeed, Isfahan as the capital of a prosperous empire reflects the personality and motives of its chief creator.

Shah 'Abbas I ascended to the throne in 1588 to become the fifth Safawid monarch of Iran. The empire had been founded by Shah Isma'il I (r.1501-1524) who, in 1501, succeeded in defeating the Aq Qyunlu Turcoman rulers and, shortly thereafter, securing the country for his dynasty and the *Safawiyya* order of Sufis.⁹ The *Safawiyya* order, founded by Shaykh Safi al-Din Ishaq Ardabili (1252-1334),¹⁰ was in fact the major influence in the overthrow of the existing ruling class and its replacement with one more closely connected to Shi'i religious ideology. Isma'il's first and most significant act as shah of Iran was the establishment of Twelver Imam or *Ithna 'Ashari* (Duodeciman) Shi'ism as the official religion of the previously Sunni empire.¹¹ Through their connection with the *Ithna 'Ashari* sect and the *Safawiyya*

order, and their descent from Shaykh Safi al-Din, the Safawids were thus able to claim both temporal and religious power.

X The original split between the two major sects, Sunnism and Shi'ism, occurred in the early years of the establishment of Islam. Among the followers of the Prophet Muhammad was a faction which supported the succession and the sacrosanctity of *ahl al-bayt*, the People of the Household (of the Prophet). The *ahl al-bayt* came to be limited to the Prophet's daughter Fatima and her husband 'Ali b. Abi Taleb, who was also the Prophet's cousin, and their sons. These supporters who favored 'Ali as the only possible and legitimate caliph, became known as *shi'at 'Ali* or the partisans of 'Ali, and henceforth simply as Shi'a. Despite the *shi'a's* bitter opposition, on the death of the Prophet in 632 A.D., the caliphate was awarded to one of the Companions, Abu Bakr as-Siddiq. The event is known as *Saqifa* after the location, an assembly hall belonging to the clan of Bani Sa'ida, where Abu Bakr secured the allegiance of the Emigrants (*muhajirun* - those who had migrated with the Prophet from Mecca to Medina) and the Supporters (*ansar* - those of the Medinans who offered aid and support to the Prophet).¹² Abu Bakr's supporters claimed that his *bay'at* (Pledge of Allegiance) by the majority of the *umma* (community) was a matter of consensus (*ijma'*), and in line with the Prophet's teachings or *sunna*. Thus, these Muslims became known as Sunnis. X

Abu Bakr was succeeded by two caliphs, Umar b. al-Khattab and 'Uthman b. 'Affan, before 'Ali was able to rise to the leadership. 'Ali's supporters, his *shi'a*, regarded the period between the Prophet's death and 'Ali's succession as one of illegitimate rule by usurper

caliphs. The Shi'is thus denounce the rule of Abu Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthman, while the Sunnis hold the three in high regard as the Rightfully Guided Caliphs.¹³ In subsequent years the gap between the Sunnis and Shi'is was widened by their differing outlooks and approaches in religious sciences. By the ninth century, Sunnism had established four 'methods' or schools (*madhahib*) of jurisprudence (*fiqh*). These are the Maliki school of Malik b. Anas (d. 795 A.D.), the Hanafi school of Abu Hanifa (d. 767 A.D.), the Shafi'i school of Imam Shafi'i (d. 820 A.D.), and the Hanbali school of Ahmad b. Hanbal (d. 855 A.D.). Through their effort of research (*ijtihad*), these founders compiled the doctrines of Islamic conduct with varying degrees of dependence upon *ra'y* (opinion), *qiyas* (analogy or precedence) and *ijma'* (consensus).¹⁴ Henceforth the door of Sunni jurisprudence or *ijtihad* was closed. By contrast, Shi'ism continues to practice 'free *ijtihad*' which is based on the *sunna* and the Qur'an but not limited to specific schools. The imitation of a dead *mujtahid* (a religious researcher or scientist) is, in fact, forbidden by Shi'ism which claims that this factor has kept Islamic Shi'i jurisprudence "alive and fresh throughout the ages".¹⁵ The processes of *tafsir* (exegesis) and *ta'wil* (interpretation) of the Qur'an thus continue to flourish.

Another distinguishing factor between Sunnism and Shi'ism is their approach to *hadith*, the traditions and discourses of the Prophet. Both rely on the Qur'an as supportive evidence, and on reliable chains of transmission (*isnad* or *silsilah*) as means of authenticating *hadith*. Sunni *hadith*, however, is composed exclusively of the Prophet's discourses and thus known as *hadith nabawi*. Not surprisingly, much of

the corpus of Sunni traditions is based upon the authority of the Three Rightly Guided Caliphs as well as the Prophet's wife 'A'isha. Traditions from 'Ali are included in both Sunni and Shi'i collections, but in the latter they form a separate category. Shi'is accept the words of 'Ali and the Imams as *hadith* which is also known as *akhbar* or *hadith walawi*. The earliest and most authoritative of Shi'i collections of *hadith* is the *Usul al Kafi* of Kulayni.¹⁶ The authority of the Imams is a reflection of the Shi'i belief that "the sayings of the Imams are in many ways not only a continuation but also a kind of commentary and elucidation of the prophetic *Hadith*, often with the aim of bringing out the esoteric teachings of Islam."¹⁷ The largest number of Shi'i *hadith* has come down from 'Ali and the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh Imams.¹⁸

In Shi'ism the concept of Imamhood is inextricably linked with esotericism. Like the Sufis, Shi'is believe that external and outward appearance (*zahir*), is only one aspect of reality, the other being the esoteric and hidden truth (*batin*). This theory is based on the following Qur'anic verse

He it is Who has sent down
To thee the Book:
In it are verses
Basic or fundamental
(Of established meaning);
They are the foundation
Of the Book: others
Are allegorical.¹⁹

III:7

The fundamental or established verses are those whose meanings are explicit and clear, the *muhkamat*. Those with implicit esoteric meanings are the *mutashabihat* which are, therefore, in need of interpretation or

ta'wil. Understanding the Qur'an thus necessitates the *ta'wil* of the *ayat al-mutashabihat* (unclear verses) by a religious authority or imam.²⁰ In general terms the word 'imam' is taken to mean religious leader or one who leads the people in worship and prayer. In Shi'ism the imam is a man who possesses the 'Muhammadan Light' or, in other words, one who is descended from the Prophet. These Imams are divinely inspired and possess '*ilm* (knowledge) which enables them to interpret and fully understand the hidden meanings of the Qur'an. '*Ilm* is passed on from one Imam to another through *Nass* or appointment. The theory of '*ilm* and *Nass* was formulated by the Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq,²¹ the sixth in a series of Imams descended from the Prophet. In *Ithna 'Ashari* Shi'ism the total number of Imams is twelve, and they are all descended from the Prophet through 'Ali and Fatima. As cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad, 'Ali is the first Imam and is accepted as such by all Shi'i sects. From 'Ali the '*ilm* and *Nass* were transmitted to his eldest son (by Fatima), al-Hasan (3-50/625-670), and thereafter to the younger son, al-Husayn (4-61/626-680). According to Twelver Shi'ism '*ilm* and *Nass* have remained in the line of the third Imam, al-Husayn, and were transmitted by him to the fourth, 'Ali Zayn al-'Abidin (38-95/658-712), the fifth, Muhammad al-Baqir (57-114/675-732), the sixth, Ja'far al-Sadiq,²² the seventh, Musa al-Kazim (128-183/744-799), the eighth, 'Ali al-Rida (148-203/765-817), the ninth, Muhammad al-Taqi (195-220/809-835), the tenth, 'Ali al-Naqi (212-254/827-868), the eleventh, al-Hasan al-'Askari (232-260/845-872), and the twelfth, Muhammad al-Mahdi, who was born in 256/868 and has been in occultation since 329/939.²³

The concept of the Mahdi or Hidden Imam which is shared by

other Shi'i sects, implies the reappearance of the Imam at an opportune moment to "fill the earth with equity and justice as it was filled with oppression and tyranny."²⁴ In Isma'ilism the Mahdi is considered the seventh Imam and is the eldest son of Ja'far al-Sadiq, called Isma'il. The Isma'ilis believe that the imamate revolves around the number seven and that at the end of each cycle a new prophet will appear. Zaydis follow Zayd al-Shahid, a son of the fourth Imam al-Sajjad, who instigated a revolt against the Umayyads. Zaydism neither limits the number of imams to twelve nor considers that the imamate belongs solely to *ahl al-bayt*.²⁵ Among the earlier sects which originated at the time of the first three Imams, are the Hanafis, followers of a son of 'Ali by a Hanafite woman.²⁶

In Twelver Shi'ism the Imams are considered infallible and absolutely pure. They are "the gate to God (*Bab Allah*), the road (*sabil*) to Him and the guide thereto (*dalil*)... The Imams are the proofs (*hujja*) of God on earth, their words are the words of God, and their commands are the commands of God. Obedience to them is obedience to God, and disobedience to them is disobedience to God. In all their decisions they are inspired by God, and they are in absolute authority."²⁷ Twelver Shi'ism has recourse to several Qur'anic verses and *hadith* for the establishment of the authority and infallibility of the Imams. Based on these doctrines the concept of imamhood becomes a matter ordained by God, and the Imam becomes the supreme authority in religious and political matters. In the absence of an Imam, which is the case during the occultation of the Mahdi, religious authorities ('*ulama'*) take on the task of guiding the *umma* on the True Path. With

the institution of *Ithna 'Ashari* Shi'ism as the official religion of Iran in 1501, the Safawid shahs established themselves as the representatives of the Mahdi and the Perfect Guides (*murshid-i kamil*) to the people.

The Safawid monarchs thus usurped religious authority from its rightful owners, the *shaykhs* of the *Safawiyya* order. The latter accepted this matter as a minor setback in the process of spreading the Twelver faith. The Safawids, however, justified their claim to religious rule through their descent from the seventh infallible Imam, Musa al-Kazim. Thus, they considered themselves the descendants of the Prophet through Fatima and possessors of the 'Muhammadan Light'. They also asserted that the third Imam al-Husayn had married the daughter of the last Sasanid king, Yazdigird III, and thus combined the concept of "kingly glory" with that of religious sanctity.²⁸ These assertions became essential propaganda factors in the Safawid struggle for legitimacy. The propaganda was primarily aimed at the Sunni adherents within Iran and the Sunni powers which ruled the land to the east and west of the Safawid empire.

Iran was a predominantly Sunni country before the institution of *Ithna 'Ashari* Shi'ism as its official religion, and continued to be so far into the seventeenth century. Certain areas and cities like Herat, Shirvan, Samarqand and Isfahan itself were major centers of Sunnism. Early seventeenth century Isfahan has been described as "one of the biggest centers of *ahl-i sunnat wa'l-jama'at*" (i.e. Sunnis), and its inhabitants as "fanatical adherents" of the Shafi'i school of jurisdiction.²⁹ To suppress Sunni elements within his kingdom

Isma'il I instituted the ritual cursing of Sunnis. During his reign *tabarra'iyān* (Safawid supporters who had 'pledged themselves body and soul to the Shah') would walk through the streets cursing the three caliphs (Abu Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthman), as well as the enemies of 'Ali and the Imams, and the Sunnis in general. The immediate expected response was to be 'May it [the cursing] be more and not less!', otherwise harsh punishments and even death would be inflicted.³⁰ Cursing Sunnis for the sake of uplifting Twelver Shi'ism and the Safawid dynasty became one of the major characteristics of Safawid history. Much of the Sunni population fled from Iran to such lands as still adhered to their own faith. One of the major centers of 'religious asylum' prior to its conquest by the Safawids was Khurasan, where the Timurid capital of Herat offered relative safety. Later on, the Ozbeg capital at Bukhara became the Sunni sanctuary.³¹

The Ozbegs were a Turkic people who gained increasing power in the fifteenth century. Between the years 1428 and 1430-32 A.D., they established themselves in Khwarazm and in the "area east of the central and Southern Urals to the mouth of the Jaxartes river on the Aral Sea."³² In 1507 A.D. the Ozbegs were able to destroy the Timurids, but their ambitions to establish an empire on the Persian plateau were checked by the Safawids. In December of 1510 A.D., Shah Isma'il I cut down the Ozbeg leader Muhammad Shaybani, a descendant of Genghiz Khan, in the region of Khurasan and was thus able to secure the land for Twelver Shi'ism.³³ The Ozbeg threat did not disappear, however, and the Safawids were faced with continuous Ozbeg intrigues in the east while facing the threat of Ottoman invasions from the west.

The Ottomans, descendants of Turcoman tribes which had migrated from Central Asia into Asia Minor and had gained power and land under the Seljuks, took their name from the primary founder of their dynasty, Osman I (1299-1326).³⁴ Through their energetic *ghazis*, or holy warriors, the Ottomans became the supreme rulers of a vast empire stretching from Mesopotamia in the east to Hungary and Albania in the west. Constantinople, taken on May 29, 1453 by Muhammad II, 'The Conqueror' (1451-1481), became the capital of the empire, Istanbul, and was transformed into a sophisticated Islamic urban center in which the Ottomans took great pride.³⁵ In 1516-17 the Ottoman Sultan Selim I (r. 1512-1520) overcame the Mamluks, the orthodox rulers and defenders of the faith whose capital was in Egypt, and gained control of the holiest sanctuaries of Islam, Mecca and Medina. At the same time the Ottomans conquered Syria, Egypt and the Hijaz, and the Ottoman sultan became the supreme Islamic figurehead and upholder of orthodoxy.³⁶ The protection of the holy sites of pilgrimage and warring against 'infidels' became an Ottoman religious duty and a source of increased political influence.

As the Ottomans expanded west and northwest in order to combat 'infidel' Christians, they often left behind an unprotected eastern frontier threatened by the rising Safawid power. They were thus forced to open a second front and to attempt to suppress their adversaries. Distance and unfavorable conditions limited Ottoman advances to Vienna in the west and Tabriz in the east. Before realizing the serious effects of these disadvantages, however, the Ottomans were to suffer many losses and defeats; only after their second siege and retreat from

Vienna in 1683, did they feel compelled to sign a peace treaty with the western powers. In the east the struggle was long and fraught with danger. In the words of Norman Itzkowitz,

The Ottomans had long opposed the development of any powerful state on their eastern flank. In defense of this flank, Bajazet I had clashed with Timur, Mohammad the Conqueror had destroyed Uzun Hasan, and Selim I and Suleiman had campaigned long and hard against the Safavids. In the case of the Safavids, the danger was twofold, political and religious.

The Safavids had indeed used religious propaganda to move the nomadic and peasant populations of Eastern Anatolia against the Ottomans. Writing in Turkish under the pen-name of Khata'i, Shah Isma'il I popularised poems of a fervent Shi'i nature among his own *Qizilbash* (Safavid Turkish warriors who formed the mainstay of the army) troops, and the discontented Shi'i elements of Anatolia. Relying on Sufi esoteric language, Khata'i came close to declaring his own divinity while asserting the superiority and purity of 'Ali. 'Ali is given the titles of *Shah* and *Bahr al-haqiqat*, 'the Sea of Reality or Truth', and precedes even the Prophet in importance; 'Ali is the Creator whose attributes are described in the following verse,

His names are a thousand, his aspects,
(*sifat*) a million, the day and night
revolve by his order. One of his
names is 'Ali, but he is the
Demiurge (*kardigar*). Heaven and
Earth hold firm through his word.³⁸

Another verse contains a direct attack on all Sunnis,

Those who do not recognize 'Ali as
Truth (or "God") are absolute
unbelievers. They have no creed,
no faith, and are not Muslims.³⁹

In his own turn, Sultan Selim I who was also a poet, composed mainly in Persian,⁴⁰ thus also using literature as a tool of politico-religious propaganda. The Ottomans further carried out the policy of hunting down, deporting and 'executing' suspected Shi'i supporters within their empire. Before Sultan Selim I set out on his campaign against Shah Isma'il in 1514, he is reported to have killed 40,000 eastern Anatolians.⁴¹

Though basically coreligionists who are supposed to aid and support one another, the Ottomans and the Safawids were actually mortal enemies. Religion was used as the excuse for political expansion and conquest. Since the Qu'ran issues repeated injunctions against infighting between Muslims,

And hold fast,
 All together by the Rope
 Which God stretches out
 For you, and be not divided
 Among yourselves,

(III: 103)

both groups were aware of their transgressions and sought justification in legal-religious opinions and arguments. The war between Ottomans and Safawids became one between Sunnism and Shi'ism. Thus, each faction attacked the other as a heretic and dissident group. The Safawids cursed the caliphs who had usurped authority from *ahl al-bayt*, while the Ottomans considered the Messianic notion of the Mahdi and the sacrosanctity of 'Ali and his descendants as pure heresy. As an answer to the Safawid practice of ritual cursing, Ottoman religious opinion issued by *Shaykh al-Islam*, the leading spiritual authority, argued in these terms,

If the schismatics of Persia (May God abandon them) who live in the land of Persia under the rule of the sons of Shah Isma'il consider as disbelievers those who recognize Abu Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthman as rightful caliphs, and they themselves hold the rest after 'Ali as possessors of nobility (May God's approbation be upon them)...and if they consider them [the first three caliphs] as apostates and backbiters' and openly curse and vilify them while considering themselves devout and believe that the killing of Muslims who are the people of the Sunnah is canonically lawful...the place where these cursers and believers of such things live, is it the Abode of War?⁴²

The response to this hypothetical question was, of course, in the affirmative. Such opinions moved the 'people of the Sunna' against a new category of infidels, the Safawids, in what amounted to a holy war, or *jihad*.

In this ongoing struggle for legitimacy and supremacy the Safawids relied heavily on their lineage and descent, constructing elaborate family trees to assert and prove their possession of the 'Muhammadan Light' and the right to rule. Their honorific titles, such as *shahenshah* 'king of kings' and the 'representatives of the Mahdi' or the 'Shadow of God on Earth'; are a reflection of their wish to impose their position and superiority. For the same purpose, the Ottomans took on the epithets of 'the Imam of the Age', 'Inheritor of the Great Caliphate', or 'Protector of the Exalted Imamate'. The Ottomans further claimed that they had attained these titles by "the will of God" who had made them the protectors of the "Two Respected Holy Places", Mecca and Medina.⁴³ That these titles were themselves considered effective tools in spreading the influence of a monarch is

reflected in the appearance of Shah Isma'il's name and honorifics in Baghdad and Kazimayn which, after the battle of Chaldiran in 1514, came under Ottoman control.⁴⁴ Gaston Wiet explains the significance of inscribed titles in the following words:

Political frontiers as we know them never existed in the Islamic East, where the desire for conquest was the basis of foreign relations, so that even in their inscriptions Islamic sovereigns felt obliged to affirm firmly their seizure of future conquests. Consequently, Persia should not mean, in a historical study, merely the country outlined on a modern map, but a far more inclusive area, determined by the influence exerted by the reigning Persian sovereign, and defined for each period primarily by inscriptions.⁴⁵

Thus, an inscription of the name of a monarch is used as evidence of his authority. In certain cases a new ruling dynasty would take over the constructions of an overthrown class and add to them the names and titles of the new monarch. The inscriptions in the *Masjid-i Shah* in which Muhammad Shah al-Ghazi (1834-1848) is designated as the builder of the Royal Mosque,⁴⁶ are therefore, a symbolic affirmation of the conquest and rule of the Qajar dynasty (1779-1925), which had formerly been among the Safawids' *Qizilbash* forces.

ψ A more spectacular and effective device in the assertion of a conquering dynasty's prestige is architecture. The Dome of the Rock at Jerusalem (completed in 691-92) stands as the earliest example of the imposition of foreign, in this case Islamic, rule over a sophisticated and wealthy population. Built on a site with ancient symbolic associations, the Dome of the Rock was embellished with epigraphs which assert the superiority of the new faith over the earlier Jewish and

Christian ones in the city.⁴⁷ Other examples, such as the desert bath of Qusayr'Amra in Transjordan, the round city of Baghdad or the Quwat al-Islam Mosque in Delhi, also demonstrate what Oleg Grabar has explained as "the presence in a precise physical area of the new faith and of the empire which embodied it." In some cases the constructions "went beyond 'presence' into a sort of affirmation of possession or rather of appropriation."⁴⁸

In the Quwat al-Islam Mosque the 'symbolic appropriation of the land' is evidenced by the use of rubble masonry for speed in execution, the choice of the site of an old Hindu temple and the adaptation of indigenous symbolic pillars as marks of the ascendancy of the conquering Ghurid dynasty.⁴⁹ Furthermore, the presence and power of the new rulers are reaffirmed by the epigraphs, both Qur'an and *hadith*, of which verses XVII: 80-81 state

80 - Say: "O my Lord!
Let my entry be
By the Gate of Truth
And Honour, and likewise
My exit by the Gate
Of Truth and Honour;
And grant me
from Thy Presence
An authority to aid (me)."

81 - And say "Truth has (now)
Arrived and Falsehood perished:
For Falsehood is (by its nature)
Bound to perish."⁵⁰

(XVII: 80-81)

Similar tendencies and assertions are to be found in the construction and epigraphic decoration of the *Masjid-i Shah* at Isfahan. The mosque itself stands as a reflection of the motivations behind the policies of Shah 'Abbas, and particularly, those policies which pertain to relations

with the Ottomans.

The construction of the *Masjid-i Shah* was begun in 1611-12, about thirteen or fourteen years after Isfahan was made capital of Iran, and marks the completion of the initial grand scheme of the *Naqsh-e Jahan* district. The shift of capital was itself a political gesture. Isfahan provided Shah 'Abbas with a convenient location from which to conduct his campaigns against the Ozbegs in the north-east and the Ottomans in the west, while exerting his influence over the commercial and diplomatic activities in the Persian Gulf. Placing his capital in the vicinity of the Ottoman border also demonstrates Shah 'Abbas' confidence "that the frontier would ultimately be made secure."⁵¹ At the same time the Shah was closer to the province of Baghdad where many of the Twelver Imams are buried. The relocation of the capital can, therefore, be interpreted as a confident step in spreading the influence of *Ithna 'Ashari* Shi'ism over Sunni lands, and in threatening the neighboring Ottoman regime. The grand schemes for the construction of the 'New Isfahan' may thus be compared to the Ottoman gesture of establishing their own capital in a threatening position on the European side of the Bosphorous, at Edirne, early in the fifteenth century, and their building there of numerous magnificent mosques.⁵²

The strength and influence of a ruling power is reflected in the wealth, prosperity and architecture of its capital. When the Ottomans transformed Constantinople into their capital Istanbul in 1453, they embellished the previously Christian capital with a vast amount of Islamic architecture. The Ottoman pride in Istanbul is reflected in the verses of the seventeenth century Ottoman poet, Nabi:

We have not seen its peer in any land
It has none, save perhaps in Paradise.

The threshold of the Ottoman Sultanate
The delight of the imperial realm...

There is no land or city that is like it
No place to live than can compare with it.⁵³

Intriguingly close to these words, especially the first couplet, is the common seventeenth century Iranian saying, *Isfahan nisf-i Jahan*, 'Isfahan is half the world', the other half being understood as Paradise.⁵⁴ Pride in Isfahan and, more important, incessant competition with the Ottoman capital, are reflected in the vast architectural program of Shah 'Abbas and the speedy construction of the mosque which was to be the Shah's crowning statement as a Shi'i monarch. In his *History of Shah 'Abbas*, the *Tarikh-e Alamara-ye 'Abbas-i* (literally, 'Abbas the Embellisher of the World), the seventeenth century chronicler Eskandar Beg Monshi describes the construction of the Royal Mosque and the general standing of Isfahan in contemporary Iranian thought. Speaking in 1020-21 A.H. (1611-13), Monshi states,

This year, Shah 'Abbas conceived the idea of building a great mosque adjacent to the Naqs-e Jahan square in Isfahan - a mosque which would be without equal in Iran and possibly in the entire civilized world. Shah 'Abbas had made the city of Isfahan like a paradise with charming buildings, parks in which the perfume of the flowers uplifted the spirit, and streams and gardens. He had already built a mosque and a theological seminary on the eastern and northern sides of the square, respectively, but he was dissatisfied with these. Just as the city of Isfahan was the envy of other cities in respect of its residential buildings, its *Qeysariya*, its *caravanserais*, and its markets, and called to mind the Koranic verses: "Eram, possessor of lofty buildings, the like of which have not been created in these regions, the Shah wanted its mosques, seminaries, and pious foundations

also to be the finest of their kind in Iran, and to rival the temple at Mecca and the mosque at Jerusalem.

The site selected by the Shah for the new mosque was the south side of the square, where stood a large caravanserai. This was demolished, and at a propitious hour determined by the astrologers from the examination of the royal horoscope, skilled architects and engineers, each of whom claimed to be without peer in the science of engineering, laid the foundations of the mosque and the sanctuary and the master craftsmen set to work. By an extraordinary coincidence, a marble quarry, the existence of which had been previously unknown, was discovered near Isfahan. The hand of providence must have kept it hidden from prying eyes so that it might be available for use in this mosque. Its discovery is a clear sign and manifest indication of the Shah's faith, and his standing in the eyes of the Heavenly Architect. It enabled blocks of this marble, of a size, length, breadth, and color rarely seen anywhere in the world, to be used to adorn this second temple of Mecca. Indeed, the chronogram for the laying of the foundation of this mosque is "A second Kaaba has been built". I pray that this great mosque may be completed in accordance with the plans of its founder, and that the people of this realm may for years to come worship in it under the protection of this great king. May he be rewarded for this act both now and in the hereafter, and may it bring him long life and the stability of his kingdom, and may he be spared to perform other beneficent works and to establish other pious foundations. In the name of the Prophet, and of 'Ali, and of the holy family of the Prophet, Amen, O Lord of the Worlds.⁵⁵

Since Monshi was one of the chief secretaries (*monshi-ye azim*) of Shah 'Abbas his words, though couched with extravagant phrases, reflect the Shah's views towards his mosque. Isfahan itself is described as a paradise with no peer in the world, not even Mecca or Jerusalem. The Royal Mosque was to be a rival even to these sanctuaries. In the

chronogram which commemorates the commencement of work on the mosque, the Royal Mosque is boldly described as a 'Second Ka'ba'. It will be remembered that in 1516-17 the Ottomans, by virtue of their victory over the Mamluks, had become the guardians of the 'Two Respected Holy Places', Mecca and Medina, and shortly thereafter had added Jerusalem to their conquests.⁵⁶ Since the possession and maintenance of these sanctuaries is a matter of utmost prestige, the Ottomans could claim supremacy over the Safawids. Shah 'Abbas, in combating these claims and striving to maintain his own legitimacy as a descendant of the Imams and the 'Shadow of God on Earth', planned the construction of a new holy sanctuary, a 'second Ka'ba'. Thus a rival holy sanctuary and a rival capital were created in a Shi'i environment.

Monshi also awards special attention to the moment of commencement of work, a propitious moment determined by the astrologers. Like the popular words used to commemorate the birth dates of kings, "under a happy astral conjunction", Monshi's assertion is more an attempt to influence fate than a statement of fact.⁵⁷ The building of a Shi'i sanctuary is an act of piety deserving both temporal and spiritual rewards. The 'Heavenly Architect's' pleasure with Shah 'Abbas' faith and conduct is evidenced (according to Monshi) by the discovery of a marble quarry which was instrumental in adding a unique finishing touch to the mosque. Most important is the hope that the Royal Mosque would bring about the 'stability of the kingdom', victory over the Ottomans.

Monshi also informs the reader that prior to the construction of the Royal Mosque, the *Maydan* was embellished with a mosque on its east side. The Shah, however, was not satisfied with the existing

mosque and proceeded to create a larger and more conspicuous one, in as short an amount of time as possible. The best architects and artists were recruited for the task, but the time element dictated such short-cuts as the use of *haft rang-i*, seven color painted tiles instead of the more time consuming mosaic tile decorative techniques.⁵⁸ The chief architect Abu al-Qasim warned the Shah about the danger of the shaky foundations, but ignoring this advice, the Shah pressed for speed.⁵⁹ The mosque was completed five years later in 1616.

The haste in construction indicates the Shah's wishes to make of Isfahan a rival capital in a Shi'i realm. His decision to build the *Masjid-i Shah* came only three years after the Ottomans began the construction of the Sultan Ahmed Jami', the celebrated Blue Mosque at Istanbul, in 1609.⁶⁰ The *Masjid-i Shah* was to be a counter-statement, a rebuttal to the Sunni argument, and a supreme assertion of the influence of *Ithna 'Ashari* Shi'ism. It has been described as a "hastily constructed" structure where the "overall and overwhelming first impression is [what matters]; it is a building that was created as a proclamation of conviction and not as a refined jewel-box."⁶¹

Among the events of 1022-23/1613-15, Monshi records the arrival of an Ottoman embassy at Isfahan. Mostafa Pasha, the new Ottoman ambassador, submitted several peace proposals to the Shah who found them flawed but nevertheless agreed to disregard details and press for peace.⁶² In 1616, the Ottomans attacked the province of Erivan and were forced to retreat and resume negotiations.⁶³ It is no great surprise that the portal epigraphs of the *Masjid-i Shah*, inscribed in the same year, declare the mosque as an equal to *al-Aqsa* mosque at

Jerusalem and proclaim

There is a mosque whose foundation
 Was laid from the first day
 On piety; it is more worthy
 Of thy standing forth (for prayer)
 Therein. In it are men who
 Love to be purified; and God
 Loveth those who make themselves pure,⁶⁴ (IX: 108)

thus implying that the mosque of piety belonging to the Shah, would be instrumental in defeating the builders of the mosques of impiety and disbelief. It is also a matter of great significance that the same *sura* from which the inscription is taken begins with a declaration of war upon pagans (IX: 1-3).

The construction of the *Masjid-i Shah* is to be seen, therefore, as the establishment of a rival sanctuary to those out of 'Abbas' reach and a threat to Istanbul. The inscriptions and structure of the Royal Mosque are an open declaration of war upon all those who do not recognize 'Ali, past and present, and specifically the Ottomans.

FOOTNOTES

¹ A discussion of the role and setting of the mosque is to be found in Elisseef, "Physical Layout", *The Islamic City*, ed. R.B. Serjeant, UNESCO, France, 1980. Hereafter, *The Islamic City*. pp. 90-103.

² Anthony Welch, *Shah 'Abbas and the Arts of Isfahan*. The Asia Society, New York 1973, p. 20. Hereafter, Welch, *Shah 'Abbas*. Arthur Upham Pope and Phyllis Ackerman, eds. *A Survey of Persian Art*, vol. III, Tokyo, 1964, p. 1186. Hereafter, Pope, *Survey*.

³ Eskandar Beg Monshi, *Tarikh-e 'Alamara-ye 'Abbasi* (History of Shah 'Abbas the Great), trans. Savory, Westview Press, Inc., Colorado, 1978. Vol. II, p. 725. Hereafter, Monshi.

⁴ L. Hunarfar, *Gonjaneh Athar Tarikhi Isfahan* (A Treasure of the Historical Monuments of Isfahan), Tehran, 1965, pp. 429-30. Hereafter, Hunarfar.

⁵ There were only two donors, Shah 'Abbas and Muhibb 'Ali. The latter reportedly donated the largest piece of land for the *waqf*. McChesney, "Waqf and Public Policy: The Waqfs of Shah 'Abbas 1011-1023/1602-1614", *Asian and African Studies*, 15, 1981, p. 179. Hereafter, McChesney.

⁶ R. Savory, *Iran Under the Safavids*. Cambridge University Press, Great Britain 1980, pp. 154-55. Hereafter, Savory. Monshi, vol. II, pp. 954; 1189-90. Shaykh Baha'i is discussed in more detail under East Pillared Hall.

⁷ *Isfahan nisf-i Jahan* or 'Isfahan is half the world' is a popular description of the city. Savory, p. 154.

⁸ Monshi, vol. II, p. 724.

⁹ John E. Woods, *The Agguyunlu: Clan, Confederation, Empire*, Bibliotheca Islamica, Minneapolis and Chicago, 1976, pp. 173-84.

¹⁰ Savory, pp. 5-11.

¹¹ Savory, p. 27. In 1501 A.D.

¹² S.H.M. Jafri, *Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam*, Librairie du Liban, Beirut and Longman Group Ltd., London and New York, 1979, the chapter on *Saqifa*, pp. 27-57. Hereafter, Jafri. *Saqifa* literally means 'covered porch'.

¹³ Generally, the Rightfully Guided caliphates include that of 'Ali and differentiate the early years of Islam from the subsequent establishment of the hereditary system of the Umayyads.

¹⁴ J.L. Michon, "Religious Institutions", *The Islamic City*, pp.13-40.

¹⁵ Imitation is allowed if a person receives guidance from the *mujtahid* while the latter is alive. 'Allamah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i, *Shi'ite Islam*, trans. and ed. Seyyed Husayn Nasr, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1975, p. 104. Hereafter, al-Tabataba'i.

¹⁶ Seyyed Hussein Nasr, *Ideals and Realities of Islam*, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, 1966, p. 156. Hereafter, Nasr.

¹⁷ Seyyed Hussein Nasr's Introduction to a *Shi'ite Anthology*, eds., William C. Chittick and 'Allamah Tabataba'i, Muhammadi Trust, London, 1980, p. 7; discussion of Shi'i *Hadith*, pp. 5-11. Hereafter, *Anthology*.

¹⁸ The four Imams are, 'Ali Zayn al-'Abidin, known as al-Sajjad (678-712), has a corpus of prayers known as *al-Sahifat al-sajjadiyyah* (The Scroll of al-Sajjad); Muhammad al-Baqir (675-732); Ja'far al-Sadiq (702-765) - from whom more traditions are recorded than all the other imams together; and Musa al-Kazim (744-799). To 'Ali is of course attributed the controversial and celebrated *Nahj al-Balaghah*. *Ibid*, pp.9;138.

¹⁹ All Qur'anic references are based on 'Abdallah Yousuf 'Ali's *The Glorious Qur'an*, The Call of Islam Society, Libyan Arab Republic, 1973. Hereafter, Yousuf 'Ali. The remainder of the verse (III: 7)

But no one knows
Its hidden meanings except God.
And those who are firmly grounded
In knowledge say: "We believe
In the Book: the whole of it
Is from our Lord:" and none
Will grasp the Message
Except men of understanding

is further proof of the existence of an elite group: the Imams who can interpret the Qur'an.

²⁰ Shi'ism also uses other verses (than III: 7) and some *hadith* to support the existence and complexity of esotericism within the Qur'an; al-Tabataba'i, pp. 94-101.

²¹ Authorities differ in determining the dates of the sixth Imam; al-Tabataba'i, p. 202, gives 83-140/702-757; Jafri, p. 259, gives 80/699-700 and 83/703-704 as birth years and supports the former; *Anthology*, p. 138, gives 83-148/702-765. These divergences are due to discrepancies in the original sources such as Ya'qubi, Ma'udi, and Kulayni.

²² See note 21 above.

²³ These dates are based on *Anthology*, pp. 137-40.

²⁴ These words are attributed to the Prophet and quoted in al-Tabataba'i, p. 211.

²⁵ al-Tabataba'i, pp. 75-85, where other Shi'i sects such as the Batinis, Nizaris, etc. are discussed. The revolution of Zayd is discussed in Jafri, pp. 265f.

²⁶ Jafri, p. 228. The Hanafi mahdi was called Muhammad b. al-Hanafiyya, and is not considered a descendant of the Prophet.

²⁷ Jafri, p. 294. In reverse order.

²⁸ Savory, p. 27. Monshi, Vol. I, p. 13 where the Safawid genealogical table is listed.

²⁹ Seyyid Muhammad Kazim Imam, author of *Mashhad-i Tus*, Tehran, 1345/1969 - as quoted in McChesney, p. 183. Today, the Shafi'i school, which distrusts *ra'y*, covers Egypt, Hijaz, South Arabia, East and Meridional Africa and part of Southeast Asia, Michon, "Religious Institutions", *The Islamic City*, pp. 21-22.

³⁰ Savory, pp. 27-28.

³¹ Savory, "Safavid Persia", *Cambridge History of Islam*, eds., Holt, Lambton and Lewis, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1970, vol. 1A, p. 398. Hereafter, *Cambridge History of Islam*.

- ³² Spuler, "The Disintegration of the Caliphate in the East", *Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 1A, pp. 173-74.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, p. 174.
- ³⁴ Norman Itzkowitz, *Ottoman Empire and Islamic Tradition*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1972, pp. 10-11. Hereafter, Itzkowitz.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 25-27.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 33.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 68. The dates of the mentioned events are, respectively; 1402, 1473, 1514, and 1533-35/1548-49.
- ³⁸ V. Minorsky, "The Poetry of Shah Isma'ili", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 10, 1940-4, p. 1026a. Hereafter, Minorsky.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1047a.
- ⁴⁰ E.G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1969, vol. IV, p. 12. Hereafter, Browne. Browne saw this predilection of each monarch for his enemy's language as "a remarkable fact", while Minorsky, pp. 1007a-1008a, considers Isma'il's use of Turkish simply as a means of popularising his poems among the *Qizilbash*.
- ⁴¹ Itzkowitz, p. 32.
- ⁴² Quoted in Itzkowitz, p. 69.
- ⁴³ Halil Inalcik, "The Rise of the Ottoman Empire", *Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 1A, pp. 321-22.
- ⁴⁴ Gaston Wiet, "The Arabic Inscriptions of Persia", *Pope, Survey*, vol. IV, pp. 1786-77.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1785.
- ⁴⁶ Hunarfar, p. 460; dated 1261 A.H.

⁴⁷ Oleg Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1973, pp. 48-67. Hereafter, Grabar, *Formation*; Grabar, "The Umayyad Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem", *Ars Orientalis*, vol. III, 1959, pp. 33-62. Hereafter, Grabar, "Dome of the Rock".

⁴⁸ Grabar, *Formation*, p. 72.

⁴⁹ Anthony Welch, "The Hawz Khass Madrasa", lecture delivered at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 23 January 1983, Victoria, B. C., Canada.

⁵⁰ These verses were revealed after the Prophet's conquest of Mecca in 630 A.D. Translations of the epigraphs in the Quwat al-Islam are from M.A. Husain, *A Record of All the Qur'anic and Non-Historical Epigraphs on the Protected Monuments in the Delhi Province*, Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India, no. 47, Calcutta 1936.

⁵¹ Savory, p. 155.

⁵² The Üch Sherefeli Jami', for example, was built in 1438. Later on, between 1569-75, the architect Sinan built his masterpiece, the Mosque of Selim II, at Edirne. Information about the mosques is from Richard Ettinghausen, "The Man-made Setting", *The World of Islam*, ed. Bernard Lewis, Thames and Hudson, London, 1976, p. 66. Hereafter, *World of Islam*.

⁵³ Quoted in Itzkowitz, p. 28, from Bernard Lewis, *Istanbul and the Civilization of the Ottoman Empire*, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, Oklahoma 1963, pp. 98-100.

⁵⁴ Savory, p. 154.

⁵⁵ Monshi, vol. II, pp. 1038-39. The Qur'anic verse is from LXXXIX: 8-9. The chronogram yields the year 1021 A.H. which corresponds to 1611-12 A.D.

⁵⁶ Itzkowitz, p. 33.

⁵⁷ Gaston Wiet, "The Arabic Inscriptions of Persia", *Pope, Survey*, vol. IV, p. 1792.

⁵⁸ Mosaic tiles are used in limited areas such as the minars.

⁵⁹ Savory, p. 162.

60 Norman Itzkowitz, "The Ottoman Empire", *World of Islam*,
p. 295.

61 Welch, *Shah 'Abbas*, pp. 18-19.

62 Monshi, vol. II, pp. 1076-77.

63 *Ibid.*, pp. 1119-1127.

64 Hunarfar, pp. 429-31.

CHAPTER TWO

THE MASJID-I SHAH

In fulfilment of Shah 'Abbas' wishes, the Royal Mosque was basically complete by 1616 A.D. From the same year dates a monumental *thuluth* inscription which adorns the main portal and entrance to the Royal Mosque. Of the numerous¹ other inscriptions in the mosque, some of which are undated, none seem to be as early as that of the portal. The majority are at least a decade later and the process of epigraphic embellishment continues long after Shah 'Abbas' demise and the fall of the Safawid dynasty.²

The entire body of inscriptions has been published in Lutfallah Hunarfar's *Ganjinah-yi asar-i tarikhi-yi Isfahan* (A Treasure of Historical Monuments of Isfahan) published in 1350/1965, which forms the main tool for this study. The epigraphs are in both Arabic and Persian. In the latter category fall a number of religious poems as well as various decrees (*firman*s) issued by the reigning monarch.³

With few exceptions, this study deals with the Arabic epigraphs⁴ completed during Shah 'Abbas' lifetime and dating from 1616-1629.⁵ These epigraphs are dispersed throughout the mosque, appearing in the eyvans, domes, mihrabs, prayer halls and minars. They offer two types of information, secular-historical and religious-iconic. The secular-historical epigraphs are essential for ascertaining the political history of the mosque: its patron, builder and its date of foundation, the particular historical moment to which it belongs. Due to their importance for the placement of the Royal Mosque in a precise position on a

chronological table, these epigraphs appear in many recent surveys of Iranian architecture.⁶

In the *Masjid-i Shah* the religious-iconic⁷ epigraphs are far more abundant than the secular ones. They are composed of poetry,⁸ Qur'anic verses, and *hadith*, both *nabawi* and *walawi*. In certain instances, as in the north eyvan, the Qur'anic quotations stand independently. The more prevalent procedure, however, is the incorporation of verses from the Qur'an into a body of *hadith*. This tendency indicates that neither the Qur'anic quotations nor the *hadith* are to be studied separately. Rather, they are 'commentaries and elucidations of one another',⁹ to be interpreted in the context of the socio-political and religious situation in which they arose and to be applied to the contemporary situation in which they are used. As such, the epigraphs of the *Masjid-i Shah* constitute a valuable document for the exploration of Shah 'Abbas' ideologies and his propaganda tactics.

One basic theme, the legitimacy and supremacy of 'Ali and *ahl al-bayt*, appears throughout the mosque. This basic confirmation, with its implied associations with the House of Safawi, is stated under several guises, overt and covert. Repetition is an essential factor in the propagation of religious and political ideals, and is a major characteristic of the *Masjid-i Shah* epigraphs. Thus, if the interpretation of these epigraphs appears laboriously repetitive at times, it is in keeping with the intended nature and purpose of the mosque.

Following the premise that art historical documents are a reflection of the society which creates them, I used the epigraph as a tool for the unfolding of a chapter in Iranian history. At several

points pauses and digressions serve to elucidate the main themes and reflect upon certain factors involved in the creation of the Royal Mosque. Thus, information pertaining to seventeenth century Iranian theologians, the social standing of Christians in Isfahan or impositions placed upon them, details of Shi'i religious doctrine and practice, is incorporated within the larger context of Shi'i-Sunni, Safawid-Ottoman conflict.

In translating the *hadith*, I have attempted to preserve the character of the original by rendering the closest intended meaning, at times substituting simple phrases for complex and enigmatic ones. Wherever possible the study of a *hadith* has been divided into three major parts; A - Epigraph, being the English translation of the text; B - Analysis, the study of the text and, in the case of Qur'anic quotations, its original context and meaning; and C - Interpretation; the application of the inscription to its contemporary milieu. In parts B and C references are made to additional textual evidence (Qur'an and *hadith*) which are not to be confused with the inscribed texts presented in part A.

Several of the inscribed *hadith* are composed of two or more sections describing different occurrences and events. In such cases the *hadith* has been subdivided into constituent parts (under the heading A) denoted by miniscule characters (a, b, etc...). Whenever pertinent, each of the subdivisions has been treated according to the procedure described above. In instances where inscriptions or subdivisions are extremely short, they are discussed in conjunction with a major inscription or, where warranted, independently but with parts B and C,

Analysis and Interpretation, cojoined.

The Portal Minars

A. Epigraph

The portal minars of the Royal Mosque, each 110 feet high,¹⁰ carry the same inscriptions, (figs. 6-8). The epigraphs are executed in *thuluth* and *kufic* scripts and read:¹¹

highest register: God and His Angels
 Send blessings on the Prophet
 O, ye who believe!
 Send ye blessings on him
 And
 Say: "Praise be to God,
 Who begets no son,
 Nor needs He any
 To protect Him from humiliation:
 Yea, magnify Him
 For his greatness and glory!"

second register: Allah (God)

third register: Akbar (is Great)
 There is no god but God
 Muhammad is the Messenger of God.

 Say: He is God,
 The One and Only;
 God, the Eternal, Absolute;
 He begetteth not,
 Nor is He begotten;
 And there is none
 Like unto Him.

B. Analysis

The first inscription, executed in *thuluth* script and placed below clusters of *Muqarnas* (architectural decorative and symbolic devices known as 'stalactites') is composed of two verses. The first is from XXXIII: 56 and usually ends with

And salute him
 With all respect.

(XXXIII: 56)

In the inscription only the 'And' has been retained in order to link the first verse with the second. The second verse is from *sura XVII, al-Isra'* or the Night Journey (also known as Bani-Isra'il). It is not used here in reference to the Prophet's Ascension, but as a definition of the attributes of God. Again, part of the verse proclaiming

And has no partner
In His dominion (XVII: 111)

has been dropped.¹²

On a circular band beneath the verse is repeated the word *Allah* which stands independently but is followed, on a lower level, by *Akbar*, thus forming the formula 'God is Great' (see fig. 7). From the word *Akbar* the inscription spirals down to the profession of faith, the *shahada* 'There is no god but God (XXXVII: 35) and Muhammad is the Messenger of God.' The epigraph then continues with *sura CXII Ikhlas* (Purity of Faith) which is composed of four verses and presented in its complete form.¹³

The inscriptions define the nature of God and identify the vehicle by which His attributes were made known to man; the Prophet Muhammad who spread the message of Islam. The Unity and Uncreatedness of God are the main themes of the epigraphs. They attack the polytheistic beliefs of pre-Islamic Arabia, which can be divided into two groups. One group acknowledged the existence of a number of equal gods while the other acknowledged a superior god, *Allah*, and a number of lesser ones.¹⁴ The second group was prevalent in Arabia at the time that Muhammad began spreading his message. *Allah* was the supreme deity to whom the tribal gods and goddesses, such as *Manat*, *Uzza* and *Allat*,

were subordinated.¹⁵

The epigraphs also attack Christianity by denying the possibility of a 'son of God', for "He begetteth not, nor is He begotten" (CXII: 3). The verses act, therefore, as a point of differentiation between the true monotheistic religion and polytheistic ones, Christianity and Paganism. The significance of these verses as proclamations of Islam is also indicated by their use in the Dome of the Rock at Jerusalem.¹⁶

C. Interpretation

The inscriptions of the portal minars are an attestation of faith and a profession of Islam. They perform the function of the *shahada* (the Muslim's first attestation of Islam) which is repeated in the *adhan*, or call to prayer. The *mu'adhdhin* (one who calls the people to prayer), however, rarely, if ever, uses the minars for this purpose. In Iran a *goldasteh* (a small 'ciborium') was used for the *adhan*¹⁷ (fig. 16). Therefore, though connected with the *adhan* through their inscribed repetition of the call, the minars perform a primarily symbolic function.

The minarets act as 'lighthouses' which draw believers toward the mosque, and hence toward God. They also mark the position of the mosque and identify the form of worship practiced within it. The minars assert the presence of Islam in a city,¹⁸ and proclaim its superiority over all other religions. These functions are expressed in the portal minars of the Royal Mosque by means of both architectural form and epigraphic decoration. The epigraphs reiterate the repetitive and recitative uses of the profession of faith, and support another symbolic interpretation of the shape of the minars.

The vertical minars are seen as a visual representation of the most important attributes of God. They are likened to the *alef*, the first letter of the Arabic alphabet which is represented as a vertical stroke, as is the number one. *Alef* is the first letter of *Allah* and appears several times in the *shahada* where the unity of God is proclaimed.¹⁹ Thus, the minarets reiterate the Unity of God, His eternal Oneness and His creative powers. He is the One, Omnipotent, Omnipresent Creator. He brings forth and sustains all life.

This interpretation is apparent in the *Masjid-i Shah* minars where the chosen inscriptions and their placement repeat the same message. The verses proclaim the unity, greatness and power of God. The formula 'God is Great' is also fragmented in such a way as to allow the word *Allah* to stand alone at an elevated position, and to be seen from all sides (fig. 8). The symbolic and functional aspects of the minars are thus clarified through the use of the most relevant of forms, the Word with which God created the *Qur'an*.²⁰

The Portal

The portal of the Royal Mosque is directed on a north-south axis (fig. 1), opening up onto the *maydan* and directly facing the *Qeyseriyya*, the portal of the royal bazaar. The mosque's orientation is shifted towards Mecca through the vaulted vestibule which extends from the entrance to the court or *sahn* of the mosque (fig. 4). It is the portal, however, which marks the transition point between the profane world and the World of God. The transformation is implemented by a series of epigraphs belonging to each of these worlds, falling

into the categories of secular-historical and religious-iconic proclamations.

These inscriptions are the worshiper's first introduction to the Royal Mosque. By necessity, they must provide all the information necessary for a deeper appreciation of what lies within. Thus, they define the spiritual nature of the *Masjid-i Shah* and identify its creators: the patron and builders. The secular inscriptions, since they provide the historical setting of the mosque, will be dealt with first, followed by the series of epigraphs which give the mosque its specific religious identity. A number of additional epigraphs, placed at the sides of the entrance, will be discussed at the end of the section.

Historical-Secular Epigraphs

A. Epigraph

The historical inscriptions pertain to the construction of the mosque and require no interpretation. They are executed in white *thuluth* script over a blue background in two horizontal bands above the entrance (fig. 5). In the upper register Shah 'Abbas' name and titles are contrasted with those of the builders by virtue of their execution in light blue instead of white. The inscriptions read:

Upper register, a: The construction of this *Jami'* Mosque was ordained, through his own money, by the most noble in lineage of the sovereigns of the earth, the most honorable in descent, the greatest in status and rank, the strongest in argument and proof, the most complete in justice and beneficence, the dust of the holy threshold of the Prophet and the refuse of the pure court of 'Ali, ABU'L MUZAFFAR 'ABBAS AL-HUSAYNI AL-MUSAWI AL-SAFAWI BAHADUR KHAN. The necks of the

greatest khaqans are humbled at his door, and the foreheads of the most stately sultans are dusty from his footsteps. And he has dedicated the rewards of this pious deed to the soul of his grandfather, the greatest, the most honorable, the magnificent Shah Tahmasp, may God drench his tomb with the rain of His satisfaction and make his dwelling the loftiest chambers of Paradise.

Written by 'Ali Rida al-'Abbasi in the year 1025.²¹

Below the main inscription and in the same script though in smaller characters, is given the information pertaining to those responsible for the actual building of the mosque (fig. 7).

Lower register, b: With the help of God and His generous assistance, the construction of the mosque which, when Friday prayers are said in it, equals al-Aqsa Mosque in importance, has been completed. Double blessings on him who supervised the laying of its foundations (literally, the paving of its floors) and the elevation of its walls, most renowned among his peers, he remains true to his name, Muhibb 'Ali Beg Lala. Built by the prodigy among engineers, 'Ustad 'Ali Akbar al-Isfahani, under the auspices of him whom God honors greatly, Beg Lala, and they excelled in it (the construction).
Written by Muhammad Rida al-Imami.²²

B. Analysis - (Part a)

The formulae used to list the titles of the Shah and to extol his virtues are not new or unique to the *Masjid-i Shah*, but rather are the standardized forms of nomenclature.²³ In a mixture of "arrogance and humility"²⁴ Shah 'Abbas links himself with both Muhammad and 'Ali and claims superiority through his association with them. Even the dust of the holiest sanctuaries of Shi'ism, Medina and Najaf (in Iraq, where Imam 'Ali is buried),²⁵ is sacred. Thus, Shah 'Abbas, as a descendant

of these men, is also deserving of veneration. The Shah is entitled to and has the power of gaining the respect of the greatest kings.²⁶

The Shah's surnames are a further reminder of the accepted line of Safawid descent. *Al-Husayni* refers to his descent from Husayn, the third Shi'i Imam and grandson of the Prophet, who was martyred at Karbala in 680 A.D.²⁷ *Al-Musawi* refers to the seventh Imam Musa al-Kazim from whom the Safawids directly traced their lineage, while *al-Safawi* refers to the family name obtained from Shaykh Safi al-Din, founder of the *Safawiyya* order. These are the main exponents of the official 'family-tree' as set by the Safawids themselves. Despite the weak links in the line of descent, this genealogy is the main factor in the Safawid claim to temporal and religious rule.²⁸

The building of a mosque is a meritorious deed deserving of the rewards promised in the Qur'an:

Is there any Reward
For good - other than good? (LV: 60)

In the inscription Shah 'Abbas transfers the spiritual rewards (*thawab*) due to him for building a house of prayer, to his grandfather Shah Tahmasp (1514-1576). The transference of *thawab* for the building of mosques or the institution of religious endowments (*waqf*) was common Safawid practice.²⁹ The dedication to Shah Tahmasp is significant because of his role in stabilizing the empire. Tahmasp's reign was plagued with warfare, civil unrest, and treachery which forced him to imprison his brothers Alqas Mirza and Sam Mirza in the fortress of Qahaqaha.³⁰ At Tahmasp's death no suitable heir was available to replace him.

The reigns of Shah 'Abbas and Shah Tahmasp are separated by a period of twelve years punctuated by the rule of two inept kings. The first, Shah Isma'il II, crowned shah at the age of forty, had spent most of his life in imprisonment and was unfit to rule. He was assassinated about a year after his accession, in 1577.³¹

The second shah, Muhammad Khudabanda, crowned Sultan Muhammad Shah, was virtually blind, and a man of weak character. His wife, Queen Mahd-i 'Ulya, controlled the affairs of state while her eldest son, Hamza Mirza, was appointed *vakil*. The queen, however, was not on good terms with the *Qizilbash* chiefs, and they soon had her strangled.³² While the *Qizilbash* supported the Shah and his eldest son Hamza, other tribes (Shamlus and Ustajlus) supported the youngest son, 'Abbas Mirza. After a series of open revolts both Shah and son were killed and a leader of one of the battling factions, Murshid Quli Khan, took on the role of kingmaker and put the young 'Abbas, then fourteen years of age, on the throne of Iran.³³

Tahmasp had himself assumed the throne at a young age, when he was less than eleven years old. In both cases the 'kingmakers' assumed a position of power as the guardians of the shahs, yet both 'Abbas and Tahmasp were able to overcome and suppress the elements that wanted to wrench the control of the country from their hands, and both succeeded in bringing to Iran a degree of stability and independence. It is no great mystery then, that Shah 'Abbas should feel an affinity with his grandfather, nor that he should dedicate the Royal Mosque to the latter's soul. As will be seen, the two shahs are further linked by a series of political events that marked their individual reigns

and decided the destiny of their kingdom.

B. Analysis - (Part b)

In his description of the Royal Mosque, Eskandar Monshi expressed the Shah's wish for it "to rival the temple at Mecca and the mosque at Jerusalem."³⁴ Now this rivalry comes to life on the mosque itself, and by virtue of its elevated status, the patron (Shah 'Abbas), supervisor (Muhibb 'Ali) and chief-engineer (Ustad 'Ali Akbar) are also elevated in the eyes of God. For building such a holy sanctuary they are twice blessed, and their honor and rewards will be great. For such a great mosque only the best of craftsmen and engineers could possibly be employed, hence the complementary titles given them.

The name of the co-donor of the *waqf* of the Royal Mosque,³⁵ Muhibb 'Ali, literally translates into 'lover of 'Ali' or "'Ali's friend'. He is seen, therefore, as a devout Shi'i with a good Shi'i name which rightly represents his strong faith: 'he remains true to his name'. His title, Beg Lala, is that of the guardians of the *ghulams* (the young eunuchs in service at the court) of the Private Household,³⁶ and he is mentioned in Monshi's history of the year 1029/1620 as the person in charge of the administration of Isfahan's palaces,³⁷ so he was indeed a person of high rank.

Not only were these architects the best among their peers and thus best suited for the task of building a royal mosque and holy sanctuary, but as the inscription states, they also 'excelled in their accomplishment'. The Royal Mosque is thus advertised as the height of achievement and the fulfillment of the Shah's wishes: it is the mosque 'the like of which has not been created in the land', and which

rivals *al-Aqsa* mosque in splendor.

The insistence upon the elevation of the *Masjid-i Shah* to the status of a 'second Ka'ba', is in line with Shah 'Abbas' policy to spread the influence of Ithna 'Ashari Shi'ism and to threaten the Ottoman-Sunni regime. Similar expressions are used at an earlier date in the inscriptions of the *Quwat al-Islam* Mosque at Delhi. An epigraph dating to the reign of 'Ala' al-Din Muhammad Khalji (r. 1296-1316) whose rule was permeated with religious zeal,³⁸ proclaims:

This (mosque) which is a second Kaba and is reported to be like paradise, (was built) with pure faith and good intention by the exalted, the lord of the kings of the age, great in the world and in faith, the king of land and sea, helped by the help of the merciful (God), Abul Muzaffar Muhammad Shah, the king, the right arm of the Khalifat, the ally of Amiru-l-Muminin (chief of the faithful)... until the day of judgement.³⁹

The *Quwat al-Islam* Mosque is thus represented as the holiest sanctuary of Islam and an expression of the 'symbolic appropriation' of a formerly pagan land. By conferring the same status on the *Masjid-i Shah*, Shah 'Abbas was, therefore, also accusing his enemies of paganism.

Here ends the historical-secular portion of information which identifies the creators of the mosque and specifies its date of completion, 1616 A.D., to those who are on the exterior. The next series of epigraphs runs around the borders of the portal and frames the entrance and the historical inscriptions (figs. 6-7). It is divided into three main categories: *Quran*, *hadith nabawi* and *hadith walawi*, the latter being attributed to 'Ali, 'Prince of the Faithful'. The script and

colors used are the same as those of the historical inscriptions.

Religious-Iconic Epigraphs

A. Epigraph

- Part a: God, Exalted and Glorious, has said:
 'There is a mosque whose foundation was
 laid from the first day on piety; it is
 more worthy for thy standing forth for
 prayer therein. In it are men who love
 to be purified; and God loveth those who
 make themselves pure.'
- Part b: Ibn 'Abbas, may God be pleased with him,
 has related this from the Messenger of
 God, God's Blessings and Peace upon him
 and the people of his Household; "Ali is
 my vice-regent and my successor, and
 Fatima his wife, Lady of womankind, is
 my daughter, and al-Hasan and al-Husayn
 are Lords of the youth of Heaven. Whoever
 befriends them, befriends me, and whoever
 holds enmity for them, is my enemy; whoever
 favors (supports) them, favors me and
 whoever alienates himself from them,
 alienates himself from me. Whoever
 honors and reveres them, honors and
 reveres me; whoever is close to them, is
 close to God; whoever assists them shall
 be succored by God, and God shall forsake
 those who abandon them. Oh, God, as your
 prophets and messengers have worth (charge)
 and family, so 'Ali, Fatima, al-Hasan and
 al-Husayn are my family and my worth (charge),
 so keep all abominations away from them,
 and purify them.'
- Part c: He (Ibn 'Abbas) related; 'The commander
 of the Faithful 'Ali b. Abi Taleb, upon
 whom be peace, used to say: "'Whoever
 frequents the mosque attains one of eight
 (rewards); a brother in his faith in God
 the Glorious and Mighty, or a resourceful
 wisdom (perception or cognizance), or a
 sure sign, or an awaited mercy, or a word
 which prevents him from coming to harm
 (wards off destruction), or hears one which
 guides him to the True Path, or he refrains
 from an evil act from fear or from shame."'

Part d: The Prophet, God's Blessings and Peace
upon him, has said:
'I am the city of knowledge and
'Ali is its Gate.'
In Truth has the Messenger of God,
God's Blessings and Peace upon
him and the people of his Household,
spoken.⁴⁰

B. Analysis - (Part a)

The first section of the epigraph is a Qur'anic verse from *Sura IX, al-Tawba*, or Repentance. This *sura* was among the last revealed to the Prophet and was possibly intended as a conclusion to *sura VIII, Anfal*, The Spoils of War, which deals with the military questions and conduct required of the new *umma*, the young Islamic nation.⁴¹ *Sura IX*, on the other hand, provides instructions on how to deal with treacherous enemies, especially those who break oaths and violate treaties contracted with Muslims, thus becoming unbelievers. The verses are not directed merely at Pagans but at 'People of the Book': Jews, Christians and Muslims alike.

A promise binding on Him
In Truth, through the Law,
The Gospel, and the Qur'an. (IX: 111)

Of major importance in the historical context is the relation between this *sura* and the Prophet's expedition to Tabuk between October and December of 630 A.D.⁴² Situated near the Gulf of 'Aqaba (biblical Elath), Tabuk was seen as the northern gateway into Syria. Muhammad's ambition was to spread the *Pax Islamica* and to counter Heraclius' prestigious triumph over the Persians in 610 A.D. In this way he hoped to win the support of the Christian tribes which dotted the route to the North⁴³ and assert the military power of Islam.

The Tabuk expedition produced varied results and set the standard for future wars of conquest. For it, Muhammad collected his largest army, 30,000 men, and elaborated on the concept of *jihad* or religious warfare in order to persuade some stragglers to join the army and build the much needed military force.⁴⁴

The concept of *dhimmi*s was also developed to cater to the communities of Christians and Jews which the Muslim army encountered on its way. Specific arrangements were made whereby these tribes would continue to manage their affairs though they would have to pay a tribute to the Islamic empire which, in turn, pledged its protection of the tribes.⁴⁵

The preparations, size, and administrative skill which were devoted to this expedition not only provided a model for the future, but also, in its own time, showed the Prophet's determination in challenging the Byzantine empire.

Apart from these major considerations, there occurred three incidents which underlined the amount of opposition that the Prophet was facing. The first was a plot to assassinate him, second was the 'mosque of dissension', and third, the 'trial' of those who had refused to participate in the war and had behaved like hypocrites.⁴⁶ Of these three incidents the second is the most directly related to the concept of the mosque. The rise of the 'mosque of dissension', or 'opposition', is mentioned in several sources.⁴⁷ Montgomery Watt relates the incident in *Islamic Political Thought*⁴⁸ as follows:

Before he [the Prophet] set out for Tabuk he was invited to pray in a new mosque which some Muslims had built in

the southern part of the oasis, perhaps five kilometres from the main mosque. He postponed his visit until after his return. On the expedition he heard of a plot against his life; some one was to stumble against him on a rough stretch of road on a dark night and make the injury look like an accident. Muhammad must have had some information connecting this plot with the mosque-builders. He had also heard that the latter were hoping to use the mosque as a convenient meeting-place to hatch further plots. He was apparently not in a position, however, to proceed overtly against the plotters, and instead sent two men by night to destroy the mosque. This settled the matter, for no complaints were made. About the same time a Qur'anic revelation had excommunicated those disaffected Muslims known as 'hypocrites', and this probably applied to some of the mosque-builders.

The exact location of this notorious mosque was the suburb of Qooba inhabited by the clan of Salima.⁴⁹ The Prophet had stopped there for four days of rest on his *hijra* from Mecca to Medina. At that time he had put up the first mosque, which came to be known as *Qowat al-Islam* (The Power of Islam) and later, as the 'Mosque of Piety' (*Taqwa*) in contrast to the 'Mosque of Impiety'.⁵⁰

The 'Mosque of Piety' could not have been more than a simple sanctuary where the faithful gathered for prayer,⁵¹ but it is celebrated because of an important event which took place there on February 11, 624 A.D. On that date the direction of the *Qibla* was changed from Jerusalem to Mecca, the ancient Arab religious center. The reasons for this shift were more political than religious. The Prophet had decided to rely on the support of Sa'd b. Mu'adh instead of 'Abd Allah b. Ubbayy who was closely associated with the Jewish

Therein. In it are men who
 Love to be purified; and God
 Loveth those who make themselves pure.

(IX: 107-108)

C. Interpretation - (Part a)

This brings us back to the portal of the Royal Mosque where verse 108, except for the first line, forms the beginning of the inscription. Could there be a specific reason for this choice? Could there exist a relationship between the original Mosque of Piety and the Royal Mosque, or is the placement of this verse simply a coincidence?

It is tempting, in view of the missing line, to assume that the verse was chosen simply as a general definition of the nature of the mosque, its purity and sanctity. Since the mosque as a developed structure did not exist at the time of the Revelation, the Qur'an offers few general descriptions. The instances where a mosque is referred to pertain to such specific sites as the *Aqsa* mosque in Jerusalem (XVII: 1) and the Ka'ba at Mecca (V: 97-8, 100; II: 125-127).

These considerations, however, do not negate the fact that the designers of the epigraphic program of the *Masjid-i Shah* had to be aware of the context of the verse, and the meanings and implications of the entire *sura al-Tawba*. A further examination of certain elements of the *sura* should eliminate all doubt. The main themes of the *sura* are hypocrisy and the responsibilities of the devout Muslim. The *sura* further defines the Faithful and divides them into three categories: those who follow the Prophet readily (i.e. the *Muhajirun* and *Ansar* - the Immigrants and Supporters), those who waver in their belief but

conquer their weaknesses (i.e. those of the Muslims who were at first reluctant to join in the expedition of Tabuk), and those who fail in their duties and disobey the Prophet (i.e. those who refused to join the expedition).⁵⁴

The hypocrites themselves are categorized according to the immensity of their crimes. Foremost among them are those who "put up a mosque by way of mischief and infidelity", whose destiny is the wrath and punishment of God.⁵⁵ Three more categories are composed of 1) those who are obstinate and shall be punished, 2) those who repent and regain acceptance, and 3) those who are "held in suspense", and will be judged by God.⁵⁶

Hypocrisy, deceit, and treachery are all vices with which the Safawid shahs had to contend throughout their rule of Iran. Since Shah Tahmasp and Shah 'Abbas are directly related to the Royal Mosque, examples will be drawn from their reigns.

Crowned shah at an early age, Tahmasp had to assert his authority over the *Qizilbash* tribes and their chief, Div Rumlu Sultan, his self-appointed guardian. A rival faction, the Ustajlu tribe, opposed this situation and initiated the civil war of 1526, thus giving the Ozbegs an opportunity to invade Tus, Astarabad, and parts of Khorasan.⁵⁷ Chuha Sultan, a rival *Qizilbash* chief, plotted the execution of his adversary and had himself promoted to a position of power and authority. The Takkalu tribe, on attempting to abduct the Shah, was totally destroyed, an event which became known as the 'Takkalu Disaster', a chronogram yielding the date 937 A.H./1530-1 A.D.⁵⁸ Another plotter was Husayn Khan Shamlu who sought to replace the Shah by his brother,

Sam Mirza. Tahmasp disposed of him in 1533, thus putting an end to a decade (1524-1533) in which the *Qizilbash* chiefs had ruled supreme.⁵⁹

This, however, was not to mark the end of the disloyalty and intrigue in Shah Tahmasp's court. During his battles against the Ottomans many of the *Qizilbash* chiefs defected to the enemy camp. His own brothers, Sam Mirza and Alqas Mirza, respective governors of Khurasan and Shirvan, rebelled and joined forces with the Ottomans. It was with the help of these deserters that the Ottomans were able to take Baghdad in 1508 A.D. The brothers' fate was incarceration at the prison-fort of Qahqaha,⁶⁰ where Isma'il II had also been imprisoned by Tahmasp.⁶¹

Shah 'Abbas himself had narrowly escaped death on his accession in 1588. During his reign he attempted to avoid his predecessor's setbacks by weakening the *Qizilbash* tribes, depriving them of any politically dangerous positions in his government, and introducing new elements into his court.⁶² To safeguard himself against rebellion he eliminated all contenders to the throne. His own sons were either blinded or killed in case they schemed against him or attempted to usurp his throne.⁶³

The inscription, therefore, issues a warning to all such would-be plotters. The verse advises believers to follow their shah faithfully and not to waver in their loyalty, for obeying him, like obeying the Prophet, has its rewards in Paradise. If, however, some group chooses to ignore the warning and to break faith with the Absolute Monarch of Iran who holds temporal as well as religious authority, then this group will belong to the category of hypocrites and unbelievers

whom God and the Prophet encourage the Muslims, in the opening verses of *sura al-Tawba*, to war against.

A (declaration) of immunity
From God and His Apostle
To those of the Pagans
With whom ye have contracted
Mutual alliances

And an announcement from God
And His Apostle, to the people
(Assembled) on the day
Of the Great Pilgrimage⁶⁴
That God and His Apostle
Dissolve treaty obligations
With the Pagans.

(IX: 1, 3)

The term 'Pagans' was not meant to be understood literally, as illustrated by verse 111,⁶⁵ but to denote any such people as broke their oaths or failed to support the cause of Islam. In the case of the Royal Mosque, the term refers to all those who are outside the True Religion and do not honor the Twelve Immaculate Ones. More specifically, it is a direct reference to those whose faith is so weak as to allow them to break oaths and treaties contracted with fellow Muslims: the Ottomans.

In 1555 A.D. Shah Tahmasp had battled with the Ottomans and had regained some of the strength lost by Shah Isma'il in the battle of Chaldiran in 1514 A.D.⁶⁶ He was then able to negotiate peace and sign a treaty whose conditions were not unfavorable to his country. This treaty, which required the withdrawal of all Ottoman troops from Iranian territory, came to be known as the Treaty of Amasya, after the region in which the two protagonists met to sign it. In 1562, Tahmasp reconfirmed it by handing back the rebel Ottoman prince, Bayazid, to his father Sultan Suleiman.⁶⁷

The Ottomans, however, did not show as much respect for the Treaty of Amasya, and being in a position of power, did not withdraw their forces from Iranian lands. In 1602 A.D., Shah 'Abbas decided that the time had come to recapture the provinces of Azarbayjan and Shirvan, and began his move by marching on Tabriz. The campaign is described by the historian Eskandar Monshi in the events of the year of the Hare (1011-12/1602-4).⁶⁸

"Once Shah 'Abbas had restored internal security in Iran, his thoughts turned to the recovery of Azerbaijan and Sirvan, two of the most important provinces in Iran which had been conquered by the Ottomans. The city of Tabriz had been the capital of the rulers of Iran, and its recovery was of prime importance to the Shah. Whenever he talked of his ambition, however, his advisors reminded him of the power of the Ottoman sultans and the numerical superiority of their armies. They deemed it not in the interest of the state to try the majesty of the Ottoman empire. The Shah still nursed this ambition, but mindful of the injunction 'Do not break your oaths after you have confirmed them', he did not break the peace, but bided his time.

The lawless activities of the Kurds and Ottomans in the frontier regions, where the frontier pashas and governors had begun to behave like rebellious Jalalis, gave the Shah his opportunity...

...the Shah, though he had overlooked these incidents, made repeated protests to the Ottoman Sultan about the actions of his officers - but to no avail. ...

At this point Gazi Beg Kord, a descendant of Sahgoli Balilan, rebelled against the Ottoman *beglerbeg* of Tabriz and strengthened the fort at Qarni-yarung near Salmas... Gazi Beg sent his son, Khan Abdal, to seek aid from the Shah.

...the Shah had a golden opportunity to attack Tabriz while the Ottoman commander was absent from the city campaigning against the Kurds.

...To throw the Ottomans off guard, a rumor was spread that the Franks were attacking Bahrain and that the royal army was about to march south to meet this threat. Some four or five days later, a courier arrived from Allahverdi Khan in Fars to say that the Franks had abandoned their plans and there was no need for the royal army to come to his assistance! The Shah then announced that he intended to take those retainers who had assembled on a hunting expedition to Mazandaran. The only officers who knew his real plans were the vizier, Hatem Beg; 'Aligoli Khan Samlu; Mahdigoli Qajar the *qir'ibasi*; and Bestam Aqa.⁶⁹

In this candid report, Eskandar Beg Monshi reveals the real identity of the person who broke the Treaty of Amasya, Shah 'Abbas himself. The Shah indulged in trickery (his alleged hunting expedition) to fool the Ottomans, and only mobilized his troops when he was assured of the support of the *Qizilbash* stationed in that area (led by Gazi Beg Kord). He also took advantage of the absence of the Ottoman commander from Tabriz. Before this opportunity was open to him, he kept faith with the Qur'anic injunction, "Do not break your oaths after you have affirmed them."⁷⁰ To justify his decision in breaking the oath, he shifted blame from himself onto the Ottomans and the ever-present border incidents. He marched on Tabriz on 14 September, 1603, where he was well received by the local inhabitants who donned their distinctive *Qizilbash* headgear, the *taj-e Heydari*, to demonstrate their 'Love for the Shah'.⁷¹ In 1605 the battle of Sufiyan took place near Tabriz and resulted in a decisive victory for Shah 'Abbas. By 1607, the terms of the Treaty of Amasya were finally enforced and the Ottomans were expelled from all Iranian territory.⁷²

From the point of view of the Iranian monarch the blame lay with the Ottomans for not leaving Iran as the terms of the treaty had required of them. As long as he was not in a position of strength, he allowed the situation to persist, but when assured that the odds were on his side, he launched the attack. The Ottomans had not only refused to comply with the conditions set in 1555, but also proved difficult negotiators after 'Abbas' victory. Peace talks were resumed when Shah 'Abbas sent an ambassador, Qazi Khan, to the court of Ahmed I, but before a new treaty could be signed skirmishes at the border, instigated by the Georgians and Kurds, caused a resumption of hostilities which culminated in an Ottoman attack on Erivan in the year 1616,⁷³ the year the portal inscription of the *Masjid-i Shah* was completed.

When the mosque was being built, therefore, Shah 'Abbas was contemplating his strategy against the Ottomans. His action was delayed, due to the death of Ahmed I, till the year 1623 when he marched on the province of Baghdad, entering the city itself on 14 January 1624.⁷⁴

At this point there was no more need for rationalization. The Ottomans had attacked Erivan despite the peace talks, Sultan Ahmed I had refused to honor the terms set in 1555 and had broken confidence, thus he was an unbeliever and a hypocrite. Waging war against him was fully justified and encouraged by God and his Messenger. As parallels are drawn between the party of *ar-Rahib* and their mosque, and the Ottomans and their mosques, so the transposition continues from the Prophet and the Mosque of Piety to Shah 'Abbas and his Royal Mosque.

On an intermediate level the verse, and the entire *sura*, can

be applied to the cause of Shi'ism in general. The events which followed the assassination of the third caliph, 'Uthman, and 'Ali's rise to the caliphate, include all the elements specified in the *sura* and applied to the Prophet's wars against infidels. When 'Ali was proclaimed caliph in 656 A.D., he was refused allegiance from the governor of Syria, Mu'awiya b. Abi Sufyan, a member of the clan of bani Umayya, who demanded revenge for the blood of 'Uthman. Talha and Zubayr, two of the Companions, paid allegiance to 'Ali but soon regretted their decision. The two then went to Mecca and met the Prophet's widow 'A'isha who had been performing the 'umra (Lesser Pilgrimage), and who also opposed 'Ali's nomination. The triumvirate marched to Basra and threatened to cut 'Ali off from the east. 'Ali marched to Kufa in the same year (656 A.D.) and met the forces of 'A'isha, Talha and Zubayr. The two men were killed and 'A'isha was sent to Medina. Since she had observed the battle from a palanquin on the back of a camel, the battle came to be known as *ma'rakat al-Jamal*, Battle of the Camel.⁷⁵ 'Ali's term for his enemies at this battle was *an-Nakithun*, "those who break their allegiance," which is a category mentioned in *sura IX al-Tawba*.⁷⁶

After the murder of 'Uthman his secretary, Marwan b. al-Hakam, had fled to Syria with the Caliph's bloodstained shirt and the murdered widow's severed fingers to use as propaganda against 'Ali.⁷⁷ The call for revenge was made.

Mu'awiya gathered his forces and waited. After the battle of *al-Jamal*, 'Ali went to meet him at Siffin. During the ensuing months arbitration was carried on to determine whether 'Uthman had been 'murdered' or 'executed'. In the meantime, 'Ali's forces, led mainly

by the *qurra'* (religious teachers and readers of the Qur'an) split into two factions. One group decided that arbitration was wrong because judgement belonged to God alone, and thus broke away from 'Ali's forces and withdrew to a place called Nahrawan. They became known as the *Khawarij* (or Kharijites: those who had 'gone out' - or 'separated themselves' - rebelled).⁷⁸ 'Ali decided to crush this agitation and proceeded to massacre these troops whom he labelled *al-Mariqun*, "those who missed the True religion", or, in the words of *sura IX*, 'those who wavered in their belief'.⁷⁹

Finally, 'Ali resumed his advance against Mu'awiya. His forces, however, had been much weakened by the preceding incidents, and thus he was forced to return to Kufa. The Battle of Siffin was the first major clash between the partisans of 'Ali and those who had claimed to follow God's *sunna*, or Law.⁸⁰ 'Ali labelled this group *al-Qasitun*, "those who act wrongfully".⁸¹ They are the hypocrites of *sura IX*: those who swerve from the True Path and are punished by Hell-Fire. The followers of 'Ali, on the other hand, came to be known as *al-Awliya*, "devoted Friends", *al-Asfiya*, "sincere Friends", *al-Ashab*, "companions", and *shurtat al-Khamis*, "chosen" or "picked division". This party swore to be "friends" to those whom he ['Ali] befriended, and enemies to whom he was hostile."⁸²

These partisans of 'Ali, his *Shi'a*, are, therefore, the political ancestors of the builders of the Royal Mosque. To them belong the True Faith and the True Mosque while to their enemies, the enemies of 'Ali and hence of the Safawids, belongs the mosque of impiety and disbelief. These enemies are to be forsaken and abandoned

by God. Among them are the Sunnis who supported the caliphate of Abu Bakr, 'Umar, and 'Uthman, and later, the Umayyads. Further, there are those who invoked God's approbation upon 'Ali and the imams who succeeded him, and declared that their descendants lived in the 'Abode of War'. This was the argument issued by the Ottoman *sheykh al-Islam*,⁸³ and these contemporary enemies are, therefore, the Ottomans.

B. Analysis - (Parts b, c, d)

The implied identity of the new Mosque of Piety is further emphasized and clarified by the *Hadith* which follows the verse, and which fulfills the specifications of the last lines: 'In it are men who love to be purified, and God Loveth those who make themselves pure'. The *Hadith* is related on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas, a cousin of the Prophet and one of his Companions, who died in 68/687-88.⁸⁴

Ibn 'Abbas is distinguished as one of the first *qurra'* and as founder of the Medinese school of jurisdiction. He is also considered one of the most trustworthy authorities of all periods in Qur'anic exegesis, *Hadith*, and the other branches of the religious sciences.⁸⁵

In the *Hadith*, the Prophet lists the members of his family, the four chief exponents of Shi'a Islam. Special emphasis is laid on Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet, since the Twelver Shi'is acknowledge only those sons of 'Ali and their descendants who are the progeny of Fatima, and thus related to the Prophet by blood. This genealogy, which forms the basis of Twelver Shi'ism, is an important tool for determining the legitimacy of any imam. The two principles fundamental to an Imamate, *Nass* and '*Ilm*', are believed by Twelver

Shi'ism to be confined to the line of 'Ali and Husayn.⁸⁶

As the owner of *Nass* and *'Ilm*, the Imam was considered the leader of his people, at least in religious matters, and thus worthy of their respect, friendship, and reverence. These terms, used by the Prophet in a series of threats and implorations which emphasize the standing of these four personalities, also appear in a number of other *hadith* describing the Imam.⁸⁷ They are most in keeping, however, with the *Hadith-i Ghadir*, or the *Hadith* of Ghadir Khumm, which describes the Prophet's designation of 'Ali as his vice-regent, and which will be discussed later.

The last section of the Prophet's declaration can be identified as part of the lengthy *Hadith* of the Mantle, *Hadith al-Kisa*, from which the entire *hadith nabawi* in this inscription is probably taken. This *hadith* is a major tool for defining and limiting *Ahl al-Bayt*, The People of the Household (family of the Prophet). According to the tradition, Muhammad asked 'Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Husayn to enter under his mantle. He then said, "Every prophet has his family (*ahl*) and his charge (*thaql*), these are my family and my charge." This *hadith* was used by the Imam Ja'far to combat the 'Abbasid claim to the caliphate because it excludes even the Prophet's wife Umm Salima, who was present at this occasion.⁸⁸ After the Prophet had finished his proclamation, the archangel Gabriel descended and announced the Verse of Purification for the Five of the Mantle.⁸⁹

And stay quietly in
Your houses, and make not
A dazzling display, like
That of the former Times
Of Ignorance; and establish

Regular Prayer, and give
 Regular Charity; and obey
 God and his Apostle.
 And God only wishes
 To remove all abomination
 From you, ye Members
 Of the Family, and to make
 you pure and spotless.

(XXXIII: 33)

The words used in the last lines of the verse coincide with the Prophet's final plea that God may purify his Family. This *hadith* is then important for the interpretation (*tafsir*) of the verse itself, and more so for identifying the closest, most worthy, members of the Prophet's House. These four members are also the pure spiritual foundations on which the Royal Mosque is built.⁹⁰

Although prayer in Islam is a private act of worship, the institution of Friday prayers made the mosque a necessity. At midday of every Friday a *Khutbah* would be delivered by the Imam from the *minbar* of the mosque. The *Khutbah* does not have to be purely religious, but can include social and political elements, and is also used to publicize new laws and state policies. An example is *sura IX* of which the first twenty-nine verses were delivered in a *Khutbah* by the Imam 'Ali on the eve of the Prophet's revelation against hypocrites.⁹¹

Attending these collective prayers is, therefore, essential to the well-being of the individual as well as the community.⁹² 'Ali himself, renowned as one of the great *Khatibs* of Islamic history, provides a list of benefits which the believer who enters the mosque is certain to attain. In the inscription, 'Ali is quoted as saying that whoever enters the mosque will either meet a brother in faith, or hear sermons that will discourage him from evil and strengthen his belief.

He will receive 'sure signs' (literally: *ayat* or verses) that will guide him to the True Path and assure him of an eternity in Paradise. Apart from the final reward, these gifts are the criteria upon which the strength and unity of the Muslim community are based. The mosque is thus not only a house of prayer but a complete education, a City of Knowledge.

In the final part of the *hadith* the Prophet likens himself to the mosque. He states: 'I am the city of knowledge and 'Ali is the Gate.' Entering the mosque without going through the gate is as impossible as attaining proximity to the Prophet without first accepting the Imamate of 'Ali.⁹³ This *hadith* is included not only in Shi'i sources and the Imam Ja'afar's traditions, but also in most standard collections of Sunni *hadith* which acknowledge 'Ali's erudite and superior knowledge.⁹⁴ It fulfills the Shi'ite belief in 'Ali as the spiritual pole (*qutb*) through which all kinds of knowledge, the seeking of which is "incumbent upon every Muslim", are attainable.⁹⁵

C. Interpretation - (Parts b, c, c)

Basing a mosque on such firm and pure foundations is an essential factor in affirming the degree of its importance and its sanctity, for the expected rewards increase in direct proportion to the sanctity of the mosque itself. In the words of the fourteenth century historian Ibn Khaldun: "God has singled out some places of the earth for special honour. He made them the home of his worship. People who worship in them receive a much greater reward and recompense."⁹⁶ The elevation of the Royal Mosque to such a position is also implied in the historical inscription of the portal where it is likened to *al-Aqsa*

mosque. Monshi, in his description of the Shah's decision to build the mosque, stated the latter's wishes that it "rival the Temple at Mecca and the mosque at Jerusalem."⁹⁷

These efforts reveal a self-conscious awareness of the reality of the situation. The mosques Ibn Khaldun describes in his *Muqaddimah* as "the most excellent places on earth" and the vehicles to greater rewards,⁹⁸ are those of Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem, all of which were in Ottoman hands.

The Shah's efforts to create a rival sanctuary may be compared to those of the Umayyad 'Abd al-Malik (685-705) who, with the help of the Traditionists of his time, built and established the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, as a rival to the Ka'ba which was controlled by Ibn al-Zubayr.⁹⁹

Despite all these studied efforts, however, Shah 'Abbas must have realized that no mosque, no matter what attributes are ascribed to it, could actually replace those of Mecca and Medina. Being a devout Shi'i, he made several pilgrimages to the shrines at Mashhad and Ardabil,¹⁰⁰ but the military situation prevented him from performing the Great Pilgrimage. The Shah was also deprived of his natural privileges as a descendant of the Prophet. These included the upkeep of such shrines as the Ka'ba. The fact that these sites were controlled by the Ottomans spurred another epigraphic attack. This attack is among the additional inscriptions found at the sides of the portal.

101.

Additional Portal Epigraphs

A. Epigraph

Part a: God, Exalted and Glorious, has said:
 'The mosques of God
 Shall be visited and maintained
 By such as believe in God
 And the Last Day, establish
 Regular Prayers, and practice
 Regular Charity, and fear
 None (at all) except God.
 It is they who are expected
 to be on true guidance.

The Prophet, God's Blessings upon him and the people of his Household, has said, 'If you see a man frequenting and maintaining the mosque, then bear witness to him that he is a believer'.

Part b: The Prophet, God's Blessings upon him and the people of his Household, has said, 'I am the city of knowledge and 'Ali is its Gate'.

Part c: Call upon 'Ali manifest of Miracles you will find him an aid (to you) in adversities.

Every care and sorrow will be dispelled through your Prophethood,
 O Muhammad, through your Guardianship,
 O 'Ali.

Written by the sinful slave in anticipation (of redemption), Adib Majlisi.

Part d: *Bismillah*, (In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful).

B. Analysis and Interpretation - (Part a)

The inscription first appears to be a simple proclamation of the devotion of the Shah. The word *ammara* (translated as 'visit and maintain') has the added connotations of 'building', 'repairing', and 'visiting for worship'. The Shah has performed this pious deed and, according to the verse, is on the path of 'True Guidance'. The Prophet

corroborates this verdict with his own orders to the believers to bear witness to the faith of such a man. But the intended meaning, as in all the other instances, is not only the direct and explicit one, but also the hidden and implied.

The verse used in this epigraph refers specifically to the Ka'ba at Mecca. It was revealed after the Prophet took Mecca and prohibited any non-Muslims from entering it, thus making it exclusive to those who believed in his message. Yousuf 'Ali explains:

Before the preaching of Islam, the Pagans built, repaired, and maintained the Mosque, and celebrated Pagan ceremonies in it, including naked dances around the Ka'ba. Islam protested, and the Pagans ejected the Muslims and their leader from Mecca, and shut them out of the Ka'ba itself. When the Muslims were strong enough to re-take Mecca (A.H. 8), they purified the mosque and re-established the worship of the true God. The families who previously held control could not after this be allowed in a state of Paganism to control the Mosque any longer.¹⁰²

In this context the Royal Mosque can only be open to Muslims who follow the *Ithna 'Ashari* faith, the rest being considered 'Pagans'. But, more importantly, the verse prohibits the Pagans from being associated with all the holy sanctuaries of Islam. The statement then carries the implications of a warning: those who are currently in control of the Ka'ba and the other holy shrines have no right to be there and they shall be punished. The context of the verse, the retaking of the Ka'ba from the tribe of Quraysh, also provides a veiled threat: those on the path of true guidance will retake these sanctuaries and expel the pagans from them. Since in 1616 Shah 'Abbas

was preparing a major offensive against the Ottomans, the threat seems to have been well-timed.

The Prophet's words at the end of the inscription serve as a further reminder of the nature of the true believer: he is the one who cares for and maintains a mosque. Since the previous inscription has already prohibited the 'Sunni-Ottoman-Pagans' from performing such services, the responsibility falls to the Shi'ite Safawids. In obeying the Prophet, the Safawids must be hailed as the True Believers, those on the path of True Guidance, God's chosen, and the only dynasty with the Divine Right to rule the lands of Islam.

As a strictly Shi'i inscription the verse may well have been considered, from earlier times, as one open to interpretation (*ta'wil*). The 'Alids of the first years following the Prophet's death may have found in it a tool for establishing the Divine Right of the Family of the Prophet to maintain and have uncontested control of the Ka'ba'. These Shi'is also used religious propaganda to attack the Umayyad caliphs whom they considered impious usurpers who deprived the Prophet's family of its natural inherited rights. In fact, it was this period, which the Shi'is saw as an 'epoch of Tyranny' (*zulm*), that witnessed the birth of the concept of *al-Mahdi* as deliverer and giver of hope.¹⁰³ More specifically, the incidents of the sack of Medina and the burning of the Ka'ba by the forces of Yazid I may be taken as direct corollaries to the verse cited in the inscription. The Umayyads had usurped power from its rightful owners; and their behavior, the destruction of the Ka'ba in 63/682-83,¹⁰⁴ is proof of their unsuitability for such a task as protecting and controlling the holiest

places in Islam. These responsibilities are to fall to those directly descended from the Prophet, the sons of 'Ali and Fatima and their descendants, not the Umayyads, 'Abbasids or Ottomans, but the Husaynid Safawids.

B. Analysis and Interpretation - (Part b)

On the side of the entrance is repeated a *hadith* which nominates 'Ali as the 'Gate', or path to God. While this reaffirms the nature of 'Ali as the true Imam, it also redefines and emphasizes the nature of the Royal Mosque as the sanctuary of true belief.

B. Analysis and Interpretation - (Part c)

The short Arabic poem which appears here seem to belong to a collection of short prayers and sayings¹⁰⁵ inscribed on a variety of objects. The same poem, with slight variations, is carved on a pair of wooden doors made for the tomb of Mirza Ibrahim in 1594-95.¹⁰⁶ On metalwork, it appears on jugs in the Nuhad Es-Said Collection and in the Metropolitan Museum,¹⁰⁷ and on a number of inkwells including one in the Victoria and Albert Museum.¹⁰⁸

In all of these cases the phrase, 'with your prophethood, O Muhammad', has been omitted, so that the emphasis is on 'Ali alone. A short Persian poem usually accompanies the Arabic one, and in this case the Royal Mosque inscription is no exception, for such a poem appears above the litany. It has been suggested that this Shi'i poem originally comes from 'Alawi Turkey¹⁰⁹ or Syria, and appears on Safawid metalwork at least fifteen years before the reign of Shah Isma'il.¹¹⁰

Whatever the case, the discrepancy between the inscription on the Royal Mosque and those Safawid objects suggests one of two

things: that the litany was originally Shi'ite in character and that the addition of the '*Prophethood of Muhammad*' is exclusive to the Royal Mosque, or that it did exist but was seldom used on objects of Shi'i character. If the first case is true, then it corroborates evidence that the Royal Mosque was intended to be the holy center of all of Islam and not merely Shi'i Iran. Omitting the 'Muhammad' addition would have kept the prayer in the nature of litanies, *dhikr*, used in Sufi initiation ceremonies,¹¹¹ that is, the mosque would have become too obviously Shi'ite and militant in character.

Ascribing a miraculous and supernatural character to 'Ali (and the Imams in general) was a phenomenon which started in Kufa at the time of the fifth Imam, al-Baqir, and flourished at the time of the sixth, Ja'far al-Sadiq. This phenomenon, known as *ghuluw* (its exponents being *ghulat*) crystallized into traditions ascribed to the above-mentioned Imams. While in reality al-Baqir and al-Sadiq are said to have frowned upon these practices, nevertheless some of the manifestations found their way into the earliest collection of Shi'i *hadith*, *Al-Usul al-Kafi* of Kulayni (died 328/939).¹¹² The *ghulat* preached that "the Imams were the incarnations of God, that the divine particle incarnate in 'Ali b. Abi Taleb enabled him to know the unseen, foretell the future, and to fight against infidels, that the power of the invisible angelic world was in 'Ali as the flame in a Lamp."¹¹³

As shall be seen, a certain degree of *ghuluw* appears in the inscriptions of the Royal Mosque. The trend no doubt travelled through Iraq to Iran where it found an enthusiastic following in a nation much used to the concept of the 'God-King'. Ascribing divinity to 'Ali also

strengthens the Safawids own claims to unlimited power.

The *Bismillah* (Part d) is all that remains of an inscription in which were listed the *waqfs* of the Royal Mosque.¹¹⁴

The entire collection of epigraphs in the portal area, therefore, acts as a prologue to the body of inscriptions within the mosque. The portal inscriptions are an introduction and a definition of the nature of the *Masjid-i Shah*, its patron, builders, *waqf*, and the faith to which it belongs. Furthermore, these inscriptions limit the number of people who may enter the mosque and warn disbelievers about the fate which awaits them if they do not renounce disbelief. The portal epigraphs are a direct attack on any disbeliever or enemy of Islam, but more particularly, they are a religious argument against the enemies of the Safawids. The epigraphs are also an invitation to embrace *Ithna 'Ashari* Shi'ism and step inside the Royal Mosque, where, with the aid of 'Ali, new truths and 'sure signs' will be revealed to 'those who can see'.

The North Eyvan

A. Epigraph

The inscription in the north eyvan consists entirely of Qur'anic verses written in *thuluth* script by 'Abd al-Baqi al Tabrizi (figs. 9-10). The epigraph is the entire *sura* LXXVI, *Dahr* or Time,¹¹⁵ known alternatively as *al-Insan*, or Man. The *sura* consists of thirty-one verses which are here quoted in full.

1. Has there not been
Over Man a long period
Of Time, when he was
Nothing - (not even) mentioned?

2. Verily We created
Man from a drop
Of mingled sperm,
In order to try him.
So We gave him (the gifts).
Of Hearing and Sight.

3. We showed him the Way:
Whether he be grateful
Or ungrateful (rests
On his will).

4. For the Rejecters
We have prepared
Chains, Yokes, and
A Blazing Fire.

5. As to the Righteous,
They shall drink
Of a Cup (of Wine)
Mixed with *Kafur*,-

6. A fountain where
The Devotees of God
Do drink, making it
Flow in unstinted abundance.

7. They perform (their) vows,
And they fear a Day
Whose evil flies far and wide.

8. And they feed, for the love
Of God, the indigent,
The orphan, and the captive,-

9. (Saying), "We feed you
For the sake of God alone:
No reward do we desire
From you, nor thanks.

10. "We only fear a Day
Of distressful Wrath
From the side of our Lord."

11. But God will deliver
Them from the evil
Of that Day, and will
Shed over them a Light
A (blissful) Joy.

12. And because they were
Patient and constant, He will
Reward them with a Garden
And (garments of) silk.

13. Reclining in the (Garden)
On raised thrones,
They will see there neither
The sun's excessive heat
Nor (the moon's) excessive cold.
14. And the shades of the (Garden)
Will come low over them
And the bunches (of fruit),
There, will hang low
In humility.
15. And amongst them will be
Passed round vessels of silver
And goblets of crystal,-
16. Crystal-clear, made of silver:
They will determine
The measure thereof
(According to their wishes).
17. And they will be given
To drink there of a Cup
(Of Wine) mixed
With Zanjabil,-
18. A fountain there
Called Salsabil.
19. And round about them
Will (serve) youths
Of perpetual (freshness):
If thou seest them,
Thou wouldst think them
Scattered Pearls.
20. And when thou lookest,
It is there thou wilt see
A Bliss and
A Realm Magnificent.
21. Upon them will be
Green Garments of fine silk
And heavy brocade,
And they will be adorned
With bracelets of silver;
And their Lord will
Give them to drink
Of a Wine
Pure and Holy.
22. "Verily this is a Reward
For you, and your Endeavour
Is accepted and recognised."

23. It is We Who
Have sent down the Qur'an
To thee by stages.
24. Therefore be patient
With constancy to the Command
Of thy Lord, and hearken not
To the sinner or the ingrate
Among them.
25. And celebrate the name
Of thy Lord morning
And evening,
26. And part of the night,
Prostrate thyself to Him,
And Glorify Him
A long night through.
27. As to these, they love
The fleeting life,
And put away behind them
A Day (that will be) hard.
28. It is We Who created
Them, and We have made
Their joints strong;
But, when We will,
We can substitute
The like of them
By a complete change.
29. This is an admonition:
Whosoever will, let him
Take a (straight) Path
To his Lord.
30. But ye will not,
Except as God wills;
For God is full of
Knowledge and Wisdom.
31. He will admit
To His Mercy whom He will;
But the wrong-doers,-
For them has He prepared
A grievous Penalty.

Written by 'Abd al-Baqi in 1035.

B. Analysis

This sura is attributed to the early Meccan period with some additions in the Medinan period.¹¹⁶ Its theme consists of the contrast between two classes of Men: those who heed God's warnings and those who 'put them away behind them'. The warnings are embodied in the message of the Qur'an which is mentioned in verse 23. Each class of men will be awarded an end which corresponds to their deeds on earth. For the unbelievers there is a 'blazing fire' while the believers will enter the Gardens of Bliss.

The title of the sura, *Dahr* or Time, is related to those men classified as unbelievers. In verse XLV: 24 these believers say, "nothing but Time can destroy us" thus connecting the idea of Time to Fate or Destiny. Fate was the supreme power which dictated death after life and over which no god could exert any influence.¹¹⁷ In medieval times these unbelievers became known as *dahriyyun* (from *dahr*). The term came to mean 'materialists', or those who believe in the material existence of the world without the intervention of a Maker or Creator. Their theory is summarized by Grunebaum as follows:

There has been no beginning to the world's rotation, and plant sprang from grain and grain from plant in an infinite sequence without a fixed starting point.¹¹⁸

This theory goes against the basic Islamic dogma that God is the starting point from which all life emanates. Hence it goes against the whole premise of Islam, and its adherents (the *dahriyyun*) became known as *zanadiqa*, or heretics. The sura, therefore, compounds the fate

of such heretics while expounding the truth of Creation: that God created Man out of nothing and gave him the gift of senses. These senses are both physical and intellectual. 'Sight' as mentioned in verse 2, also refers to 'insight'. With these faculties man could distinguish between good and evil. He could make the choice of either retaining the basic righteous nature with which he was created, or replacing it with the burdens of sin. These burdens become like a yoke which drags men into hell (verse 4).

The virtuous choose to preserve their original untainted character. They enforce it with prayer (verses 7; 25-26), kindness and charity (verse 8), but above all, they remember the admonitions of God and fear his wrath (verse 10). On the Day of Judgement these men will be delivered from evil and brought into the presence of God (verse 11). As used in verse 11, the word 'Light' is simply one of many symbols incorporated within this mystic sura. In the Gardens the image of timelessness is produced by the absence of the effects of sun and moon (verse 13), and the presence only of eternal comfort and bliss. Objects from earthly existence are transformed into symbols of Paradisical blissfulness.

In Paradise the righteous will drink wine mixed with camphor from goblets of silver and crystal (verses 5; 15). Camphor serves to allay the unpleasant effects of wine.¹¹⁹ These three minerals fall into the three categories of the science of alchemy. Camphor is a 'spirit', a mineral which is volatilized by fire; silver is one of the 'metallic bodies' which can be hammered into lustrousness, and crystal is a 'body' or 'mineral substance' which can only be pulverized. The

elements are composed of the natural qualities of hotness, dryness, wetness and coldness which, in turn, include the four processes of expansion, contraction, fixation and solution. Thus all Nature, all Life, undergoes a change when these elements are combined. The alchemist "as he works with material objects, is the one who helps nature to breathe the Divine Presence and thereby to be purified."¹²⁰ Likewise as God mixes the symbolic counterparts of camphor, crystal and silver, He creates Divine Perfection: a state in which the purified souls are brought into His presence and integrated with His being.¹²¹

Similarly, the 'Green garments' with which the faithful will be clothed symbolize eternity. Green embodies the other three basic colors; red as a complement, yellow and blue as constituent parts. In Islam, "green is hope, fertility, and eternity with its two inherent dimensions of past (blue) and future (yellow), and its opposite, the present seen as red."¹²²

Timelessness, eternal life, or annihilation in the being of God, are the final rewards of the virtuous. The symbolism of *sura Dahr* was definitely understood by the Shi'is of Safawid Iran, especially the Sufis. The painted tile decoration of the *Masjid-i Shah* is evidence that the system of *haft rang*, or palette of seven colors, was used in the mosque.¹²³ The picture of Paradise is completed by the mention of the 'raised thrones' on which the faithful will recline (verse 13). These thrones reappear in the inscription of the south eyvan where the Prophet mentions them in reference to 'Ali, who is to accompany Muhammad to Heaven and into the presence of God.¹²⁴ 'Ali is implied once again in verses 8-9 where the true Muslim is described as an

unselfish and pious believer. This quality of 'Ali's is emphasized in verse V: 58 where the interpretation is altered so as to apply the verse exclusively to 'Ali.¹²⁵

The admonition of verse 29 of *sura Dahr* is also in favor of 'Ali. It applies to those who refused to accept the 'straight Path' with the guidance of 'Ali. The first three Rightly Guided Caliphs fall into this category. Mu'awiya b. Abi Sufyan as usurper and establisher of an illegitimate dynasty is also included. The Umayyads are described by the Shi'is as "having no religious character", and being "lax in applying moral principles in government", as well as committing "injustice, tyranny, sin and iniquity".¹²⁶ As such, the Umayyads are grouped with those heretics known as *Dahriyyun*, for they share with them an attachment to the material rather than the spiritual aspects of life. The Umayyads also committed the gravest sins by attacking and killing the members of the Household of the Prophet. The fate of these *Zanadiqa* is the same as that of those who do not acknowledge the Truth of God. The 'Abbasids share the same predicament as do all Sunnis. At the time of Shah 'Abbas, the main victims of this Shi'i proclamation were the Ottomans. To understand the pertinence of *sura Dahr* to the reign of the Safawid Shah, account must be made of the events of the year in which it was inscribed in the Royal Mosque, 1035/1625-26.

C. Interpretation

The events contemporary to the inscription of the north eyvan fall between 1624-26, a period of time during which Safawid troops were besieged by the Ottomans at the fort of Baghdad.¹²⁷ Monshi's record of the year 1035 A.H. begins with the plan of the Ottoman commander

Morad Pasha to cut off all supply lines to the citadel at Baghdad and thus starve the *Qizilbash* soldiers into submission.¹²⁸ The Shah, however, devised a plan by which he could supply his troops with provisions and they were able to remain in their position until the Ottoman retreat.¹²⁹

When the siege was in its sixth month, Ottoman envoys were sent to Shah 'Abbas to propose peace negotiations. Shah 'Abbas did not object, but emphasized that Baghdad was his inherited property. As Monshi reports, the Shah replied that

The best...solution would be for the Ottoman government to admit his claim to Baghdad, so that the peace which had been concluded between the two states might be reaffirmed. A further point said the Shah, was that the Ottoman Sultan already claimed to be the guardian of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, it was appropriate that the holy shrines of the Imams at Baghdad, Imams who were the Shah's ancestors, should be in his hands. Since the Ottomans had disputed his claims to Baghdad, continued the Shah, he had taken steps to protect it.¹³⁰

The Ottomans were usurpers of the inherited territory of Shah 'Abbas, therefore he was compelled to wage war against them. Further, the sultan 'claimed' to be guardian of the holy cities, but in reality he had usurped both the Shah's lands and his rights as custodian of the holy cities. It was 'Abbas' duty to liberate what he could of these lands, and Baghdad was the only religious center within his reach.

The importance of the province of Baghdad lies in the number and status of Twelver Imams buried in its regions. The tenth and eleventh Imams, 'Ali al-Naqi and Hasan al-Askari, are buried at Samarra. The seventh and ninth, Musa al-Kazim and Muhammad al-Taqi, at Kazimayn. The third Imam, al-Husayn, is buried at the site of his martyrdom, Karbala, while 'Ali, the first Imam, is buried at Najaf.¹³¹ Of these six figures Husayn stands out as the second son of 'Ali and Fatima, and ancestor of Musa al-Kazim. al-Kazim stands out as the Safawids' ancestor and their blood link to Muhammad. 'Ali, however, is foremost in importance. He is the first Imam, he is 'approved' and 'inspired' by God, and is seen as 'brother' of the Prophet. Shi'is receive God's grace through him and it is with his help that they attain victory and, ultimately, Paradise.

'Ali played an important role in the conquest of Baghdad. The chronogram for the initial victory was "'Ali b. Abi Taleb annihilated the Ottomans", yielding 1034 A.H.¹³² Monshi mentions several miracles which were performed by the 'Prince of Najaf'. He begins by making the following statement which also throws some light on the Safawid learned attitude toward 'Ali:

Although the status of 'Ali is too high and his miraculous powers too well known by both friend and foe to occasion any wonder, nevertheless, to do honor and to confer prestige on the clients and friends of the house of the Prophet, I will record what I have heard from reliable sources.¹³³

The first miracle was related to Eskandar Beg by Mowlana Mahmud, the keeper of the keys of the shrine of 'Ali. It involves an

Ottoman musketeer who, as a Sunni, hurled abuse at the defenders of the city every day. The musketeer urged the garrison to surrender and managed to lower the morale of the guards. Finally, a child who 'had never held a gun in his life' was 'aided by the spirit of 'Ali' in shooting the Sunni heretic.¹³⁴ The second miracle involves another 'bigoted' musketeer who behaved in much the same way as the first, except that he also fired shots in the direction of the shrine. When he began to direct his abuse at the 'holy sepulchre' his musket burst and 'his tongue (was) silenced for all eternity'.¹³⁵

The third miracle concerns a lion which prowled around the Ottoman camp at night. Since the Ottomans feared the lion, they did not dare to extend their breastwork, which they usually did at that time. The fourth and fifth miracles both deal with light. When, during the siege, the Safawid stores of lamp oil were exhausted, the guards had to resort to cooking fat to keep the torches lit. When they were out of fat and totally deprived of light, they suddenly found a barrel full of oil. Monshi comments, "when news of this miracle got around, it raised the morale of the defenders."¹³⁶

The final miracle, the account of which Eskandar Monshi received from Pahlavan Mohsin, who was present during the siege, also has to do with lack of oil. Due to the limited resources, the guards could only light one torch, but the light it shed was so bright it illuminated the whole fort. When an assailant taunted the guards about their plentiful supply of oil, they replied, "we have not lit any lamps; this light comes from the light of sainthood and the miraculous power

of the 'Prince of Najaf!' The Ottoman's laughter induced Pahlavan Mohsin to curse them saying, "if we are telling the truth, you will soon see proof of it." A few days later the gun which had been trained on the fort exploded and when Murad Pasha requested a replacement and reinforcements from Istanbul, they were denied him. Discouraged, he marched away, the siege was lifted and "the defenders of Najaf were saved by the holy spirit of 'Ali."¹³⁷

In most cases Monshi supports his stories by attributing them to eyewitnesses or 'God-fearing men" who could only speak the truth. He begins his account of the miraculous barrel of oil, for instance, by stating:

This story was told to me by
men of substance and trust
who had it on the authority of
Mir Baha al-Din, the son-in-law
of Mir Feyzollah, a resident of Najaf;
I myself had the story direct from
the above-mentioned *seyyed*,
a most pious and God-fearing man.¹³⁸

This insistence on truth not only makes Eskandar Beg Monshi a remarkable historian, but also connects his accounts of the miracles with those of the *hadith* or the *akhbar* of the Imams. He uses a system of *isnad* to authenticate his accounts. Their truth, therefore, cannot be contested, and they serve their primary purpose (mentioned above) of conferring prestige on the friends of the Household of the Prophet.

As a member of this Household, Shah 'Abbas perceived the victory as that of good over evil. This was merely one addition to the list of arguments in the Safawid store. The intercession of 'Ali was undeniable proof of 'Abbas' own authority and his rightful claim to the

province of Baghdad. The Shah's worth is also supported by his behavior during and after the siege. He treated the enemy wounded with kindness and provided them with medical care.¹³⁹ Before leaving Baghdad he sent offerings and alms to the residents and the poor of Karbala and Najaf.¹⁴⁰ He also visited the shrines at Najaf, Kazimayn, Karbala and Samarra.¹⁴¹ In all this, the Shah was conforming to the definition of the righteous as expressed in *sura* LXXVI: 7-9.

Because of his 'patience and constancy' Shah 'Abbas will be rewarded with 'a Garden and garments of silk' (LXXVI: 12-22). He will have no fear of the Day of Judgement, for he marches towards it as he marches into battle, confident in God's help and support (LXXVI: 11). Since the Ottomans, like the Umayyads and 'Abbasids before them, chose to ignore the powers of 'Ali, they could only suffer defeat, both in this life and in the hereafter.

The Ottoman viewpoint on the occurrences which culminated in their withdrawal from Baghdad is expressed in a letter which was intercepted by the *Qizilbash* and dispatched to the Shah.¹⁴² The following excerpt expresses the despair and discouragement which the writer felt. Shah 'Abbas already seemed like an invincible victor and 'Ali as a powerful and true saint.

Why has fate treated us so unkindly? On one side of us the Diala, on another the Satt, behind us Shah 'Abbas and in front of us Baghdad. Perhaps help will come to us from God. In a word, nobody since Adam has fallen into such peril. None knows our plight, and well I know that whatever measure the Shah of Iran undertakes, it will turn out in his

favor - there is absolutely no doubt that the miracles of 'Ali have some effect. We do not know why the Emam-e Azam (i.e., Abu Hanifa) is so much weaker in exerting his miraculous power on our behalf or else we could turn for help to the saint on account of his sacred resting place and kindly spirit.¹⁴³

Abu-Hanifa, whom the letter writer mentions, was the grandson of a Persian slave. He was a businessman by profession and he lived and worked in Kufa for most of his life (699-767). Abu Hanifa wrote no books, but he became, on account of his religious views, the founder of the second school of orthodox jurisdiction. The Hanafi school was accepted by the 'Abbasid caliphs because of its reliance on *qiyas* (analogy) rather than *hadith* or *Sunna*. Hanafi teachings spread eastward and the system was inherited by the Seljuqs and the Ottoman Turks.¹⁴⁴

Obviously, the Ottoman letter writer was a Hanafi. He wonders at the impotence of Abu Hanifa, who is buried in the province of Baghdad, in aiding his followers. He sees 'Ali, however, as possessing true and effective powers. The Ottoman is convinced of the Shah's victory and poses the question, "Why has Fate treated us so unkindly?" Any Safawid theologian would have given the simple answer, 'because you are a heretic, a *zindiq*, your faith is not true, for you neither recognize 'Ali as the *wali* of God, nor God as the Creator of Life and shaper of men's destinies.' Fate, Destiny, Time or *Dahr*, all hark back to the inscription of *sura LXXVI* in the north eyvan. For this Ottoman the Blazing Fire was already prepared and he had no hope of salvation. At the end of his letter the Ottoman writes:

Truly the calamity of the Day
of Resurrection will not equal
these days of our sufferings here.¹⁴⁵

The Day of Resurrection is the day of 'distressful Wrath' which the righteous fear (LXXVI: 10). But the righteous will be delivered from it and only the evil will be left to suffer the consequences of their acts. This is a dark and terrible day for unbelievers and, indeed, for all men. *Sura XXII, Hajj*, begins with the warning of the Day of Judgement:

O Mankind! fear your Lord!
For the convulsion of the Hour
(Of Judgement) will be
A thing Terrible!

(XXII: 1)

According to the Ottoman writer the calamity which he was suffering was worse than that of Judgement Day. There is no doubt that when Eskandar Monshi chose to reproduce this portion of the letter in his history, he was aware of all the possible associations. Judgement Day had come at the hands of Shah 'Abbas, a descendant of 'Ali who enjoyed God's favor and grace. By restoring the lands of Arab Iraq to its rightful inheritors, the Shah was performing a religious duty, bringing justice and equity to the region. This mission was not unlike that of the Mahdi who shall appear on Judgement Day to perform precisely the same function.

The Ottoman heretics had no hope of escape. Their sins dictated their ultimate end. Justice was being restored at the hands of 'Abbas with the aid of 'Ali, the Approved by God. Sunni control of the Shi'i religious center was being eliminated. The Sunnis were being replaced by Shi'is just as God replaces unbelievers with believers.

This is the final result of Shah 'Abbas' campaign into Baghdad. The expulsion of the Sunni rulers is in conformity with verse 28 of *sura Dahr*:

It is We who created
Them, and We have made
Their joints strong;
But, when We will,
We can substitute
The like of them
By a complete change.

(LXXVI: 28)

The implications of *sura Dahr* and its associations with the Royal Mosque are in conformity with the usual methods of Safawid religious arguments. These 'weapons' could be used to discourage an enemy as well as to encourage Isfahan's residents and strengthen their faith in the power of their Shah. The Ottomans may never have seen the epigraphs but the words had their effect on all the residents of Iran. The Shi'is were confident of attaining Paradise at the hands of their Shah. The Sunnis had to decide between God's wrath or salvation. Salvation could only come through conversion, for as the invasion of Baghdad had shown, resistance was of no avail.

The events contemporary to the inscription of *sura Dahr* supplement its words and threats. The *sura* itself acts as irrefutable proof of the justice of the events. The two methods together form a physical and psychological trap from which all Sunnis, whether civilians or warriors, could not escape.

East Section (fig. 11)

The East Eyvan

Around the sides of the east eyvan is the following inscription in *thuluth* script:

A. Epigraph

Abu Na'im (or Nu'aym) al-Muhaddith said in his book on God's words (the Qur'anic verse) 'and question our apostles whom we sent before thee' that the Prophet, God's Blessings upon him and the people of his Household, said that during the Night Journey, God brought him face to face with the prophets then said, "Ask them, O Muhammad, 'what was your inspired message (what were you sent to preach)?" The Prophet, God's Blessings and Peace upon him and the people of his Household, said... "We were sent to testify that there is no god but God and to acknowledge your prophethood and the *wilaya* (spiritual investiture) of 'Ali b. Abi Taleb, upon whom be Peace."

Abu Dharr al-Ghifari said that the messenger of God, God's Blessings and Peace upon him, said to 'Ali b. Abi Taleb, upon whom be Peace, "You are a partner in Heaven and Hell, and you shall knock on the gate of Heaven and enter it without (giving) account." *ta'mir* (restoration) of March 1329.

The word *ta'mir* which appears at the end of the epigraph is related to the verb *ammara*, which was discussed earlier in relation to the portal of the Royal Mosque.¹⁴⁶ An inscription in the south dome indicates that restoration work was carried out under Muhammad Rida Shah Pahlavi.¹⁴⁷ Since the date given in the east eyvan (1329/1950) coincides with that in the south dome, *ta'mir* has been translated as 'restoration' and the *hadith* has been considered a seventeenth century

original rather than a late addition.

This could explain the missing words in the inscription. God instructs Muhammad to question the prophets about their message. The Prophet begins to speak but responds in the plural. This indicates a missing portion. If the missing segment were restored, the Hadith would read as follows:

"Ask them, O Muhammad, 'what were you sent to preach?'" The Prophet, God's Blessings and Peace upon him and the people of his Household, said [so I asked them, what were you sent to preach? and they replied] We were sent to testify...

The error, probably a mistake in restoration work rather than an original omission, has no effect on the meaning of the *hadith* and, therefore, presents no problems in its interpretation.¹⁴⁸

B. Analysis

The *hadith* concerns the interpretation of a specific Qur'anic verse, verse 45 of *sura* XLIII, *Zukhruf* or Gold Adornments. The *sura* expounds the Truth of Revelation as contrasted to the false practices of pagans. They are seen as attached to the material aspects of life, 'silver roofs and silver ceilings and adornments of gold' (XLIII: 33-35), hence the title of the *sura*; *Zukhruf*. Three messengers prior to Muhammad are mentioned: Abraham (XLIII: 26-28), Moses (XLIII: 46-56), and Jesus (XLIII: 57-67). In each case the messenger exposes false worship and expounds the true, but the people to whom the revelations are sent either refuse to accept them or, as in the case of Jesus, corrupt them. Muhammad's message was sent to the people of Quraysh, but they too refused to accept the 'Clear Signs' and take the 'Straight

Way.' Thus verse 45 is a reminder to them to look back at the examples of ancient peoples and messengers and learn from them.

Verses LXIII: 43-45 are a direct address to the Prophet. He is told:

43. So hold thou fast
To the Revelations sent down
To thee: verily thou
Art on a Straight Way.
44. The (Qur'an) is indeed
The Message, for thee
And for thy people;
And soon shall you
(All) be brought to account
45. And question thou our apostles
Whom We sent before thee;
Did We appoint any deities
Other than (God) Most Gracious
To be worshipped?

The 'Straight Way' is, therefore, the belief in God's Unity which is incorporated in the Qur'an as well as all earlier revelations.

The doctrine was not acceptable to the Meccans who controlled most of the shrines of the Arabian gods and goddesses. The doctrine of unity would cost them the loss of income from the pilgrims who visited the major shrines.¹⁴⁹ Verse XLIII: 16 refers directly to the Meccans:

What! Has He taken
Daughters out of what He
Himself creates, and granted
To you sons for choice?

(XLIII: 16)

The daughters are the goddesses Manat, 'Uzza and Allat which the Meccans subjugated to a superior deity, Allah.¹⁵⁰ The verse refutes the possibility of the existence of partners with God and reiterates the concept of unity.

This concept was known by all earlier generations and messengers. Proof is supplied by the Qur'an and by the *hadith* in the east eyvan. In the latter case, however, the details of the revelation of the verse are changed. The first two lines of verse 45 are explained as God's speech to Muhammad during the Night Journey or *Isra'*. One year before his *hijra* to Medina,¹⁵¹ Muhammad was transported from the Sacred Mosque, *Masjid al-Haram* (at Mecca) to the Farthest Mosque, *Masjid al-Aqsa* (usually considered to be the one at Jerusalem).¹⁵² Muhammad was then transported to Heaven and "shown some of the signs of God."¹⁵³

In the *hadith* the prophets are used as vehicles of these signs. Muhammad is brought into the presence of his spiritual ancestors and instructed to question them about their revelations. They reply by professing the unity of God and acknowledging the Prophethood of Muhammad, both of which had been revealed to them. They also acknowledge the *wilaya* of 'Ali b. Abi Taleb, making that too one of the 'Signs of God' and part of His planned revelations.

That these ancient messengers had knowledge of 'Ali's mission is sufficient proof that he was invested with authority, that his Imamhood was decreed by God and holds the same station as the dogma *La ilaha illa Allah*. In this context, the Safawid *shahada* as instituted by Shah Isma'il I in 1501, *Ashadu an la ilaha illa Allah, Ashhadu:anna Muhammadan rasulu Allah, wa Ashhadu anna Aliyyan waliyyu Allah*,¹⁵⁴ becomes the only complete profession of Islam. Not to add the last clause is not to be a Muslim. The chosen verse XLIII: 45, therefore, holds special significance in Shi'ism. It calls to witness all past

unitarians who voice their belief in the Shi'i Imam. Knowledge and acceptance of this profession lead to Paradise, while its rejection leads to pain and suffering (LXIII: 68-77). Verse 78 of the same *sura* proclaims:

Verily We have brought
The Truth to you!
But most of you
Have a hatred for Truth

(LXIII: 78)

This is the Truth of the Unity of God as sent down to the people of Moses, Abraham and Jesus, and the truth of the Prophethood of Muhammad as applied to the Meccans. Finally it is the truth of the imamate-caliphate of 'Ali as revealed to all Muslims. If this interpretation is applied to the entire *sura Zukhruf*, it becomes evident that 'they who have been unjust' (LXIII: 76) are the Sunnis who refused to accept the message and proclaim 'Ali their rightful caliph and imam.

The final portion of the inscription supports this conclusion. It states that 'Ali is among those who, on the Day of Judgement, will be told, 'enter ye the Garden' (LXIII: 70) without questioning or account. The Prophet's statement (in the epigraph) 'you are a partner in Heaven and Hell', also indicates that 'Ali is truly on the path of God and is thus awarded knowledge of all that is unseen. This is borne out by another *hadith* known as *Hadith al-Mi'raj* (the Nocturnal Ascension or Night Journey). The Prophet is addressed by God in these words:

"He who wishes to act according to my satisfaction must possess three qualities: he must exhibit a thankfulness that is not mixed with ignorance, a remembrance upon which the dust of forgetfulness will not settle, and a love in which he does not prefer

the love of creatures rather than My love. If he loves Me, I love him; I will open the eye of his heart with the sight of My majesty and will not hide from him the qualities of my creatures. I will confide in him in the darkness of the night and the light of the day until conversation and intercourse with creatures terminates. I will make him hear My word and the word of My angels. I will reveal to him the secret which I have veiled from My creatures. I will dress him with the robe of modesty until the creatures feel ashamed before him. He will walk upon the earth having been forgiven. I will make his heart possess consciousness and vision and I will not hide from him anything in Paradise or in the Fire. I will make known to him whatever people experience on the Day of Judgement in the way of terror and calamity.¹⁵⁵

This is the basis of the Shi'i argument for the inspiration of the Imam. As possessor of esoteric knowledge, the Imam, specifically 'Ali, is the perfect guide who leads people to eternal life. Being forgiven by God and inspired by Him, 'Ali could also assume the role of intercessor on behalf of his followers. His 'partnership in Heaven and Hell', could also imply that he would be presiding on Judgement Day. He will ask the unbelievers to account for their sins and be an aid to the believers, bringing about God's mercy upon them.¹⁵⁶ The Sunnis have no imam (in the Shi'i sense of the word) to guide them or intercede with God on their behalf. On the Day of Judgement they will be called upon to account for their disbelief and then consigned to hell. This final part of the *hadith* is transmitted by the authority of Abu Dharr b. Jundab al-Ghifari (d. 653), an early follower of Muhammad and

a renowned ascetic.¹⁵⁷ Abu Dharr was also one of the earliest followers of 'Ali. He and three other 'Alid supporters, Salman, Miqdad and 'Ammar, were the first to receive the designation of *shi'ah*.¹⁵⁸ He is said to have been an opponent of the wealthy and a defender of the oppressed.¹⁵⁹ His attacks on the aristocracy in general and on the Umayyad caliph in particular caused the caliph 'Uthman to exile him to his birthplace, a small village known as Rabdha, where he died.¹⁶⁰ This exile was due not only to Abu Dharr's criticisms of the ruling regime, but also to his support for 'Ali. In one of his *kutbahs* (sermons or speeches) he stated:

'Ali is the legatee (*wasi*) of Muhammad and the inheritor (*warith*) of his knowledge. Oh you bewildered and perplexed community after its Prophet, if you give preference [in leadership] to those whom God has given preference, and set aside, those whom God has set aside, and if you firmly place the succession and inheritance in the people of the house of your Prophet, you will certainly be prosperous and your means of subsistence will be made ample.¹⁶¹

This kind of political agitation could not be tolerated by 'Uthman who promptly sentenced Abu Dharr to exile, with the stipulation that none may accompany him on his trip except Marwan (the caliph's secretary). 'Ali, Hasan and Husayn, as well as a partisan, 'Ammar b. Yasir, disobeyed this order and escorted Abu Dharr out of Medina. When Marwan reported this transgression to the caliph, 'Uthman questioned 'Ali about his behavior. 'Ali refused to acknowledge the order and replied, "my merits and excellences are far beyond yours; I am far superior to you in every respect."¹⁶²

Thus Abu Dharr became a celebrated Shi'i hero and, in a sense, a martyr. There are Shi'i *hadith* in which the Prophet speaks of the virtues of the early followers of 'Ali and specifically of Abu Dharr. The most pertinent to this discussion is the following:

There is no one between heaven
and earth more truthful than
Abu Dharr.¹⁶³

Thus, according to Shi'i belief, the truthfulness of his proclamation at the end of the epigraph of the east eyvan is unquestionable. Considering the importance of the first part of the inscribed message, 'The Profession of Shi'ism', it is not surprising that the designers of the epigraphic program relied on such a truthful authority to substantiate the interpretation of Verse XLIII: 45.

C. Interpretation

The focal point of the *hadith* is the verse (or portion of),

And question thou our apostles
Whom we sent before thee;

(XLIII: 45)

The main theme of the verse and *sura* is the attestation of unity which prevails throughout the Qur'an. The original setting of the verse is not specific, but in the inscription it is attributed to the Night Journey and Ascension of the Prophet (*al-Isra'* and *al Mi'raj*). There is also an entire *sura*, *al Isra'* XVII, which is devoted to the Prophet's Night Journey. The main purpose of the verse, therefore, is not the simple proclamation of unity, nor the description of the Prophet's miraculous journey. It holds far wider significance for the institution of Shi'ism.

The verse stands as an introduction to the basic Shi'i dogma, the *wilaya* of 'Ali. The presence of apostles is essential since they

are irreproachable and inerrant witnesses.¹⁶⁴ The more essential point, however, is that 'Ali's *wilaya* was revealed to the prophets and to Muhammad after being ordained by God. The Prophet then had a duty to 'proclaim the message sent from the Lord' (V: 70). After receiving this revelation, however, the Prophet felt it prudent to keep it secret. He then received the revelation of verse V: 70.

O Apostle! proclaim
The (message) which hath been
Sent to thee from Thy Lord.
If thou didst not, thou
Wouldst not have fulfilled
And proclaimed His Mission.
And God will defend thee
From men (who mean mischief).
For God guideth not
Those who reject faith.¹⁶⁵

(V: 70)

At the same time the Prophet also became aware that his death was near, thus he had to 'fulfill his mission', he could no longer keep the ordained succession secret and had to reveal it. That this decision was realized is manifest in the Shi'i religious argument which states,

How is it possible that the Prophet should not neglect to speak of events and details and trials of years or even thousands of years after him, and yet would neglect the condition that had to be brought into being most urgently after his death?... How could he concern himself with the most natural and common acts such as eating, drinking and sleeping and give hundreds of comments concerning them, yet remain completely silent about this important problem and not appoint someone in his place?¹⁶⁶

The Shi'i answer to this question is that the Prophet did not neglect his duty, he did appoint a successor, and he made this nomination

(*nass*) known to all his devout followers. This event took place shortly after the revelation of verse V: 70 at the marsh of Ghadir Khumm where the Prophet stopped on his return from the Final Pilgrimage. For the details of this event and its full interpretation, the discussion must move a step further, out of the east eyvan and into the dome chamber, where the conclusion and results of the Night Journey are inscribed.

The East Dome

The epigraph in the east dome is divided into two parts. The first is the inscription which runs in a long band along the interior of the dome. The second, also inside the dome, is inscribed along the four sides below it (fig. 12).

East Dome Drum Inscription

A. Epigraph

Inside the east dome runs a long band of *thuluth* script. The inscription is composed of the first ten verses of *sura XLVIII*, *Fath* or *Victory*,¹⁶⁷ and signed by Muhammad Ghani. The ten verses are quoted below.

1. Verily We have granted
Thee a manifest Victory:
2. That God may forgive thee
Thy faults of the past
And those to follow;
Fulfil His favour to thee;
And guide thee
On the Straight Way;
3. And that God may help
Thee with powerful help.

4. It is He who sent
Down Tranquility
Into the hearts of
The Believers, that they may
Add Faith to their Faith;-
For to God belong
The Forces of the heavens
And the earth; and God is
Full of Knowledge and Wisdom;-
5. That He may admit
The men and women
Who believe, to Gardens
Beneath which rivers flow,
To dwell therein for aye,
And remove their ills
From them;- and that is,
In the sight of God,
The highest achievement
(For man),-
6. And that He may punish
The Hypocrites, men and
Women, who imagine
An evil opinion of God.
On them is a round
Of Evil: the Wrath of God
Is on them: He has cursed
Them and got Hell ready
For them: and evil
Is it for a destination.
7. For to God belong
The forces of the heavens
And the earth; and God is
Exalted in Power,
Full of Wisdom.
8. We have truly sent thee
As a witness, as a
Bringer of Glad Tidings
And as a Warner:
9. In order that ye
(O men) may believe
In God and His Apostle,
That ye may assist
And honour Him,
And celebrate His praises
Morning and evening.
10. Verily those who plight
Their fealty to thee

Do no less than plight
 Their fealty to God:
 The Hand of God is
 Over their hands:
 Then any one who violates
 His oath, does so
 To the harm of his own
 Soul, and any one who
 Fulfils what he has
 Covenanted with God, -
 God will soon grant him
 A great Reward.

In Truth has the Almighty God spoken; written by
 Muhammad Ghani.

B. Analysis

This *sura* was revealed after the conclusion of the Treaty of Hudaibiya between Muhammad and the Meccans (628 A.D.), and can thus be dated with certainty.¹⁶⁸ The treaty was the outcome of Muhammad's march on Mecca with a group of around 1,400 to 1,600 men¹⁶⁹ in order to perform the 'umra, or Lesser Pilgrimage. Muhammad's motives in making such a move on a city which was still antagonistic to his teachings are varied and may be interpreted in different ways. Two years earlier (624 A.D.) the *qiblah* had been changed from Jerusalem to Mecca. The conquest of Mecca and the conversion of its inhabitants may then have been considered a religious duty. While on his way to subdue the city, the Prophet felt that his attack was premature and thus converted the march into a peaceful pilgrimage.¹⁷⁰ Other sources interpret the Prophet's march to Mecca as a primarily peaceful one. He is said to have had a dream which forced his decision to call on all Muslims to join him, bringing with them their animals of sacrifice.¹⁷¹ Some of the tribes, who expected that there would be no booty, made excuses not to join the pilgrims, and were later rebuked in the same *sura* (XLVIII:

11-17).

The Meccans interpreted the approach as a hostile action and sent two hundred cavalry men to halt the advance. Muhammad avoided the confrontation by making a diversion onto the hilly terrain of Hudaibiya, where he set up camp.¹⁷² The Meccans refused to grant entry to all but one of the Muslims, 'Abd Allah b. 'Ubayy, on account of his advanced age. Ibn 'Ubayy's refusal of the offer was the first mark of his solidarity with Muhammad, a solidarity which was to be reaffirmed after the pact was concluded.¹⁷³ The result of the lengthy negotiations between Muhammad and the Meccans was a treaty in which both parties agreed to halt all hostilities for a period of ten years.¹⁷⁴ The Muslims were still barred from the holy city but would be allowed to perform the 'umra the following year when the Meccans would vacate the area for a period of three days. Another provision was Muhammad's agreement to send back any Meccan who might come to join him without the consent of a protector or guardian. Any tribes or individuals outside Mecca who might choose to join the Prophet, however, would be permitted to do so.¹⁷⁵

This treaty gave Muhammad the freedom and security needed for northward expansion. His companions, however, felt disappointed and defeated and he had to find a means of securing their loyalty. When difficulties arose at a certain point in the negotiations, Muhammad sent 'Uthman to represent him in Mecca. 'Uthman was of the powerful clan of Abu Sufyan and would thus be safe, but he was late in returning and rumors had it that he had been killed. The Prophet then gathered

his followers under a tree and asked them to swear allegiance to him and to assure him that they would follow all his commands. This became known as *bay'at al-ridwan*, The Pledge of Good Pleasure.¹⁷⁶

In sura XLVIII verse 10, the covenant between Muhammad and his people is likened to one between them and God. God's 'Good Pleasure' with the proceedings is evidenced by the symbolic placement of His hand over those of the supporters.¹⁷⁷ Their actions assured them of victory (XLVIII: 1), forgiveness (XLVIII: 2), and ultimately, Paradise (XLVIII: 5). Those who had lagged behind and had doubted God's power to aid believers, as well as the Meccans who persisted in resisting Islamization, would be punished with "an evil destination" (XLVIII: 6).

The entire project ended in favor of Muhammad. He had been able to subdue the Meccans by peaceful means and thus gained much prestige.¹⁷⁸ Shortly after the Muslims performed the 'umra as planned the following year, two leading Meccans, 'Umar b. al-'As and Khalid ibn al-Walid, later to become among the foremost statesmen and generals of Islam, joined the Prophet's forces. The Pledge of Good Pleasure also provided the Prophet with a group of followers who would not oppose any of his decisions. To confer added prestige upon these men, Muhammad forbade any others from taking part in the conquest of Khaybar which occurred six weeks after the pledge.¹⁷⁹

Since God had contracted a covenant with these men and approved their choice, their prestige was to last long after the Prophet's death in 632. It is to 'Ali's credit that seven hundred of them fought by his side at the battle of Siffin in 657.¹⁸⁰

C. Interpretation

Although the Pledge of Good Pleasure forms a firm link between Muhammad's march on Mecca and 'Ali's battle against Mu'awiya, it is not by any means the only common point between the two. A similar pledge or *bay'a* took place on 'Ali's nomination for the caliphate in 656 A.D.¹⁸¹ On that occasion Mu'awiya b. Abi Sufyan and his followers in Syria refused to pay allegiance to 'Ali. Talha and Zubayr gave theirs and subsequently withdrew it. 'Ali disposed of Talha and Zubayr at the Battle of the Camel in 656, and marched to confront Mu'awiya at Siffin. Lengthy arbitration, not unlike that between Muhammad and the Meccans, took place. In the meantime an opposition group, later known as the *Khawarij*, broke away from 'Ali's forces. In a speech concerning these events 'Ali described his situation, his popular nomination after the death of 'Uthman, and the subsequent desertion of his fellow Muslims.

...all of a sudden I was frightened
to see a crowd of people around
myself, thick as the hyena's mane,
thronging towards me from every
direction until [my sons] Hasan and
Husayn were mobbed and my two sides
split, gathering around me like a
band of goats.

But when I took up the government,
one group broke its pledge, another
rebelled, and some others transgressed,
as if they had not heard the words of
God, who says: 'That is the abode
hereafter which we allot those who
do not seek greatness and corruption
on the earth, and the end is for those
who fear'.

(XXVII: 83)¹⁸²

The deserters and transgressors are like the tribes who refused to join the Prophet in his pilgrimage, and the Meccans who refused to

allow him access to the city. They are all hypocrites and their end is described in XLVIII: 6 of the inscription. 'Ali's devoted friends, who swore allegiance to him promising to be "friends to whom he befriended and enemies to whom he was hostile",¹⁸³ are likened to those of the Prophet's followers who reaffirmed their loyalty to him in the Pledge Under the Tree. Both cases, therefore, are to be seen as 'Pledges of Good Pleasure', and from a Shi'i point of view, the hand of God was over the hands of the supporters of 'Ali just as it had been over those of the followers of Muhammad (XLVIII: 10). The arbitration of Adhruh at Siffin had been in favor of Mu'awiya, but the authority invested in him was on a human level. In contrast, the authority invested in 'Ali and, through Husayn and Musa al-Kazim, in the Safawids, is on an eternal, spiritual level. There exists, therefore, a covenant between 'Ali, the Safawids, and God.

The Treaty of Hudaibiya also became the historical model on which later peace negotiations were based. Late in the seventeenth century, the Ottoman historian Naima used it to justify the Treaty of Karlowitz (1699 A.D.) to the Muslims.¹⁸⁴ The most outstanding treaty between the Ottomans and the Safawids is that of Amasya (1555 A.D.). During the reign of Shah 'Abbas there were many attempts to reaffirm the terms of this treaty and arrive at a solution through peaceful means. This peaceful settlement, however, was never to be realized, for the Ottomans, like the Umayyads and the early Muslims, had "violated their oaths" (XLVIII: 10) and usurped what belonged to the Safawids by right.¹⁸⁵ The Safawids claimed the leadership of Islam and, in 1624,

managed to capture Baghdad.¹⁸⁶ In this venture the Safawids found aid in the Imam 'Ali whose miraculous deeds helped guide them to victory.¹⁸⁷

Peace may not have been possible through arbitration, but the Safawid action against the "hypocrites" was condoned by God. The inscription of XLVIII: 1-10 beginning with God's proclamation,

Verily We have granted
Thee a manifest Victory

(XLVIII: 1)

stands as the affirmation of the covenant between God and his followers as contracted at Hudaibiya. The promises of victory and Paradise are a call to the people of Iran as well as its enemies to pledge themselves to the Shah and join the forces of God. The results of this cooperation are elaborated upon in the inscribed *hadith* which serves as an interpretation of the Qur'anic verses.

Sides Below East Dome (figs. 13-14)

A. Epigraph

The inscription runs in a band along the four walls below the east dome. It is in the same white *thuluth* script executed over a blue background on *Kashi* tile. The inscription reads,

Part a.

From the *Musnad* of Ibn Hanbal after al-Bara'a b. 'Azib who said: We were with the Prophet, God's Blessings upon him and the people of his Household, on the Farewell Pilgrimage. When we reached Ghadir Khumm we were all called to collective prayer and the Messenger of God, God's Blessings upon him and the people of his Household, sat between two trees and took 'Ali's hand saying, "Am I not closer to the believers than their own selves?" They said, "Yes,

O Messenger of God". He said,
 "Am I not closer to each and
 every believer than his own self?"
 They said, "Yes, O Messenger of God."

The Prophet said "this is the
mawla of whom I am the *mawla*.
 O God, befriend his friends and
 be the enemy of his enemies."

'Umar then met him ('Ali)
 and said, "congratulations,
 O b. Abi Taleb. You have
 become the *mawla* of every
 believing man and woman."

Part b.

And from the *Manaqeb* of
 Ibn al-Maghazili after Abi
 Huraira who said, The Messenger
 of God, God's Blessings upon
 him and the people of his Household,
 said to 'Ali b. Abi Taleb, upon
 whom be peace, on the day of
 the conquest of Mecca, "do you
 not see that idol, O 'Ali?"
 He replied, "Yes, O Messenger
 of God". He (the Prophet) said,
 "I will carry you up to remove it".
 He ('Ali) said, "No, but I should
 be the one to carry you, O Messenger
 of God". So he (the Prophet),
 God's Blessings and Peace upon
 him, said "If *Rabi'a* and *Mudar*
 were to exert themselves to
 lift me up but a little while
 I am still alive, they would
 not succeed, but stand up,
 O 'Ali". And the Messenger of
 God, God's Blessings and
 Peace upon him and the people
 of his Household, took hold
 of 'Ali's legs and lifted
 him so high above the ground
 that the white of his (the Prophet's) arm-
 pits could be seen. Then he
 said, "Do you see what I
 see O 'Ali?" He ('Ali) said,
 "God, Exalted and Mighty, has
 so honored me with you that
 if I wished to touch the
 sky, I would touch it." He
 (the Prophet) said, "Pick up the
 idol, O 'Ali", so 'Ali picked

it up and threw it down.
 The Prophet, God's Blessings
 upon him and the people of
 his Household, then moved out
 from beneath 'Ali and let
 go of his legs. 'Ali fell
 to the ground and laughed.
 "What makes you laugh, O 'Ali?"
 asked the Prophet. He ('Ali) said
 "I fell from atop the Ka'ba
 and no harm has come to
 me". So the Prophet, God's
 Blessings upon him and the
 people of his Household,
 said, "how could any harm
 befall you when
 Muhammad carried you and
 Gabriel, upon whom be peace,
 brought you down?"

Part c.

And from Abi Dharr
 al-Ghifari who said, the
 Messenger of God, God's Blessings
 upon him and the people of his
 Household, has said, "Whoever
 competes with 'Ali for the
 caliphate after me is a *kafir*
 (heretic) who has waged war
 against God and his Messenger".

Written with gratitude to God,
al-Ghani (the Self-Sufficient),
al-Qawi (the All-Powerful),
 in eight and thirty and one thousand.

The epigraph is not signed in the usual manner, but the epithet
 of God, *al-Ghani* (one of the ninety-nine Beautiful Names), might have
 been used by the scribe as an indication of his own identity: Muhammad
 Ghani. The entire inscription forms the intended interpretation of the
 ten verses of *sura XLVIII, Fath*, inscribed on the upper part of the
 east dome.

B. Analysis - (Part a)

The *hadith* is attributed to Ibn Hanbal, the jurist whose

Musnad is one of the canonical collections of Sunni Islam.¹⁸⁸ The authority on whom he bases his *hadith* is al-Bara'a b. 'Azib al-Ansari, a Companion of the Prophet who was present during the Farewell Pilgrimage, and probably also at the Pledge of Good Pleasure of Hudaibiya.¹⁸⁹ Ibn 'Azib was one of the aristocrats of Medina who later moved to Kufa and fought with 'Ali at the battles of *al-Jamal*, Siffin and Nahrawan.¹⁹⁰ As he enjoyed such a prestigious position, his account cannot be doubted except in that he was from the pro-'Alid faction. Objectivity is insured, however, by the inclusion of Ibn 'Azib's account in the canonical *Musnad* of Ibn Hanbal.

The *hadith* concerns the proclamation of Ghadir Khumm which also occupies a major position in the inscription of the south dome.¹⁹¹ Ghadir Khumm was a marsh between Mecca and Medina where the Prophet stopped on his return journey from the Final or Farewell Pilgrimage on 18 Dhu'l Hujja 10/16 March 632. There he made his famous speech, appointing 'Ali the *mawla* of all Muslims. Shi'is interpret the incident and the term *mawla* as a nomination of 'Ali to the caliphate (a *nass*), while Sunnis, although they record the incident, maintain that the term is to be interpreted as 'friend' and not 'leader'.¹⁹²

Shi'ism claims that Muhammad had been inspired by God to make 'Ali his successor. The contention is that the Prophet received this revelation on the Night Journey during his Ascension and this event is recorded in the inscription of the east eyvan where the apostles profess the Imamhood of 'Ali.¹⁹³ Muhammad, however, was aware of some opposition to 'Ali and decided to keep this revelation secret.¹⁹⁴ At Ghadir Khumm he received another divine inspiration which enjoined him to

communicate the divine decision. This, according to Shi'ism, was verse V: 70 of the Qur'an.¹⁹⁵

Shortly after the Prophet publicized the succession of 'Ali, and while still at Ghadir Khumm, he received another revelation which he communicated to the Muslims. This revelation is also a verse from sura V:

This day have those who
Reject Faith given up
All hope of your religion:
Yet fear them not
But fear Me.
This day have I
Perfected your religion
For you, completed
My favor upon you,
And have chosen for you
Islam as your religion.

(V: 4)¹⁹⁶

'Allamah Tabataba'i comments on this verse as follows:

The obvious meaning of this verse is that before that particular day the infidels had hopes that a day would come when Islam would die out, but God through the actualization of a particular event made them lose forever the hope that Islam would be destroyed. This very event was the cause of the strength and perfection of Islam and of necessity could not be a minor promulgation of one of the injunctions of religion. Rather, it was a matter of such importance that the constitution of Islam depended on it.¹⁹⁷

The official form of Islam which existed after the Prophet's death, therefore, is imperfect. It did not take into account God's divine

decree which appointed 'Ali as the head of the community. Perfect Islam exists only among the followers and descendants of 'Ali while the Sunnis who 'rejected Faith' (V: 4) are in turn rejected by God (V: 70).

At the same time that the Prophet received God's order to 'proclaim the message', he is also said to have obtained knowledge of his own impending death. He then exhorted the believers to seek guidance in the Qur'an and in his family. The *hadith* dealing with this matter is held (by the Shi'is) to be additional proof that the Prophet could not have left his people before appointing a successor. It is known as *Hadith al-thaqalayn*. The *hadith* of the Two Charges, Zayd b. Arqam, a Companion, gives the following account of the Prophet's speech:

It seems that God has called me
unto Himself and I must obey
his call. But I leave two great
and precious things among you:
the Book of God and My
Household. Be careful as to how
you behave toward them. These
two will never be separated
until they encounter me at *Kawthar*
(in paradise).¹⁹⁸

A similar *hadith* attributed to one of the Prophet's wives, Umm Salmah, goes as follows:

I heard from the Prophet of God
who said, 'Ali is with the Truth
(*haqq*) and the Qur'an, and the
Truth and the Qur'an are also
with 'Ali, and they will be
inseparable until they come upon
me at *Kawthar*.¹⁹⁹

The implications of these *hadith* are summarized by 'Allamah Tabataba'i into five points. First, the Qur'an and the progeny of the Prophet will exist till the Day of Judgement, and there will be no

period of time without an Imam. Second, these two trusts (*amanat*) provide all the spiritual and intellectual authority needed to guide Muslims. Third, the Qur'an and the Household are not to be separated, hence no Muslim has the right to separate himself from the Imam's guidance. Fourth, God will be with those who obey the Imams and will not allow them to be led astray. Fifth, the members of the Household of the Prophet are inerrant, and whoever follows them will never fall into sin or error. The 'Allamah concludes that these perfect descendants are 'Ali and the eleven Imams who succeeded him.²⁰⁰ *Ithna 'Ashari* Shi'ism is, therefore, the only form of True and Perfect Islam.

C. Interpretation - (Part a)

Twelver Shi'ism was instituted by Shah Isma'il I as the official religion of Iran in 1501 A.D.²⁰¹ Through their descent from the shaykhs of the *Safawiyya* order and the seventh Imam Musa al-Kazim, the Safawids thus claimed both religious and political authority. The shah himself was to be considered as the perfect guide to his people, the *murshid-i kamil*.²⁰²

Resistance to Safawid power can thus be equated with resisting the Imamhood of 'Ali and his True Faith. In the inscribed *hadith*, 'Umar b. al-Khattab acknowledges 'Ali's authority by congratulating him on his nomination.²⁰³ On the death of the Prophet, however, 'Umar shifted his allegiance from 'Ali to Abu Bakr.²⁰⁴ By his action he broke his oath and thus became a hypocrite. As a hypocrite who refuses to acknowledge the 'Warnings of God', he is included among those who refused to honor the Pledge of Good Pleasure at Hudaibiya, and who refused to join the

Prophet on his pilgrimage to Mecca. Verse 6 of sura XLVIII inscribed above the *hadith* thus refers to him as well as the two other caliphs, Abu Bakr and 'Uthman, who usurped 'Ali's position. The verse proclaims:

And that He may punish
The hypocrites, men and
Women, who imagine
An evil opinion of God.
On them is a round
Of Evil: the Wrath of God
Is on them: He has cursed
Them and got Hell ready
For them: and evil
Is it for a destination

(XLVIII: 6)

Since God had cursed the unbelievers and usurpers, their cursing became the duty of those who followed the religion of the Imam. In Iran this cursing became a ritual invocation of God's approbation on Abu Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthman in particular, and on all Sunnis and enemies of 'Ali in general.²⁰⁵ As the violators of the 'Pledge of Ghadir', these three also became the main objects of the Feast of Ghadir, celebrated in Iran on 16 March. The Feast gained political significance under the Safawids.²⁰⁶ It is celebrated by the baking of three pastry figures filled with honey, each of which represents one of the three usurpers. The figures are then stabbed and the flowing honey symbolizes the blood of the caliphs.²⁰⁷ In 1038/1628-29, when this inscription was added to the Royal Mosque, Sunni blood had recently been spilt over the earth of Baghdad. Shah 'Abbas' war against the Ottomans was thus part of his duty of promulgating Perfect Islam.

B. Analysis - (Parts b, c)

The setting is Mecca in 630 A.D., the year the Meccans were conquered by the Muslims. The Treaty of Hudaibiya, contracted two years earlier, had stipulated ten years of peace, but an incident had strained relations between the two parties. Abu Sufyan, the Meccan leader (and ancestor of the Umayyads), headed a deputation to Medina to seek compromise with the Prophet. Muhammad advised him to surrender peacefully. After Abu Sufyan left, the Prophet gathered 10,000 men and marched to Mecca. There was little resistance and the city was quickly overcome. On 11 January 630 A.D. Mecca officially belonged to the new Arabian religion.²⁰⁸

On entering the Ka'ba, the Prophet is said to have touched each of three hundred and sixty idols with his spear. They immediately fell to the ground and were destroyed.²⁰⁹ The destruction of the idols was part of the Islamization of the pagan shrine. The giant stone statue of Hubal, the main deity,²¹⁰ was atop the Ka'ba, and it is this same statue which the Prophet instructs 'Ali to remove. Al-Tabataba'i mentions the incident as an illustration of 'Ali's courage and strength. Following the Prophet's command, he "placed his feet on the Prophet's shoulders, climbed to the top of the Ka'ba and pulled Hubal from its place and cast it down."²¹¹

In the inscribed *hadith*, 'Ali protests to being carried by the Prophet and offers to be the carrier instead. The Prophet's reply, "if Rabi'a and Mudar were to exert themselves in lifting me up but a little while I am still alive, they would not succeed", is a symbolic

attestation of Muhammad's weight and worth. *Rabi'a* and *Mudar* are the two main Northern Arabian tribes from which the majority of Muslim clans were descended. The Prophet himself was from the clan of Quraysh, a subdivision of the tribe of Kinana descended directly from *Mudar*.²¹² Thus, by way of a figure of speech, the Prophet claims that even if all the Arabs tried to lift him, or stand in his way, they would not succeed.

The Prophet's invincibility is a sign of God's approval. When the Prophet moves from beneath 'Ali and allows him to fall to the ground, the latter's safety is assured by this same approval. Gabriel, the agent of God, intercedes to insure that no harm may come to 'Ali. As a vehicle of revelation and executor of God's will, Gabriel then reveals God's wishes that 'Ali should remain unharmed in order to carry on God's work.

C. Interpretation - (Parts b, c)

The removal and destruction of the statue of Hubal stands for the complete Islamization of the Ka'ba, the destruction of the last vestige of pagan belief and the last remnants of opposition in Mecca, and the purification of the shrine by the forces of Islam. The implications of this event have far wider significance. It stands as a symbolic annihilation of all forces of evil (the statue) at the hands of both Muhammad and 'Ali. None could stop the expansion of Islam (*Rabi'a* and *Mudar*), for it was the religion approved by God. Finally, 'Ali was to be the main protagonist of Perfect Islam and the leader of the *umma* (Gabriel's help). His leadership was, therefore, foretold by this

incident.

This *hadith* enjoys a direct relationship with the verses (XLVIII: 1-10) inscribed above it. *Sura Fath* begins with the proclamation of victory. That victory was manifested in the Treaty of Hudaibiya, but also applies to the conquest of Mecca. The hypocrites of verse 6 are then substituted by the Meccans themselves, for they were punished by the forces of God. In Shi'i terms, the same applications can be superimposed over the forces of opposition against the Imam. The infidels include Abu Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthman, Mu'awiya, and all their ideological descendants. Verse XLVIII: 6 specifies the punishment of all hypocrites "men and women". This may be interpreted as a manifestation of the bitterness the Shi'is felt toward 'A'isha, *umm al-mu'minin* (Mother of the Faithful).²¹³ Fatima, 'Ali's wife and daughter of Muhammad, would then be included among the "men and women who believe" (Verse 6). Since the twelve Imams are descended from her, she becomes the real *umm al-mu'minin*, or at least, Mother of the Twelver Shi'is.

'Ali had been aided in the destruction of Talha and Zubayr just as he had been aided in destroying paganism. He also fought for the True religion by destroying al-Aswad, the false prophet of Yemen.²¹⁴ The inscription of the east dome, therefore, reiterates the spiritual and political authority invested in 'Ali. As the protagonist of Perfect Islam, his leadership is to be considered among the warnings and glad tidings of the upper part of the dome where Verse XLVIII: 8 states,

We have truly sent thee
 As a witness, as a
 Bringer of Glad Tidings
 And as a Warner.

(XLVIII: 8)

The Prophet's warning is summarized in the short *hadith* at the end of the inscription (part c). It is an injunction against questioning the authority of 'Ali, for fighting what is ordained is akin to waging war against God and his Messenger. 'Ali's caliphate had not only been contested but also usurped. The Muslims who condoned this transgression are infidels and heretics, thus they cannot be allowed to lead other Muslims or to control the shrines of Islam. Religion and politics are as closely intertwined in the seventeenth century as they were in the seventh. To the seventeenth century Muslim world, 'Abbas was the warner. With 'Ali on his side he was assured that he was on the right path and that God would help him 'with a powerful help' (XLVIII: 3).

The forces of *Rabi'a* and *Mudar* could not hinder the advance. Shah 'Abbas and 'Ali could destroy the forces of evil just as easily as 'Ali and the Prophet had destroyed Hubal. The conquest of Baghdad is in fact dated by the chronogram "'Ali b. Abi Taleb annihilated the Ottomans."²¹⁵ 'Abbas' efforts were a contribution toward the institution of Perfect Islam, Ithna 'Ashari Shi'ism. Had the warning of XLVIII: 8 been carried out, the Shah of Iran would have become the caliph of the Islamic world. In that position he could guide all Muslims on the True Path and prepare them for the final appearance of the Mahdi.

The East Mihrab

A. Epigraph

The east mihrab inscription is contemporary with that of the dome. It is by the hand of Muhammad Saleh and consists of verse 144 of sura II, *al-Baqara*, The Cow.²¹⁶

We see the turning
Of thy face (for guidance)
To the heavens: now
Shall We turn thee
To a Qibla that shall
Please thee. Turn then
Thy face in the direction.
Of the Sacred Mosque:
Wherever ye are, turn
Your faces in that direction
The people of the Book
Know well that that is
The truth from their Lord.
Nor is God unmindful
Of what they do.

Written by Muhammad Saleh al-Isfahani, 1038.

B. Analysis

On 11 February 624 A.D. the Prophet was with a group of his followers at the mosque of Qoba. They all turned toward Jerusalem to commence their prayers when verse II: 144 was revealed. The Prophet then turned toward the Sacred Mosque, the Ka'ba, and thus established the new focal point of the faith.²¹⁷ The shift of *qiblah* was a symbolic act by which Islam was established as a totally independent religion.

The choice of the Ka'ba as the center of Islam was of dual significance. In religious terms it is connected to Abraham,²¹⁸ the first *hanif* or unitarian, and thus it is the greatest monument to the primary tenet of Islam. Politically, it separated the Muslims from the People

of the Book while at the same time it unified them into one brotherhood with an Arabian center.

Symbolically, this orientation takes place every day when the Muslims face Mecca in prayer. The mihrab acts as a pointer, directing them to the essence of their worship. The inscription of verse II: 144 in the mihrab is thus the graphic counterpart of the architectural form. Both act in unison to enhance and reiterate the dogma of unity. The physical orientation toward Mecca occurs once a year when Muslims from all over the world go to the holy city to perform the Great Pilgrimage. The Ka'ba, therefore, stands at the heart of Islam and dominates the daily life of every Muslim.

C. Interpretation

The establishment of Mecca as the holy center of Islam occurred six years before the city was in the hands of the Prophet and his followers. During those years they were exiles in Medina, and Mecca was closed to them. When, in 628, the Muslims were on their way to perform the 'umra, the Meccans thwarted them. The Prophet camped at Hudaibiya and concluded the peace treaty which was heralded in the inscription above this mihrab as a 'manifest victory' (XLVIII: 1). Before leaving Hudaibiya the Prophet asked his coreligionists to renew their allegiance to him. Thus a new 'manifest victory', the Pledge of Good Pleasure, was awarded to him.

Two years later, with 'Ali at his side, Muhammad entered the city. The cooperation between the two is also recorded on the dome. Together they destroyed the forces of evil; they took down the statue of Hubal and put up the banner of the unitarian new faith. This faith,

however, had yet to be perfected and once again two years elapsed before its ultimate completion. On his way back from the pilgrimage which was to be his last, the Prophet received verse V: 70, enjoining him to 'proclaim the message' which had been sent to him. He then took 'Ali by the hand and proclaimed him the *wali* of every believer.

The Prophet had prefaced this nomination with a question, "am I not closer to each and every believer than his own self?" The reply was in the affirmative, establishing that at the core of every Muslim's faith is his Prophet, just as the Ka'ba is at the heart of international Islam. The new motivating force behind Perfect Islam was then revealed. The *qiblah* after the Prophet was to be 'Ali. In Sufi and Shi'i terminology, 'Ali is truly the *qiblah* of the faith, for he is the Spiritual Pole (*qutb*) whose existence is essential to the well-being of the community.²¹⁹

The *qiblah* specified in the mihrab can, therefore, be interpreted as the Imam, the manifestation of Perfect Islam and the guide of all men. This conclusion is based primarily on the preceding inscriptions. It comes as the climax of the *hadith* and verses in the entire east side of the Royal Mosque. The theory is built up gradually and supplied with supportive evidence at each step. In the *eyvan* 'Ali's *wilaya* is revealed only to the Prophet and communicated to him by the apostles and God. In the dome this divine decree is communicated to a group of early Muslims gathered around the Prophet. Finally, in the mihrab, it is publicized to all believers. Though they may be separated by space and time from the original source of divine Imamhood, the

Muslims are reminded that his presence is real and that his guidance is their only means of achieving God's forgiveness and reward.

As they face their '*qiblah*', Shi'is thus face the Imam, the pole of the Faith. Sunnis, on the other hand, may face the designated *qiblah*, but their faith lacks the additional factor that would make it complete. They are, however, unaware of this deficiency and they question the validity of the Shi'i belief. Verse II: 142 is intended as the answer to their accusations.²²⁰

The fools among the people
Will say: "What hath turned
Them from the Qibla to which
They were used?" Say:
To God belong both East and West,
He guideth whom He will
To a path that is straight.

(II: 142)

Originally, this verse was intended to silence the accusations of the "unthinking multitude that sway to and fro, instead of being firm in God's way. ... the idolaters, the Hypocrites, and the party of Jews who were constantly seeking to entangle in their talk Mustafa and his disciples in Medina."²²¹ It can, therefore, be applied to the cosmopolitan population of Isfahan. Basically, however, it is directed at those who, like the Jews, attempted to 'entangle with their words'. These words came from Istanbul where religious opinion labelled the Safawids "schismatics", "apostates" and "backbiters", and questioned their actions in "the killing of Muslims who are people of the Sunnah."²²²

The inscriptions of the east section of the Royal Mosque are a combined rebuttal and attack on the Ottoman argument. They present a counter argument in favor of 'Ali and his descendants, and hence the

Safawids. As the progeny of Musa al-Kazim, Shah 'Abbas and his family were the protectors of the True Faith. In Shah 'Abbas' Royal Mosque believers turn their faces to a new *qiblah* in accordance with the guidance of God. In the *Masjid-i Shah*, as in the Mosque of Quba, Muslims break away from idolaters and hypocrites and establish perfect worship. The mosque built by Shah 'Abbas is, therefore, the Mosque of Piety, the only mosque where Muslims can be totally purified.²²³

West Section

The epigraphs in the west section of the Royal Mosque are placed in the eyvan and the dome chamber. The mihrab epigraphs have not survived.

West Eyvan

The epigraph of the west eyvan (fig. 15) is dated 1040 A.H., and presents verses which have already been discussed.²²⁴ Thus the interpretation of this inscription will be brief and will serve mainly as an introduction to the inscriptions in the domed chamber beyond the eyvan. The inscription reads,

God, Exalted and Mighty, has said
 "The mosques of God shall be
 visited and maintained by such as
 believe in God and the Last
 Day, establish regular prayers
 and practice regular charity, and
 fear none (at all) except God.
 It is they who are expected to be
 on True Guidance."
 And He, Glory be to Him, has said
 in sura *al-Jinn*, "And the places
 of worship are for God (alone):
 so invoke not any one along
 with God."

And from our *mawla* Abi
 'Abdallah al-Sadiq, upon whom
 be peace, who related from his
 father al-Baqir, upon whom be
 peace, that the Messenger of
 God, God's Blessings and Peace
 upon him and the people of his
 Household, said, "Whoever takes
 the Qur'an for his speech and
 the *masjid* for his house,
 God shall have a house built
 for him in Paradise".

Written by Muhammad Rida al-Imami with thanks to
 the Exalted God, in 1040.²²⁵

The first inscribed verse, IX: 18, mentions three of the main pillars of Islam, the profession of unity, regular prayer and regular charity. The verse has already been analyzed in the discussion of the portal inscriptions. Through its associations with the mosque of Qoba (the Mosque of Piety), and the mosque of *ar-Rahib* (the Mosque of Impiety), it distinguishes mosques built by the followers of 'Ali, the True Believers, as the only pure mosques of Islam. In contrast, mosques built by Sunnis, otherwise labelled as heretics, are mosques of impiety and disbelief for which the second inscribed verse, LXXII: 18, comes as a warning. Mosques, or any places of prayer built by unbelievers, are susceptible to the greatest sin, the invocation of the name of other than God.

The remainder of the inscription is a *hadith* based on the authority of the sixth Imam, Ja'far al-Sadiq (702-765), and the fifth Imam, Muhammad al-Baqir (675-732). In it the Prophet proclaims that only those who understand the Qur'an and take it as a guide to their daily life, and who frequent the mosques of God, are eligible for a life in Paradise. Since Shi'i interpretation of verse IX: 18 limits

the number of 'true mosques' and the identities of those who frequent them, the 'house in Paradise', is reserved for those true believers. Hence, the abode of Shah 'Abbas (who died before the addition of this epigraph), the builder of a new Mosque of Piety, can only be Paradise. Paradise is also the home of the Shah's ancestors, for as will be seen (and as has already been mentioned), they are among God's most beloved and devoted followers.

The full meanings and implications of this inscription are incorporated in the domed chamber beyond the eyvan. Thus the complete discussion will be preserved for the following inscriptions which also begin with an allusion to Paradise.

West Dome Drum Inscription

A. Epigraph

The inscription is in thuluth script by 'Abd al-Baqi al-Tabrizi.

It reads,

Part a.

From the *Musnad* of Ibn Hanbal after Salman who said, I heard my beloved Muhammad the Messenger of God, God's Blessings upon him and the people of his Household, say, "'Ali and I were Light (*Mur*) in the hands of God who praised it and blessed it for a thousand years before He created Adam. So when God created Adam, He implanted that Light in his backbone and it remained in one thing until we were separated in the backbone of 'Abd al-Muttaleb, thus Prophecy is within me and the Caliphate is within 'Ali."

Part b.

And also from his (Ibn Hanbal's) *Musnad* after Jaber b. 'Abdallah who heard the Prophet, God's Blessings upon him and the people of his Household, say: "God, Exalted and Mighty, took down a portion of Light and implanted it in Adam's backbone, then He drove it on until he separated into two parts. One part he transferred to the backbone of 'Abd Allah and the other part to the backbone of Abi Taleb thus, he made me a prophet and made 'Ali a *wasi* (viceregent).

Part c.

And from the *Manaqeb* of al-Maghazili after 'A'isha who said, "'Ali b. Abi Taleb came by and the Prophet, God's Blessings upon him and the people of his Household, said, 'whomever it pleases to see the Lord (*seyyed*) of Arab men, let him look at 'Ali. So I ('A'isha) said, 'O messenger of God, aren't you the Lord of Arab men?' He said, 'I am the Lord of the sons of Adam and 'Ali is Lord of the Arabs."

In one thousand and thirty and five. Written by 'Abd al-Baqi in thanking God and praising Muhammad and his Household. 226

B. Analysis - (Parts a, b)

The first two sections of this *hadith* (parts a and b), which are almost identical, establish the relationship between Muhammad and 'Ali. Both had been one entity, symbolized by Light, which existed before the creation of mankind. When God created Adam, He implanted this entity within him but kept it concealed or hidden. The concealed Light remained whole until it was divided into two units each of which then manifested itself in a different personality and assumed a

different role. Thus, Muhammad was born a prophet and 'Ali a vice-regent or caliph. The two functions are, therefore, the intellectual manifestations of one Truth, just as Muhammad and 'Ali are the physical manifestations of one 'Light'.

The inscribed *hadith* briefly summarises the genealogies of Muhammad and 'Ali, beginning with Adam and proceeding to 'Abd al-Mottaleb, 'Abd Allah and Abu Taleb.²²⁷ This genealogy is elaborated upon by the chronicler Eskandar Monshi who mentions most of the personalities possessing the Divine Light.²²⁸ Through several stages the Light of Adam travelled to Abraham and Isma'il. It was then transferred to Kenana and his son Nazr, ancestor of the tribe of Quraysh. Of the descendants of Nazr, the recipient of the Light was 'Abd Manaf who transferred it to his son Hashim, chief of the Hashimite clan. After Hashim the Light went to 'Abd al-Mottaleb who became the keeper of the Ka'ba. 'Abd al-Mottaleb had ten sons, the eighth of whom was 'Abd Allah 'from whose brow shone the Muhammadan Light',²²⁹ and whose marriage with Amena produced Muhammad, the Prophet. 'Abd al-Mottaleb's seventh son was Abu Taleb, the father of 'Ali. According to the *hadith* the Light inherent in 'Abd al-Mottaleb was transferred to two instead of one of his sons as had been the case so far. In 'Abd Allah and Abu Taleb, however, the Light, though partitioned, remained concealed. With the respective births of Muhammad and 'Ali the Light manifested itself and began its exoteric journey.

The overriding symbol of the *hadith* is Light. Monshi traces the progression of this Light to 'Abd Allah and hence to Muhammad

without relating it to Abu Taleb.²³⁰ In this sense, therefore, the Light is the 'Light of Prophethood' or prophecy itself. In the *hadith* however, prophecy is but one manifestation of the Divine Light, the other being expressed as 'caliphate' or 'viceregency' (*wisaya*). A similar *hadith* from *Yanabi' al-Mawaddah* presents a third alternative to these terms. At the end of his discourse on the esoteric journey of Light the Prophet states, "thus is the Prophethood within me as the Imamhood is within 'Ali."²³¹ 'Caliphate', 'viceregency' and 'imamhood' are used as indiscriminate variants of one function performed by 'Ali. In later times the term caliphate came to be associated with the secular function of a king or sultan while imamate retained religious associations.²³² The *hadith* reconciles these functions into one where political leadership is a direct result of religious authority. In his discussion of the caliphate and imamate Ibn Khaldun states:

(To exercise) the caliphate means to cause the masses to act as required by religious insight into their interests in the other world as well as in this world. ... Thus (the caliphate) in reality is a substitute for Muhammad in as much as it serves, like him, to protect the religion and to exercise leadership of the world.²³³

The only discrepancy between Ibn Khaldun's explanation and that presented in the *hadith* is the substitution of Muhammad by the caliphate. Since Muhammad and 'Ali are presented as components of a single entity, they serve to complement rather than displace one another. Hence neither one could be complete-without the other.

This argument has direct bearings on the interpretation of the

term 'Light'. The portion allotted to Muhammad is prophecy or revelation, that is, the Qur'an. 'Ali is appointed in the role of guide to the *umma* along the precepts set by the Qur'an. He, therefore, possesses the power to interpret Muhammad's prophecy, and his portion of the Light is esoteric revelation. Although the Prophet's death marks the end of prophecy, his revelations nevertheless remain preserved in the text of the Qur'an and in 'Ali's imamate. This supports the *hadith* in which Muhammad proclaims:

'Ali is with the Truth (*haqq*)
and the Qur'an, and the Truth
and the Qur'an are with 'Ali,
and they will be inseparable
until they come upon me at
Kawthar (in Paradise).²³⁴

'Ali's imamhood, however, also had to come to an end, but unlike that portion of Light which was extinguished with the death of the Prophet, esoteric knowledge continued to be transferred along the progeny of 'Ali. Thus, the Prophet's words,

God placed the children of all
prophets in their backbone but
placed my children in the backbone
of 'Ali.²³⁵

take on special significance. On a superficial level these words emphasize the close relationship between Muhammad and 'Ali's sons, Hasan and Husayn. The more relevant interpretation is the transference of esoteric knowledge, and his religious and political leadership, to the Prophet's descendants through 'Ali. Thus when the Prophet entrusts the 'Book of God' and his 'Household' to the Muslim community and states that the two shall not be separated until they encounter him at

Kawthar,²³⁶ he alludes to the reunion between the separate components of the Light and their restoration into one entity.

This reunion which occurs in Paradise heralds the return of the Light to its source, God. Hence, the components, Muhammad and 'Ali, revelation and imamhood, Qur'an and esoteric knowledge, are all manifestations of the Will of the Creator, the Supreme Reality, and "The Light of the heavens and the earth" (XXIV: 35).²³⁷ The Muslims are awarded this Light as a sign from God:

O mankind! Verily
There hath come to you
A convincing proof
From your Lord:
For we have sent unto you
A light (that is) manifest.

(IV: 174)

and they are expected to abide by it throughout their temporal lives. Living according to the precepts set by the Qur'an and the guidance of the imam, assures every Muslim of final union with Light.

According to the inscribed *hadith*, part of the Light of God was manifested in 'Ali. In referring to the 'Book of God' and his 'Household', the Prophet refers specifically to 'Ali's sons and their descendants. Other *hadith* further these specifications by the addition of the Prophet's daughter, Fatima.²³⁸ Claimants of the caliphate outside this group, such as the descendants of 'Ali by another wife (the Hanafis) or relatives of the Prophet through his uncle al-'Abbas (the 'Abbasids), are excluded on the grounds of inadequacy. Their lack of divine inspiration renders them incapable of guiding the Islamic community to salvation. The Light, however, continued to travel among

the descendants of 'Ali and Fatima until it reached the Mahdi whose occultation marks the end of the 'earthly' caliphate.

C. Interpretation - (Parts a, b)

Along the route from Husayn to the Mahdi, the Light was manifested in Musa al-Kazim, seventh Imam and ancestor of the Safawis. Though the Light was then inherited by the eighth Imam, 'Ali al-Rida, the Safawid claim to power is based on the hypothesis that part of this Light descended through the *Safawiyya shaykhs* to the shahs themselves. Eskandar Monshi recounts a vision experienced by the founder of the *Safawiyya* order, Shaykh Safi al-Din, in which he "was standing with a sword at his belt and a sable hat on his head, when he removed the hat, a brilliant light shone forth from his head and illuminated all the surrounding area". Safi al-Din's spiritual mentor, Shaykh Zahed (d. 1301), interpreted the vision as follows:

The sword and the sunlike radiance
are the signs of the appearance and
coming forth of a powerful king from
your (Safi al-Din's) stock. The
reflection of his sunlike felicity
will shine upon the people of the
earth and the flashing blade of his
sword will obliterate and totally
destroy the dark evil of innovators
and those in error.²³⁹

Thus, the Safawids took great care in assembling the genealogies which link them with the *Safawiyya shaykhs* and with the seventh Imam. That the purpose of the genealogies was to trace the development and movement of the Light is borne out by Monshi's words,

Expert genealogists and those skilled in dynastic traditions, have constructed elaborate family trees showing the descent of the ancestors of the Safavids from the Prophet, have written treatises on their merits and virtues, and have described various strange events and wonderful signs and acts emanating from them and indicative of the fact that the Prophet's light shone upon them.²⁴⁰

Thus, by repeatedly emphasizing their lineage, their descent from the Prophet, and the concept of 'Ali's divine imamate, the Safawids were not only launching an attack on the early Sunnis and the usurper caliphs, but also on their contemporary contenders to the caliphate.

The Ottomans had no relationship with the family of the Prophet and were not descended from the tribe of Quraysh. Once they had wrenched Mecca and Medina from the Mamluk sultans,²⁴¹ however, they had at their disposal the basis of the religious argument with which to establish their authority. Selim I claimed that his victory over the Mamluks was a sign of God's approval and that it was God who had brought him to "the throne of the Sultanate and the position of the Caliphate".²⁴² The title of Suleyman the Magnificent (Shah Tahmasp's adversary) was "Inheritor of the Great Caliphate... Possessor of the Exalted Imamate, Protector of the Sanctuary of the Two Respected Holy Places". The Ottomans further claimed that they had acquired these titles by "the will of God".²⁴³

Suleyman justified the use of the title 'imam' through his widespread victories, especially over the 'infidel Christians', and the argument which presented him as

the Imam of the Age in
 fulfilment of the relevant
 stipulation relating to the
 maintenance of the Faith
 and guardianship of the
 homeland of al-Islam...
 He is the Imam of the Age
 without dubiety and he is
 truly the defender of *Shar'*.²⁴⁴

As the defenders of the *shari'a* and protectors of Sunni Islam, the Ottoman caliphs aimed to subjugate the Shi'i Iranian population whom they considered as heretics. The major and most effective tool in this propaganda campaign was their control of the shrines of Mecca and Medina. The Safawid response to this argument was their own claim to this position as the descendants of the Prophet. According to an earlier argument presented in the *Masjid-i Shah* and repeated directly before the inscription under discussion (in the west eyvan):

The mosques of God
 Shall be visited and maintained
 By such as believe in God
 And the Last Day, establish
 Regular prayers and practice
 Regular charity, and fear
 None (at all) except God.
 It is they who are expected
 To be on true guidance.²⁴⁵

(IX: 18)

By means of the Safawid arguments which present 'Ali as foremost in Islam, Ottoman control over Mecca and Medina is rendered illegitimate and against the will of God. The Light of God exists only in the descendants of the Prophet through 'Ali and Fatima. The Ottomans lacked this Light and thus they were actually in need of the Safawids for spiritual guidance. Those who claimed the caliphate and imamate are, therefore, seen by the Safawids not only as usurpers but also as

unbelievers who are not on the path of true guidance. The relevance of the 'Light of Guidance' to this argument is stated in God's words,

O ye that believe!
 Fear God, and believe
 In His Apostle, and He will
 Bestow on you a double
 Portion of His Mercy:
 He will provide for you
 A Light by which ye
 Shall walk (straight
 In your path), and He
 Will forgive you (your past):
 For God is Oft-Forgiving
 Most Merciful.

(LVII: 28)

By rejecting 'Ali, the Ottomans rejected God's Light and thus can neither walk the straight path nor be forgiven. They will never achieve reunion with 'the Light of the heavens and the earth" (XXIV: 35) unless they repent and recognize the Safawids as their perfect guides.

B. Analysis - (Part c)

The supremacy of 'Ali (and hence of the Safawids) is reiterated in the short *hadith* which ends the inscription. The Prophet proclaims 'Ali 'Lord of the Arabs' while he assumes leadership over mankind. That this *hadith* is related by 'A'isha, whose dislike for 'Ali has already been mentioned, suggests that the Prophet's words with regard to 'Ali's position could not be disputed, even by her.

In applying the previous conclusions to this *hadith* it becomes evident that Muhammad's words do not merely refer to himself and 'Ali as personalities, but must take their respective roles into account. Thus Muhammad's 'Lordship over mankind' may be interpreted as

the universality of the revealed message, the Qur'an, as well as the religion which he preached, Islam. 'Ali's role as recipient of esoteric knowledge and interpreter of the Qur'an is restricted to the Arab population to whom the Qur'an was sent. This is to be understood not in terms of application, for the universality of the Qur'an necessitates the universality of its interpretation, but in terms of appointment to the position of interpreter. All Muslims must look to 'Ali and his descendants for guidance, and the role of guide is restricted to those who share the Light of knowledge.

If the restrictions which place the imamate strictly in the line of 'Ali and Fatima are not taken into consideration, the first three caliphs, by virtue of their relationship with the Quraysh, would be legitimate contenders to the position. This is in line with the Prophet's words, "all the viceregents will be from Quraysh".²⁴⁶ The 'Abbasids, since they are descended from Quraysh, would also have a claim to authority.²⁴⁷ Other contenders, like the Ottomans who cannot claim this racial background, have no basis for their arguments or in favor of their leadership. The caliphates of Abu Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthman (as well as the 'Abbasids) are, however, negated by the supremacy of 'Ali as their 'Lord' (*seyyed*). Early awareness of 'Ali's position and the usurping acts of the first three caliphs are evidenced by 'Ali's speech to 'Uthman, "my merits and excellences are far beyond yours; I am superior to you in every respect".²⁴⁸

C. Interpretation - (Part c)

The door of the caliphate and of the imamate is closed to all those outside 'Ali's community and family. As such, the Ottomans' claim that their caliphate was in 'accordance with the will of God', is false. In this *hadith*, therefore, another tool is introduced into the body of Twelver Shi'i Safawid propaganda. The argument refutes the Ottoman claim first on the grounds of lineage and second on the precept of racial descent. Since the Ottomans were descended from the Oghuz confederation of Turkish tribes from Central Asia,²⁴⁹ they were essentially non-Arabs who could not claim superiority in Islam.

The Safawids seized this opportunity to stir up the dissatisfied Shi'i Turcoman elements within Anatolia. This part of the population could not reconcile itself with the administrative policies imposed by the Ottoman government and were radical believers in the right of the family of the Prophet to leadership. Thus Safawid propaganda and Twelver Shi'i ideas "tinged with anarchical, radical and social overtones", found special acceptance among them.²⁵⁰ The propaganda proved effective enough to cause Ottoman fear of Shi'i insurrection. The Ottomans thus carried out mass executions among the Turcoman Shi'is and were active in the deportation of Shi'i families and forcing Shi'i religious authorities into exile.²⁵¹

Thus, in a systematic argument, the *hadith* first establishes Safawid superiority, then proceeds to negate Ottoman claims. These epigraphic attacks were only one weapon in the Safawid war against the Ottoman Empire. In 1035/1625-26, another war with more direct and tangible results was taking place in the province of Baghdad. The fall of the

city and the capture of the shrines of the Twelver Imams provided concrete proof of the Safawid 'right to rule'.²⁵²

Sides Under West Dome

A. Epigraph

The inscription on the four walls under the west dome was put up four years after that of the drum by the hand of Muhammad Rida al-Imami. It reads:

Part a.

Ibn 'Abbas related; we were seated in the company of the Prophet, God's Blessings upon him and the people of his Household, when the Faithful Gabriel, upon whom be Peace, descended upon him (the Prophet) with a red crystal goblet (*jam*) with musk and amber. Seated beside the Prophet, God's Blessings upon him and the people of his Household, were 'Ali b. Abi Taleb and his two sons al-Hasan and al-Husayn. He (Gabriel) said to the Prophet, "Peace be upon you. God bestows his Peace upon you and salutes you with this salutation and orders you to salute 'Ali and his two sons". Ibn 'Abbas said; when it came to rest in the palm of the Prophet, God's Blessings upon him and the people of his Household, it uttered each of the formulae *La ilaha illa Allah* and *Allahu Akbar* three times then proceeded in an eloquent and clear tongue, "In the name of God, Most Compassionate, Most Merciful. *Ta-Ha*. We have not sent down the Qur'an to thee to be (an occasion) for thy distress". The Prophet, God's Blessings upon him and the people of his Household, smelled it then saluted 'Ali with it. When it was in 'Ali's palm, it said, "In the name of God, Most Compassionate, Most Merciful. Your (real) friends are (no less than) God, His apostle, and the (Fellowship of) Believers,

those who establish regular prayers and regular charity while bowing down humbly in worship". 'Ali upon whom be Peace, smelled it and saluted al-Hasan, upon whom be Peace, with it. When it was in Hasan's palm, it said, "In the name of God, Most Compassionate, Most Merciful. Concerning what are they disputing? Concerning the Great News, about which they cannot agree". Al-Hasan smelled it and saluted al-Husayn, upon whom be Peace, with it. When it was in the palm of al-Husayn, upon whom be Peace, it said, "In the name of God, Most Compassionate, Most Merciful. Say: 'No reward do I ask of you for this except the love of those near of kin'. And if any one earns any good, We shall give him an increase of good in respect thereof: for God is Oft-Forgiving, Most ready to appreciate (service)". Then it was handed back to the Prophet, God's Blessings upon him and the people of his Household, and it said, "In the name of God, Most Compassionate, Most Merciful. God is the Light of the heavens and the earth". Ibn 'Abbas continued, I have no knowledge whether it ascended to the sky or was concealed in the earth, all by the Will and Power of God, Exalted and Mighty.

Part b.

'Ali, upon whom be peace, said: the Messenger of God, God's Blessings upon him and the people of his Household, said to me "the Imams who come after me are twelve. The first will be you, O 'Ali, and the last will be *al-Qa'im* on whose hands God will conquer the eastern and western recesses of the earth".

Part c.

After Ibn 'Abbas who related that the Messenger of God, God's Blessings upon him and the people of his Household, said: "During my *Mi'raj* (Ascension) to the sky, I saw written on the gate of Heaven 'There is no god but God, Muhammad is the Messenger of God, 'Ali is the beloved of God, al-Hasan and al-Husayn are the choice of God, and Fatima is the slave of God. God's approbation on all those who hate them."

Written by Muhammad Rida al-Imami al-Isfahani, 1039.²⁵³

B. Analysis - (Part a)

Ibn 'Abbas relates an incident whereby Gabriel descended upon the Prophet with a cup sent by God. The cup was to be passed around three of the people seated with the Prophet, 'Ali, al-Hasan and al-Husayn. For each of these individuals, including Muhammad, the cup offered a salutation in the form of a verse. Thus, these verses are to be interpreted strictly in reference to each of the persons to whom they were 'revealed' or 'sent down'.

The qualities of the cup or goblet (*jam*), 'red crystal of (or with) musk and amber', associate it with two interpretations. The first is the Qur'anic description of Paradise in which such a cup appears in several verses. In *sura LXXXIII Tatif* (Dealing with Fraud) the pure believers are promised endless bliss and offered a divine drink:

22. Truly the Righteous
Will be in Bliss:
23. On thrones (of Dignity)
Will they command a sight
(of all things):

24. Thou wilt recognise
In their Faces
The beaming brightness of Bliss
25. Their thirst will be slaked
With pure wine sealed:
26. The seal thereof will be
Musk: and for this
Let those aspire,
Who have aspirations:
27. With it will be (given)
A mixture of *Tasnim*:
28. A spring, from (the waters)
Whereof drink
Those nearest to God

(LXXXIII: 22-28)

The symbolic wine is 'sealed' with musk, a perfume that enhances its pleasant qualities and obliterates unpleasant effects. *Tasnim* is a spring or fountain from which all the inhabitants of Paradise will drink. In pure undiluted form, however, it will be offered only to those closest to God, for "they alone can bear its full flavor, as they alone can bear the full effulgence of the Glory of God".²⁵⁴

In sura LXXVI *Dahr*, the description differs slightly:

15. And around them will be
Passed around vessels of silver
And goblets of crystal, -
16. Crystal-clear, made of silver:
They will determine
The measure thereof
(According to their wishes).
17. And they will be given
To drink there of a cup
(Of a Wine) mixed
With *Zangabil*, -
18. A fountain there,
Called *Salsabil*.

(LXXVI: 15-18)

In this case the divine mixture is wine and ginger (*zangabil*).²⁵⁵ The fountain is *Salsabil* which translates literally into 'seek the way', thus enjoining Muslims to prepare themselves, by seeking the right path, for the presence of God.²⁵⁶

The wine, cup and the metaphorical concept of *Salsabil*, like the symbolic Light, are elements of Iranian mysticism. Wine is the method by which the believer or ascetic encounters the divine presence. The *jam* is a symbol of initiation connected with the *fotowwat* or Sufi spiritual brotherhoods. With it, the believer is introduced to the concept of the 'Water of Life'. These symbols appear on Safawid bowls in the form of Qur'anic verses (eg. XXXVIII: 45-46; LXXVI: 15-17), or litanies and mystic poems, as well as variations of single mystic letters.²⁵⁷

Thus, it may be concluded that the gathering described in the *hadith* is similar to those of Sufi circles. Through the divine mixture²⁵⁸ sent down to the four individuals, God initiates them into His Knowledge and begins their journey to Him. The speech of the *jam* may also be compared to inscriptions on surviving cups or bowls of the same sort. In the inscribed *hadith* the verses were actually recited by the cup, indicating that God meant them as a message pertaining to each of the four initiates.

The *jam's* first words are meant for the Prophet. It recites the profession of Islam, the proclamation of Unity which Muhammad preached; *La ilaha illa Allah*, 'there is no god but God', and follows it with *Allahu Akbar*, 'God is great'. These attestations are repeated

three times, then followed by the *Bismillah* heralding the beginning of God's words. The cup recites from *sura XX, Taha*:

1. Ta-Ha
2. We have not sent down
The Qur'an to thee to be
(An occasion) for thy distress.

(XX: 1-2)

The first verse, from which the title of the *sura* is taken, is composed of two letters *Ta* and *Ha*. These are two of the 'Mysterious Letters' of the Qur'an which appear at the beginning of twenty-nine *suras*. There have been several theories that attempt to explain them, but they remain a mystery.²⁵⁹ Yousuf 'Ali maintains that *Ta* and *Ha* are to be interpreted as 'O Man', thus making the *sura* an individual address to a specific person.²⁶⁰ This coincides with the tradition describing this *sura* as the main influence in the conversion of 'Umar b. al-Khattab to Islam.²⁶¹ The words 'O Man', however, can be applied to the Prophet as the recipient of the *sura*, and to mankind in general, enjoining them to embrace the new faith. In the context of the *hadith*, *Ta Ha* (if it is to be interpreted as 'O Man') refers specifically to the Prophet. The mention of the Qur'an in the second verse implies that Prophecy was not meant to cause any distress but to act as an 'admonition to those who fear' (XX: 3). Muhammad's role as a prophet, therefore, is coupled with his role as a warner who enjoins people to fear God and follow his teachings. The Prophet's mission was also a cause for his persecution by the Meccans, and thus the verse comes as a source of comfort to Muhammad and a threat to his enemies.²⁶²

Once the Prophet had received his verses and 'smelled' or

sipped some of the 'wine', he passed the cup to 'Ali.²⁶³ For 'Ali the cup recited the *Bismillah* followed by verse V: 58:

Your (real) friends are
 (No less than) God,
 His Apostle, and the (Fellowship
 Of) Believers, - those who
 Establish regular prayers
 And regular charity
 While bowing
 Down humbly (in worship).

(V: 58)

This verse is also inscribed in one of the mihrabs of the domed prayer hall east of the south dome.²⁶⁴ Shi'is maintain that it refers to an incident which occurred when a number of Muslims, including 'Ali, were praying with the Prophet. When a needy man asked for help 'Ali was in the position of prostration, but he extended his hand allowing the man to take his ring and leave. Thus 'Ali gave charity 'while bowing down humbly'.²⁶⁵

The purpose of the verse, therefore, is to include 'Ali among the Muslim's most trusted friends and guides (*awliya'*), God and Muhammad. His authority and knowledge are essential for the guidance of all Muslims. His position cannot be obliterated as it is a primary component of the entire inspired message (symbolized in the preceding inscription by Light). Nor can this position be occupied by any other, for 'Ali is 'Lord of the Arabs', possessor of esoteric revelation and divine Light (preceding inscription), and best in virtue (V: 58).

The cup is then passed to 'Ali's elder son, al-Hasan. For him it recites the first three verses of *sura LXXVIII, Naba'* or the Great News.

1. Concerning what
Are they disputing?
2. Concerning the Great News
3. About which they
Cannot agree.

(LXXVIII: 1-3)

'Great News' is generally taken to mean two things. In one interpretation it is the message of the Resurrection, in another the Revelation itself, both of which were highly disputed at the time of Muhammad.²⁶⁶ In reference to Hasan it alludes to the dispute with Mu'awiya on the succession to the caliphate. In this context, therefore, Great News refers to God's appointment of 'Ali as viceregent and caliph.

On 'Ali's death in 661 A.D., Hasan was proclaimed caliph by forty thousand people in Kufa.²⁶⁷ Mu'awiya b. Abi Sufyan, governor of Syria, refused to pay allegiance to Hasan, and denounced the acclamation. Mu'awiya, being of the clan of the Sufyanids who only accepted Islam after the fall of Mecca in 630, could not be accepted as caliph by the inhabitants of Mecca and Medina or Kufa. Hence, the death of Hasan would only serve to transfer the caliphate to Husayn, and Mu'awiya had to employ other measures in order to secure the position for himself. He recruited agents to arouse the people against Hasan and wrote to the latter, advising him to resign the caliphate. In one of his responses, Hasan wrote:

We were shocked to see that some people snatched our right from us though they were men of excellence, virtues, and merits, and were the forerunners in Islam [reference to the first three caliphs]. But now what a great astonishment and shock it is to see that you, O Mu'awiya, are attempting to accede to a thing

which you do not deserve. You do not possess any known merit in religion (*din*), nor have you any trace (*athar*) in Islam which has ever been praised. On the contrary, you are the son of the leader of the opposition party from among the parties (*hizb min al-ahzab*) [a reference to the "confederacy" which under Mu'awiya's father, Abu Sufyan, made the last united effort to crush Medina] ; and you are the son of the greatest enemy of the Prophet from among Quraysh... so give up your persistence in falsehood (*batil*) and enter into my homage as other people have done, for you are certainly aware of the fact that I am far more entitled to the caliphate than you in the eyes of God and all worthy people. Fear God, restrain yourself from rebellion and from shedding the blood of Muslims; for, by God, there would be no good for you to meet your Lord with the responsibility of the blood of the Muslims.²⁶⁸

Mu'awiya's counter argument is also worth quoting as it clarifies the nature of the dispute.

When this community had some disagreements after the Prophet concerning the leadership, it was not ignorant of your family's merits, your priority and your close relationship to the Prophet; and the community was also not unaware of your exalted place in Islam and your qualifications in it. But the community saw that this thing [the caliphate] would be better placed among the Quraysh in general and they therefore selected Abu Bakr. This is what the people thought best in the interest of the community. You are asking me to settle the matter peacefully and surrender, but the situation between you and me today is like the one between you [your family] and Abu Bakr after the death of the Prophet. Had I believed that

you had a better grip over the subject people than I do, that you could protect the community better than I, and you were stronger in safeguarding the properties of Muslims and in outwitting the enemy than I, then I would have done what you have asked me. But I have a longer period of reign [probably referring to his governorship], and am more experienced, better in policies, and older than you. It would therefore be better for you not to insist on what you have asked me; if you enter into obedience to me now, you will accede to the caliphate after me.²⁶⁹

Hasan based his argument on priority in Islam, personal merits and descent, while Mu'awiya argues on the basis of seniority and experience as well as the precedence of the nomination of Abu Bakr. The matter in dispute was the caliphate which was allotted to the family of 'Ali through the Qur'an and the *hadith* (in Shi'i interpretation). The Great News is hence to be understood as the *nass* or nomination of 'Ali and his descendants to the leadership of Islam. That Mu'awiya refused to acknowledge this *nass* is to be seen as a further refusal (on his part) to embrace Islam totally. Mu'awiya and his followers were, therefore, heretics.

Hasan finally abdicated in favor of Mu'awiya, but with the stipulation that after Mu'awiya's death the caliphate would revert to the 'Household of the Prophet'.²⁷⁰ Since Hasan was twenty years Mu'awiya's junior, he anticipated the return of the caliphate to him after the latter's death.²⁷¹ Hasan, however, was poisoned by one of his wives nine years later. The Shi'is maintain that the poisoning occurred at Mu'awiya's instigation, for he could then secure the

position for his son Yazid.²⁷² Thus Mu'awiya was considered a murderer of one 'chosen by God'. As such, if the 'Great News' the verse refers to is to be understood as the Resurrection, then it may be used to indicate that Mu'awiya could have no hope of a blissful afterlife.

Hasan's abdication is seen as a 'meritorious deed' and attempt to reconcile all Muslims and avoid bloodshed. In support of this view is a *hadith* in which the Prophet states, "this son of mine (Hasan) is a Lord and he will unite two branches of Muslims".²⁷³ Hasan's final decision, therefore, was to leave Mu'awiya's judgement to God and to look forward to his own final recompense, while leaving temporal power to Mu'awiya.

The same attitude is apparent in Husayn's behavior and stance against Yazid. This chapter of early Shi'i history is introduced by the *jam's* recitation of part of verse 23 of sura XLII, *Shura* or Consultation. In its complete form, the verse refers to the 'glad tidings', news of rewards in Paradise, brought to the Muslim community by the Prophet. He (Muhammad) is then instructed by God to ask for no material rewards.

Say: "No reward do I
Ask of you for this
Except the love
Of those near of kin
And if any one earns
Any good, We shall give
Him an increase of good
In respect thereof: for God
Is Oft-forgiving, Most Ready
To appreciate (service).

(XLII: 23)

If this verse is applied to the Prophet then it is to be understood as an order from God demanding the *umma's* devotion to Muhammad's family.²⁷⁴

As such, it applies to the treatment which Husayn received at the hands of Mu'awiya's son Yazid. The verse can also be applied more specifically to Husayn and his responses to the demands of Yazid.

The abdication of Hasan stipulated the return of the caliphate to the house of 'Ali at the death of Mu'awiya. In 680 A.D. when Mu'awiya was on his deathbed, he appointed his son as his successor, at the same time warning him that the people of Mecca and Medina were still loyal to the grandson of the Prophet.²⁷⁵ Yazid demanded allegiance from Husayn, who was at Medina, through his governor Walid b. 'Utba. In a letter from the new caliph, Walid was instructed to exact homage from Husayn and to behead him if he refused to give it. Husayn declined but Walid neither arrested him nor beheaded him. Marwan b. al-Hakam, one of Yazid's supporters, rebuked Walid for his action and the latter retorted:

Do not reproach me for this, O Marwan. You have advised me to do something in which there lies complete destruction and the ruin of my religion. By God, if the entire wealth and treasures of the world were given me I would not kill Husayn. Should I kill him only because he refuses to pay homage, I would suffer total destruction on the Day of Judgement, for in the sight of God, there cannot be anything more accountable than the blood of Husayn.²⁷⁶

This early attitude of veneration for the descendants of the Prophet was certainly a factor in Husayn's refusal to pay homage to Yazid, for he felt secure in the belief that the Muslims would not risk 'destruction on the Day of Judgement' for his death. When the Kufan community invited Husayn to become their imam and leader, he expected

them to fight at his side.²⁷⁷ While on his way to Kufa, Husayn was intercepted by a detachment sent by Yazid at a place called Dhu Husm. He then proceeded only a little further to the plain of Karbala where he and his followers set up camp on 2 Muharram 61 / 2 October 680.²⁷⁸ On the following day another Umayyad contingent of four thousand men under the leadership of 'Umar b. Sa'd arrived. While these troops surrounded Husayn and his small group of followers, a letter arrived from Yazid. The order was in favor of the killing of Husayn and the trampling of his body, for as Yazid described him he was "a rebel, a seditious person, a brigand, an oppressor."²⁷⁹ On the tenth of Muharram, henceforth known and celebrated as 'Ashura, the troops moved in on Husayn. He offered supplications to God, saying:

O God, I submit myself to You;
 my complaint is to You alone against
 my enemies, and to You alone is
 my desire and request.²⁸⁰

Then he again reproached his adversaries:

O people! you are accusing me
 but think who I am! Then search
 your hearts for what you are doing
 to me. Consider well if it be
 lawful for you to kill me and violate
 my sacrosanctity. Am I not the son
 of the daughter of your Prophet,
 the son of the Prophets wasi and
 cousin... Did not the Prophet say
 of me and my brother 'they are
 lords of the youth of Paradise'?²⁸¹
 You cannot deny the truth of what
 I have said concerning the merits
 of the family of Muhammad. Are all
 these not sufficient to prevent you
 from shedding my blood?²⁸²

From these speeches made by Husayn and his adversaries, it becomes evident that the association between 'the people of the Household' and the Final Judgement was not new or exclusive to Safawid Twelver propaganda. The sanctity of the family of the Prophet had been proclaimed in the early stages of the conflict between the Shi'is and their enemies. Thus the cursing of a member of the Household such as the only surviving grandson of the Prophet, could only be punishable by eternal suffering. The shedding of Husayn's blood at Karbala, a Shi'i tragedy fervently celebrated till the present day, deserves eternal damnation. The killing of Husayn was a transgression against God's will and it was magnified further by the massacre of most of the members of the family. Thus verse XLII: 23, enjoining Muslims to love 'those near of kin', refers to this event. The verse ends with a promise from God ('whoever earns any good shall be given an increase of good') to reward all those who fulfill his wish. The full significance of this verse appears in the substitution of a threat for the promised rewards. Walid b. 'Utba's reluctance to mistreat Husayn is evidence that this threat and its application to the Household, was somewhat effective.²⁸³

After reciting verse XLIII: 23, the *jam* was returned to the Prophet. Its final speech was the first line of XXIV: 35, the Throne Verse,

God is the Light
Of the heavens and the earth.

(XXIV: 35)

Unlike the other verses, the verse of Light is not meant for any individual in the group, but for the group as a whole. Light, symbol of

Perfect Knowledge and Supreme Reality, puts the seal on the initiation rites of the four protagonists of Shi'ism. The divine mixture and the verses indicate that Muhammad, 'Ali, Hasan and Husayn were endowed with supreme knowledge. The verse of Light might be a further indication that they were the representatives of God's Light on earth. They are, therefore, the means by which to attain knowledge and keep a straight path.²⁸⁴

In the previous inscription (on the drum) the Light was composed of two elements: prophecy and esoteric revelation. In the present inscription two more elements, peace-making (Hasan) and martyrdom (Husayn), are added. The miraculous character of the event and the disappearance of the *jam* after its completion of the circle are all in accordance with the will of God. That he favored the four Muslims with his knowledge and Light, and that he sent down the *jam* to them as a sign, are a confirmation of His will that they lead the Muslims. Transgressions against them would be akin to transgressions against Him, and the punishment would be everlasting darkness.

C. Interpretation - (Part a)

The implications of this *hadith* with regard to the Safawid-Ottoman conflict are self-evident. The verses act as a rebuke to the Sunnis. The delineation of 'Ali's importance is a direct challenge to the Ottomans' claim to be representatives of the *Shar'*. Furthermore, the verses are a reminder to the Ottomans of past events and transgressions. The first three caliphs, though they were 'men of excellence', behaved contrary to God's wishes. Mu'awiya had 'no trace in Islam', yet he claimed the caliphate. Mu'awiya had agreed to return the caliphate to

the Household, but he 'broke his oath' and appointed Yazid as his successor. Yazid committed the greatest sin of all, he massacred members of the 'holy' family. These wrongdoings continued throughout the Sufyanid line and had not yet ended when the *Masjid-i Shah* was built.

The basic purpose of this inscription is to place Ottoman faith under suspicion. Aggressive action taken against the descendants of the Prophet would call the Ottomans' loyalty (to Islam) into question. Further, the Ottomans are criticized for their claim to imamhood. Like Mu'awiya, they are seen as 'attempting to accede to a thing which they did not deserve... for they had no trace in Islam, nor any known merit in religion'.²⁸⁵ The Ottomans did not possess the 'Light' and thus could not lead people on the path of salvation, rather they needed guidance themselves. Instead of allowing their souls to perish, the Ottomans were advised to 'enter into obedience' to the Safawids. They could still attain salvation, for 'God is Oft-Forgiving' (XLII: 23), but they were in need of a *pir* or guide to initiate them into the true brotherhood of Islam. The role of guide is best manifested in a monarch whose ancestors attained total enlightenment during their lives.

The emphasis on ancestral relationships is an important factor in the affirmation of political legitimacy. The Safawids claimed to have penetrated the mystic veils of 'Light upon Light' (XXIV: 35) and to have achieved total knowledge and acceptance of God. Their teachings therefore, are a fulfilment of the intellectual and mystical concepts of God. As descendants of the *Safawiyya shaykhs* and the Imams, Shah 'Abbas and his family possessed all the qualities essential to the

leadership of Islam, and they proclaimed themselves 'Lords of the Arabs'.

B. Analysis - (Parts b, c)

In the first *hadith* (part b) which is related by 'Ali, the Prophet specifies the number of imams who will lead the Muslims after him. He appoints 'Ali as the first imam and predicts the coming of al-Qa'im, the Twelfth Imam, another epithet for al-Mahdi or *Sahib al-zaman* (Lord of the Age). Al-Qa'im is an abbreviation of the full title *al-qa'im bi'l haqq*, the Support of Truth or He who is supported by Truth.²⁸⁶ Al-Qa'im's mission is the judgement of all the inhabitants of the earth and the replacement of 'tyranny and oppression' with 'justice and felicity'.

There are several *hadith* attributed to the Prophet and the various Imams which speak of the identity and role of the Mahdi.

According to one tradition the Prophet once proclaimed:

Even if there remains for the world but one single day, God will extend it until He sends a man from the people of my House, whose name will be the same as mine, and the name of his father will be that of my father. He will fill the earth with equity and justice, just as it is now filled with tyranny and oppression.²⁸⁷

Another *hadith* further identifies the Mahdi as a descendant of Fatima:

On the authority of Salima, who reported; 'I heard the Apostle of God say, al-Mahdi will be from the descent of Fatima'.²⁸⁸

Fatima is, therefore, an essential component of Twelver Shi'ism and she is thus mentioned in part c of the inscription. As the 'slave girl' of God, she becomes 'Mother of the Faithful' and the link between all the

Imams and the Prophet. The Imams are all designated as guides for the Muslims, for they are

the proofs (*hujja*) of God on earth, their words are the words of God, and their commands are the commands of God, and disobedience to them is disobedience to God. In all their decisions they are inspired by God and they are in absolute authority.²⁸⁹

The separation of those who do not abide by the authority of the Imams will be performed by al-Qa'im. The identification of the Mahdi with the Day of Judgement is reflected in a *hadith* in which 'Ali questions the Prophet about the time of the Mahdi's appearance. The Prophet replies:

His case is like that of the Hour (of Resurrection). "He alone will manifest it at its proper time. It is heavy in the heavens and the earth. It cometh not to you save unawares."²⁹⁰

(VII: 187)

Thus, the end of the Mahdi's occultation, which began in 939 A.D., is concomittant with the Day of Judgement. Through al-Mahdi, God will reach the 'eastern and western recesses of the earth' (epigraph), and call all men to questioning. Shi'is defend the concept of the Hidden Imam by his ability to watch over the "soul and spirit of men even if he be hidden from their physical eyes".²⁹¹

C. Interpretation - (Parts b, c)

In Islam life is oriented toward a future in which peace and perfection will govern the earth. In Shi'ism the manifestations of these final events are embodied in the figure of al-Mahdi. Thus, the Shi'i orients himself toward this final Truth, al-Qa'im.

The original function of al-Mahdi was to avenge the Household of the Prophet and the usurpation of their rights. The concept was, therefore, one which provided a savior to the oppressed. The *ghaybah*, or occultation, was justified through fear from the oppressor. Thus, the eleventh century theologian, al-Sharif al-Murtada (d. 1044) wrote in his *Epistle on the Ghaybah*:

The reason for the *ghaybah* is fear for him (al-Mahdi) from the oppressive people, and their obstructing his hand from discretionary control over that which has been meant to be his right of discretionary control. [This is] because one attains total benefit from the Imam when he is firmly established and obeyed [by the people] and when there is no obstruction between him and his goals, so as to enable him to lead troops, fight the oppressors, administer legal punishment, protect the boundaries, see that justice is done to the oppressed. All this cannot be accomplished except when he is firmly established.²⁹²

The military nature of the eleventh-century Mahdi was essential as a source of hope to the Imamite followers. Through a strong leader they could exact revenge on the descendants of the usurpers, the first three caliphs and the Umayyads, but mainly on the 'Abbasids under whose rule they lived in fear and oppression.²⁹³ Oppression is manifested

not only in forceful usurpation, but also in the mistreatment of the descendants of the Prophet. The forced abdication of Hasan and the martyrdom of Husayn have already been described. The details of these events are significant in clarifying the Umayyad attitude toward the early Shi'is. When Hasan agreed to resign the caliphate in favor of Mu'awiya, one of his conditions was "that 'Ali would not be reviled and cursed, as had been the practice of Mu'awiya since the beginning of 'Ali's caliphate - at least not in Hasan's presence."²⁹⁴ The official cursing of 'Ali from the pulpits of mosques had been instituted by Mu'awiya as a propaganda ploy against Hasan. It was practiced to such an extent that when some supporters of Hasan, Hujr and some of his followers, refused to comply with Mu'awiya's demands of denouncing 'Ali, they were executed.²⁹⁵ In Syria, the stronghold of the Sufyanids, *la'ana Allah 'Ali b. Abi Taleb* (God's curses on 'Ali b. Abi Taleb) was a curse which survived well into the 'Abbasid Caliphate. Its counterpart, in favor of Mu'awiya's rule, was *Rahima Allah Mu'awiya*, May God have mercy on Mu'awiya.²⁹⁶ Another common Syrian practice was the naming of newborn sons after Mu'awiya, Yazid and al-Walid. A contemporary traveller reports that on a trip to Syria he encountered only one man who had named his sons Hasan, Husayn and Ja'far. The man's justification was that, when rebuking his sons, he did not wish to call malediction on the "Caliphs of God", but rather on the "Enemies of God."²⁹⁷

Contemporary to Safawid rule, such practices were still in use in predominantly Sunni areas, particularly where they were

instrumental in stirring the populace against the Twelver Shi'is. The condemnations appear in the arguments of Ottoman religious authorities where the mention of 'Ali and his descendants is invariably followed by "May God's approbation be upon them."²⁹⁸ From the Shi'i point of view, these curses are punishable by God, for as the final portion of the inscription (part c) states, God's love for 'Ali, his wife, and their two sons, is proclaimed in an inscription on the gate of heaven. Not content with simply reinstating the Shi'i protagonists in their exalted positions, the inscription then proceeds to invoke God's curses 'upon those who hate them'.

The entire inscription, therefore, is an argument in favor of the True Faith. This is the faith propagated by Muhammad but maintained by 'Ali and his descendants through Fatima. The special importance accorded to Husayn is suggested by the invocation of God's peace upon him two times instead of one.²⁹⁹ The descendants of Husayn are the infallible Imams and the Safawids. The final Imam, al-Qa'im, is represented by the Safawids, who are the defenders of truth and justice. Thus the *hadith* performs two functions: it lists the ancestors of the Safawids and it upholds Twelver Shi'ism as the only true form of worship. Sunnism as well as other Shi'i sects such as Zaydism or Isma'ilism are abrogated. Leadership of the Muslim community in the seventeenth century had to be awarded to the only dynasty whose members could truly claim to be 'the shadow of God on earth'.

Domed Hall East of the South Dome

On each side of the sanctuary is a domed or pillared prayer hall (fig. 1 - H and I). The hall west of the sanctuary contains an epigraph in the form of a long Persian poem. The epigraphs of the east hall (fig. 17) are placed in and around its two mihrabs (J and K on plan, fig. 1). Each mihrab will be discussed separately, beginning with the border inscription and proceeding to the inscription on the interior.

The West Mihrab - Border

A. Epigraph

Around the mihrab is an inscription by the hand of Muhammad Rida al-Imami.

From Abu 'Abd Allah, upon whom be peace, he said: When Gabriel revealed the *adhan* to the Messenger of God, God's Blessings upon him and the people of his Household, the latter's head was in the lap of 'Ali, upon whom be Peace. Gabriel, upon whom be Peace, recited the *adhan* and left. When the Messenger of God, God's Blessings upon him and the people of his Household, realized what had happened he asked; "have you heard, O, 'Ali?" 'Ali replied, "Yes". He (the Prophet) said, "have you memorized?" he ('Ali) said, "Yes". He (the Prophet) said, "call Bilal and teach him". So 'Ali, upon whom be Peace, called Bilal and taught him.

Written by Muhammad Rida al-Imami. 300

B. Analysis

This passage centers on the subject of revelation and the connection of 'Ali b. Abi Taleb with the transmission of God's message.

The contents of this revelation are the *adhan* or the call to prayer which begins with *Allahu Akbar*, God is Great, and goes on with the *shahada*. In Safawid Iran, the call to prayer was lengthened by the addition of ''Ali is the *wali* of God'.³⁰¹ This *hadith* may be seen as reasonable justification for this addition.

In the Qur'an, revelations (*wahy*) are transmitted to the Prophet by an intermediary agent. The earlier belief that Muhammad received the text of the Qur'an directly from God was discarded on account of Muhammad's visions. Contact with the Jews and Christians had convinced Muhammad of the impossibility of seeing or hearing God, but the same contact also introduced him to the concept of angels as agents of God. Thus, the bringer of revelation became his guiding spirit, the archangel Gabriel.³⁰²

Gabriel is mentioned three times in the Qur'an in his capacity as vehicle of revelation. In one instance (II: 97) the name itself is mentioned, in another (XXVI: 193) the epithet 'Spirit of Faith and Truth' is used, and lastly (LXXXI: 19) the reference is to Gabriel's truthfulness. It is only in the first two cases that the relationship between Gabriel and Muhammad is discussed. In each verse, Gabriel is described as bringing down the message 'To thy heart',³⁰³ that is, to Muhammad whom he silently inspired with the word of God. The belief in the appearance of the angel, although contested by modern scholars,³⁰⁴ was not disputed in the early years of Islam (except by those elements who either negated the visions completely or ascribed them to Muhammad's unstable state of mind).

The transmission of the message directly into the 'heart and mind' of Muhammad, however, goes against the assumption, made in the *hadith*, that the revelation could actually be heard. Verses 192-195 of *sura XXVI, Shu'araa'* (The Poets), support this idea.

192. Verily this is a Revelation
From the Lord of the Worlds:
193. With it came down
The Spirit of Faith and Truth -
194. To thy heart and mind,
That thou mayest admonish
195. In the perspicuous
Arabic tongue.

It may be assumed, therefore, that the inspiration was silent, and that it was the Prophet's duty to announce it to his people. How then, could 'Ali have heard the *adhan* as recited by Gabriel? To attribute this event in the *hadith* to an actual appearance and audible recitation by Gabriel would be a personification of a mystic experience. Rather, it is the idea or concept of revelation, the inspired thoughts and their contents, which are to be understood by the term 'Gabriel'.

The *wahy*, therefore, came down to Muhammad and 'Ali at the same time. Both received a message from God, both were inspired by Him. Whether or not Muhammad was fully awake at that moment is not clear. He did not, however, seem to retain the inspired message and thus asked 'Ali to teach it to Bilal. 'Ali then, and not Bilal, is to be seen as the first *mu'adhdhin*. The fact that he received the message suggests that 'Ali was an emissary of God, a *wali*, hence the addition to the *shahada*.

C. Interpretation

Muhammad was the Messenger of God, the recipient of revelation and the religious and political leader. 'Ali was the interpreter of this message and the leading religious teacher. He taught the word of God and instructed the Muslims on it from the time of revelation (which began in 610 A.D.).³⁰⁵ He also received knowledge of such matters, such as the *adhan*, which are not included in the Qur'an. 'Ali's teaching was not entirely his own, for in some instances he was inspired by God. The *hadith* seems to narrow the gap between Muhammad's Prophethood and 'Ali's Imamhood, yet it would be too dangerous to unite the two completely. It is certain, however, that Shi'i doctrine presents the Imam as inspired by God, as the one most knowledgeable in religious matters and thus, the interpreter of God's words. Shi'ism interprets verses XXI: 73 and XXXII: 24 as referring directly to the imams. Verse XXI: 73 states:

And we made them
Leaders, guiding (men) by
Our Command, and we
Sent them inspiration
To do good deeds,
To establish regular prayers,
And to practice regular charity;
And they constantly served
Us (and Us only).

(XXI: 73)

al-Tabataba'i comments on this specific verse (and XXXII: 24):

One can conclude from these, that besides being an outward leader and guide, the Imam possesses also a kind of spiritual power to guide and attract which belongs to the world of the Spirit.

He influences and conquers the hearts of people of capability through the Truth, the light, and the inner aspect of his being and thus guides them toward perfection and the ultimate goal of existence.³⁰⁶

By relating a seemingly simple incident which involves 'Ali, the *hadith* reiterates the basics of Shi'ism, the doctrine of Imamology. Although the *hadith* might be an exaggeration, 'Ali's spirituality and insight into religious matters are borne out by his early submission to Islam, and his compiling and recording of the Qur'an.³⁰⁷ Some of the earliest recitations of the Qur'an, as well as such collections of *hadith* as those of Ibn 'Abbas, go back to 'Ali.³⁰⁸ The interpretation or *ta'wil* of the Qur'an itself is reserved for "the prophets and the pure among the saints of God".³⁰⁹ The Muslims must, therefore, follow the guidance of their imams in these matters rather than risk retribution, for the Prophet has said "whosoever interprets the Qur'an according to his own opinion has made a place for himself in the fire".³¹⁰

The *barakah* (grace) of the Qur'an was conveyed to mankind by the Prophet and to the Sunni community by the four Rightly Guided caliphs. The Shi'i community, however, received the *barakah* through 'Ali who, as foremost in esoteric knowledge, transmitted it in its purest form.³¹¹ Shi'ism can, therefore, be safely known as the 'Islam of 'Ali',³¹² and the *barakah* received by Shi'is is intensified through 'Ali's direct access to God's words.

Unlike that of a prophet, the imam's constant presence among the people of his community is necessary for their well-being. In the

absence of an imam, the position is taken over by a representative who paves the way for the imam's return. As descendants of the Prophet through 'Ali and his son Husayn, the Safawids were the elite of the Shi'a. The task of preparation for the reappearance of the imam was theirs. Their reign is, therefore, another sign of the grace of God.

The West Mihrab - Interior

A. Epigraph

Inside the same mihrab and in blue tile, is the following inscription in *thuluth* script:

God, Exalted and Might, has said:
 O ye who believe!
 When the call is proclaimed
 To prayer on Friday
 (The Day of Assembly),
 Hasten earnestly to the Remembrance
 Of God, and leave off
 Business (and traffic):
 That is best for you
 If ye but knew.³¹³

B. Analysis

The entire epigraph (except for the first line which identifies it as the speech of God) is a verse from *sura LXII, Jumu'a* or Friday, The Day of Assembly. This is an early Medinan *sura* of eleven verses in which the Arabs and Jews are exhorted to leave off worldly gain for the remembrance of God. Friday being the day of assembly, or congregation and collective prayer, has special significance for all Muslims. It brings together the Muslims of the community to their congregational mosque where an act of centralization, as opposed to the decentralization of individual prayer, takes place. The

collectivity is called to prayer by the *adhan*. The Muslims then gather for the *khutbah*, or sermon, which is delivered by the imam, or religious leader who "offers advice and exhortation on holy living".³¹⁴ As has already been mentioned, in Shi'ism the term 'imam' is used to denote a descendant of the Prophet and a spiritual authority rather than simply a religious leader.³¹⁵ The last Twelver Imam is al-Mahdi, *Imam al-'Asr* (the Lord of the Period), or *Sahib al-zaman* (the Lord of the Age). He was born in 868 A.D. and went into a minor occultation (*ghaybat-i sughra*) between 872 and 939 A.D., when he appeared only to his companions and deputies. The *ghaybat-i kubra*, or major occultation, began in 939 A.D. and will last till the day of Judgement.³¹⁶ The reappearance of the Mahdi and the restoration of justice and mercy to the world is seen as the fulfillment of several *hadith* in which the Prophet speaks of this Imam. In one *hadith* the Prophet states:

If there were to remain in the life of the world but one day, God would prolong that day until he sends in it a man from my community and my household. His name will be the same as my name. He will fill the earth with equity and justice as it was filled with oppression and tyranny.³¹⁷

The absence of an imam changed the nature of Friday prayers in Shi'i practice. Since there was no living religious authority to lead the faithful in prayer and deliver the *khutbah*, individual prayers took precedence over collective prayers. The Friday prayers are commented upon by Seyyed Husayn Nasr in the following words:

In Shi'ism, although these prayers are performed in at least one mosque in every

city and town, in the absence of the Imam, who according to Shi'ism is the true leader of these prayers, their importance is somewhat diminished and more emphasis is placed upon individual prescribed prayers.³¹⁸

In Safawid Iran Friday prayers were in abeyance until the reign of Shah Tahmasp (r. 1524-1576), when they were reinstated by Shaykh 'Abd al-Samad. 'Abd al-Samad was a Shi'i shaykh from Jabal 'Amel in Syria and had studied with a shaykh called Zayn al-Abidin until the latter's execution by the Ottomans. 'Abd al-Samad then emigrated to Iran which, due to a shortage of Shi'i divines, had been recruiting such men from Jabal 'Amel and Bahrain since the beginning of Safawid rule.³¹⁹ 'Abd al-Samad was, therefore, warmly welcomed by Shah Tahmasp and soon became a leading scholar in Qur'anic exegesis, *hadith*, religious law (*Shari'a*), Arabic languages, and other religious sciences. He was able to resolve the conflict concerning the conditions which pertain to Friday prayers, and was later promoted to the position of *Shaykh al-Islam*.³²⁰

Shaykh 'Abd al-Samad died in Bahrain after completing a pilgrimage to Mecca and the shrines of the Imams.³²¹ His infant son, Baha' al-Din 'Amili, returned to Iran with his mother. Later on, he devoted himself to study and became the foremost scholar of his time in the fields of Qur'anic commentary, the authentication of *hadith*, jurisprudence and the Arabic language, as well as the rational sciences: mathematics, medicine, law, philosophy, astrology, etc.³²² He became known as Shaykh Baha'i and was appointed to the positions of *Shaykh al-Islam*, *Vakil-e halaliyat*, and supervisor of affairs regarding religious

law at Isfahan.³²³ He also managed the trusts and religious endowments of the capital.³²⁴ Shaykh Baha'i was also a poet. He composed poetry in both Persian and Arabic, and specialized in the *mathnavi* (rhyming couplets) in the style of Jalal al-Din Rumi.³²⁵

After visiting Mecca and many of the holy sites of Islam, the Shaykh became a dervish.³²⁶ His holiness and spirituality are attested to by a vision at the tomb of the mystic Baba Rokn al-Din Isfahani, which the Shaykh took as a sign of his impending death. A few months later he fell ill and died on 12 Shavval 1030 / 30 August 1621.³²⁷ The Shaykh's body was prepared for burial in the old *Masjid-i Jami'* of Isfahan and housed temporarily at the shrine of the fourth Imam Zayn al-Abidin. Later on, by a decree from Shah 'Abbas, he was buried at Mashhad in the spot where the eighth Imam used to hold his circles.³²⁸

Shaykh Baha'i was the mastermind behind the planning and construction of the New Isfahan of Shah 'Abbas.³²⁹ As a leading *mujtahid* he also attracted many students and scholars to his circles (probably held at the Sulaymaniyya Madrasah attached to the Royal Mosque). He was a prolific writer and, in 1616, had completed several works, including one on Qur'anic commentary, '*Orvat al-Vosqa*', and one on the criteria for establishing the authenticity of *hadith*, *Habl al-Matin*. A third book, *Ethna Ashariyat Arba'*, deals with ritual purification, fasting, prayer and pilgrimage in Twelver Shi'ism.³³⁰ His *Jami'-i 'Abbasi*, completed after 1616, became a popular manual of Shi'i law.³³¹

The Shaykh's knowledge of languages, his poetic skills and his Syrian origins make him of particular importance for the Royal Mosque. The inscriptions are obviously the work of a person with a profound knowledge of Arabic language, religious law, and Shi'i doctrines. The Persian poems, most of which are in *mathnavi* form, also include rhyming Arabic phrases, thus combining poetic skill with facility in languages.³³² Finally, the Shaykh's Syrian origins explain the deep hatred of Ottomans in particular and Sunnis in general which is apparent in the epigraphs. Some of the litanies and prayers which appear among the *hadith* in the Royal Mosque have also been shown to be of Syrian origin.³³³

These factors, as well as the high position which the Shaykh enjoyed, make him a prime candidate for the position of designer of the epigraphic program in the mosque, at least until his death in 1030 or 1031 A.H.³³⁴ It might also be proposed that the Shaykh led the Friday prayers and delivered the *khutbah* in the Royal Mosque.³³⁵ There is little doubt that Friday prayers were indeed held in the *Masjid-i Shah* at Isfahan. This mosque was designed to be one of the largest in Iran and to hold the most importance, at least for the Shi'is. The inscriptions refer to it as a *masjid-i jami'*, a congregational mosque, or a place of collective prayer.³³⁶

On every Friday, therefore, the call to prayer was made and the inhabitants of Isfahan collected in the Royal Mosque. The inscription in the west mihrab specifically enjoins believers to 'hasten earnestly to the Remembrance of God', and 'to leave off business and traffic'. This applies to Muslims in general and, at the time of

revelation, to Jewish and Arab merchants who refused to accept Islam. In Isfahan the verse is directed to the merchants who had set up shop in the Royal Bazaar facing the *Masjid-i Shah*. The choice of verse, therefore, is extremely suitable to its location.

C. Interpretation

The portal of the bazaar, the *Qeyseriyya*, stands at the north end of the Maydan-i Shah. This monumental facade faces the portal of the Royal Mosque and was also built by Shah 'Abbas I. The *Qeyseriyya* was part of the original plan of the New Isfahan which was approved by Shah 'Abbas in 1598 A.D.³³⁷ It was completed shortly after the main portal of the Royal Mosque, though the precise date may fall anywhere between 1617 and 1620 A.D.³³⁸

The *Qeyseriyya* was the facade of a vast area in which shops, small mosques, *madrasahs* (theological seminaries), *hammams* (public baths), cemeteries, and private dwellings formed the body of the bazaar.³³⁹ The facade itself was decorated with a cycle of monumental paintings. One of these was mentioned by D.N. Wilber in *Persian Gardens and Garden Pavillions* where he described it as a "tremendous painting of a victorious battle of Shah 'Abbas against the Uzbeks."³⁴⁰

The earliest recorded date for the completion of the *Qeyseriyya* is 1617, when, presumably, the painting was also completed. In his account of that year Eskandar Monshi mentions an Ozbeg invasion of Khorasan. The ruler of Transoxania, Emamqoli Khan Ozbeg, sent the commander Nadr Togay at the head of a force of 30,000 men from the army of Bokhara, to ravage Khorasan. The Ozbegs were preparing to invade

Mashhad when a *Qizilbash* troop, under the command of Mehrab Khan, pursued them. Mehrab Khan had just intercepted another Ozbeg force near Marv. In that battle five hundred Ozbegs were killed and fifty were taken prisoner. Although the pursuit of Nadr Togay was called off, the result was favorable for the Shah's troops.³⁴¹

Shah 'Abbas' greatest victory over the Ozbegs, however, occurred in 1598. The Ozbegs had overrun the province of Sistan, and taking the opportunity of the dynastic struggles which resulted from the Ozbeg leader's death, Shah 'Abbas decided to regain Sistan that year.³⁴² The Shah marched from Isfahan on 9 April 1598. He stopped at the shrine in Mashhad till August 1, when he moved on to Herat. The two armies, led by Shah 'Abbas and Din Muhammad Khan respectively, met on August 9. The Ozbeg army outnumbered the Iranian one which caused a wave of panic to spread among 'Abbas' men. To spur them on, he shouted, "Why are you just standing there? Attack like men, for a valiant death is preferable to a life of shame!"³⁴³

This battle of Rabat-i Pariyan ended with a resounding victory for the Iranian troops. Din Muhammad Khan was killed, Herat was liberated and the north-eastern frontier of the Safawid empire was stabilized.³⁴⁴ It is probably this victory which is recorded on the walls of the *Qeyseriyya*. It commemorates a Safawid victory over the Ozbegs, but through the connection between the bazaar and the inscription inside the mihrab (which draws our attention to the *Qeyseriyya*), it also commemorates a Shi'i victory over Sunni Muslims.

The verse inside the mihrab enjoins all men to come to the

remembrance of God. The inscription around the mihrab, on the other hand, defines the nature of this remembrance. The *adhan* with which the call to prayer is proclaimed was revealed to, and taught by, 'Ali. The Friday prayers of all Muslims, therefore, are presided over by the spirit of 'Ali. This is the total message of the mihrab. It calls on all 'unbelievers' to embrace True Islam, the Islam of 'Ali. While verse 9 of *sura LXII* advises the merchants in the bazaar to leave off their traffic for the sake of prayer, it also reminds them that unless their prayers are of the correct nature, their fate would be like that of the Ozbegs.³⁴⁵ The subtle links between the mihrab inscriptions, the commercial center nearby, and the recent historical events, provide a complete lesson in *Ithna 'Ashari* doctrine and Safawid propaganda.

The East Mihrab - Border

A. Epigraph

Surrounding the eastern mihrab in the domed hall east of the south dome is the following inscription:

From Abu 'Abdallah, upon whom be Peace, he said, 'Whoever hears the *mu'adhdhin* say "I bear witness that there is no god but God, and I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of God", and says believingly and trusting in God's reward in the Hereafter, "and I bear witness that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is the messenger of God"; that would suffice to (make him a Muslim and) differentiate him from whoever refuses and disbelieves. It (the *shahada*) will help him who acknowledges and testifies (bears witness). He will be rewarded the bounty of him who denied, and a bounty similar to (that of) him who acknowledged and attested.'

Written by Muhammad Rida al-Imami
al-Isfahani al-Adhami, 1038.³⁴⁶

B. Analysis

This *hadith* continues the message inscribed in and around the western mihrab. Prayer and the *shahada* are the primary requirements of Islam. Around the eastern mihrab the rewards of a Muslim are contrasted with the punishments of a non-Muslim. Whoever repeats the *shahada* with a pure heart, fully believing each word, can expect a reward equal to that of any other true believer. The unbeliever's reward, however, is allotted to those who submit fully to the will of God. This idea is presented in Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddimah* where it is directly related to earthly living. Ibn Khaldun states:

Every man tries to get things; in
this all men are alike. Thus,
whatever is obtained by one is denied
to the other, unless he gives something
in exchange.³⁴⁷

God's justice, therefore, applies to both temporal life and life in the Hereafter.

In style, this *hadith* is close to Qur'anic rendering,³⁴⁸ and there are several verses which transmit the same message. Verse 70 of *sura XXVIII; Qasas*, The Narration, repeats the message of the Unity of God inherent in the *shahada*.

And He is God: there is
No God but He. To Him
Be praise, at the first
And at the last:
For Him is the Command,
And to Him shall ye
(All) be brought back.

(XXVIII: 70)

An earlier verse (XXVIII: 54) describes the believers in this message and their rewards:

Twice will they be given
Their reward, for that they
Have persevered, that they avert
Evil with Good, and that
They spend (in charity) out of
What We have given them.

(XXVIII: 54)

Towards the end of the *sura*, a comparison is drawn between evil-doers and good-doers, and God's mercy is emphasized:

If any does good, the reward
To him is better than
His deed; but if any
Does evil, the doers of evil
Are only punished (to the extent)
Of their deeds.

(XXVIII: 84)

Since the theme of the entire *sura* is the Revelation and its methods of reception, it is clear that 'doing good' can, in this case, be defined as accepting God's Truth. Yousuf 'Ali elaborates on the purpose of the *sura*:

It emphasizes new points: how the recipient of inspiration is prepared for his high destiny, even in the growth of his ordinary life, and how the rejection of God's Message by groups of men or individuals is caused by overweening arrogance or avarice. The plight of those who reject the Truth is contrasted with the reward of the righteous.³⁴⁹

'High destiny' is obviously the career of a prophet culminating in the final reward: eternal life in Paradise. The recipient of inspiration is then a particular chosen person who will bring a message to his people. Those who accept the message will be rewarded by God,

those who reject it will be cast off. The rewards are not to be understood in purely material terms, for they have spiritual connotations. *Sura XXIX, al-Ankabut, The Spider*, carries a similar message. Verses 52-59 of this *sura* define the final punishments and rewards which will be allotted men on the Day of Judgement. Verse 55 states:

On the Day that
The punishment shall cover them
From above them and
From below them,
And (a Voice) shall say:
"Taste ye (the fruits)
Of your deeds!"

(XXIX: 55)

In contrast, verse 58 states:

But those who believe
And work deeds of righteousness -
To them shall We give
A Home in Heaven, -
Lofty mansions beneath which
Flow rivers, - to dwell therein
For aye; - an excellent reward
For those who do (good)! -

(XXIX: 58)

The final question revolves around the identity of the 'recipient of inspiration'. The *suras* mentioned above all refer to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, etc... The Qur'an repeatedly makes use of these figures in order to emphasize the mission and position of the 'seal of prophets'. In a mosque the recipient of inspiration must then be understood as Muhammad. In Shi'i interpretation, 'Ali is also a recipient, as well as interpreter of God's message.

C. Interpretation

Muhammad is mentioned at the beginning of the *hadith* in the course of the *shahada*. The *shahada* itself is incorporated into the *adhan*, the call to prayer which gathers together all Muslims for collective worship on Friday. These points have already been elaborated upon in the inscriptions of the west mihrab. More specifically, they were mentioned in the course of proving 'Ali's authority through divine inspiration. 'Ali received the *adhan*, and he taught it to all Muslims. 'Ali then is the recipient of inspiration who brings the message of the east mihrab. The rewards mentioned here are to be received by those who believe in the unity of God and the Prophethood of Muhammad as taught by 'Ali. The unbelievers' rewards, those of the Sunnis who do not recognize 'Ali's role in this process, shall be incorporated in the recompense received by the believers, the Shi'is. In 1038 A.H. this theory was already in effect, for God had shifted control of Arab Iraq from the Ottomans to the Safawids. This conclusion is supported by the inscription inside the same mihrab.

The East Mihrab - Interior

A. Epigraph

The message of the interior of the east mihrab is relayed in the same *thuluth* script.

...Your (real) friends are
 (No less than) God,
 His Apostle, and the (Fellowship
 Of) Believers, - those who
 Establish regular prayers
 And regular charity,
 And they bow

Down humbly (in worship).
 The Prophet, upon whom be
 peace, has said, 'prayer is the
 believer's *mi'raj* (ladder or
 Way to Heaven).³⁵⁰

B. Analysis

This epigraph is mainly constituted of verse 58 of *sura V*, *al Ma'ida*, The Table Spread.³⁵¹ This *sura* deals with the subjects of Jews and Christians who turned away from the Truth, and with the Muslims who are to recognize the virtues of the 'People of the Book', but take for friends only those who accept the message of God as revealed by Muhammad. The usual interpretation of verse 58 is simple and straightforward. The believers' friends are divided into three categories: God, Muhammad, other believers. True believers are distinguished by their actions. They offer regular prayers to God, they are generous, and they approach prayer with humility. In this context the verse ties in with the three preceding inscriptions. After the *adhan* is called and the faithful are gathered for Friday prayers (west: . mihrab), they remember the message of Islam (border of east . mihrab) and they bow down in prayer in accordance with the stipulations of verse V: 58 (interior of east . mihrab). The Prophet then assures these believers that prayer is the only means by which they may attain Paradise, thus strengthening the thrust of the call to prayer, or *adhan*.

The first three inscriptions have been shown to include implicit references to 'Ali as the one chosen by God and transmitter of God's grace to the Shi'is. In its present form, verse V: 58 also makes an implicit reference to 'Ali. If the word *wali* is interpreted

according to the tenets of Shi'ism, the verse would stipulate friendship with God, Muhammad and 'Ali. According to Shi'ism, however, 'Ali is not merely implied in this verse, but he is the central theme around which it revolves. This becomes evident only if the reading of V: 58 is slightly changed.

C. Interpretation

Shi'i Islam does not accept the reading of verse V: 58 as it has been presented above.³⁵² In *Shi'ite Islam*, 'Allamah Tabataba'i presents the reading acceptable to him.³⁵³ In this version the last three lines of the verse are altered. The reading becomes:

Your (real) friends are
 (No less than) God,
 His Apostle, and the (Fellowship
 Of) Believers, - those who
 Establish regular prayers
 And regular charity,
 While bowing down
 In prayer.³⁵⁴

The slight difference in reading changes the meaning of the verse dramatically. In the first instance the believers are those who pray and give alms (*zakat*), and approach prayer with humility. In the second reading, the believers also pray regularly, but they give their alms while 'bowing down', that is, at the same time that the act of worship is taking place. The Shi'i interpretation is based on a *hadith* transmitted by Abu Dharr al-Ghifari.³⁵⁵ Abu Dharr related:

One day we prayed the noontime prayers with the Prophet. A person in need asked people to help but no one gave him anything. The person raised his hands to the sky saying, 'Oh God! Be witness that in the mosque of the Prophet no one gave me anything'.

'Ali ibn Abi Talib was in the position of genuflection in the prayers. He pointed with his finger to the person, who took his ring and left.³⁵⁶

The Prophet, having witnessed 'Ali's behavior then prayed to God to make 'Ali his vizier and helper, just as Moses had asked the same for Aaron.³⁵⁷ In reply to Muhammad's request, God sent down verse V: 58 which then became 'the Revealed Truth' of 'Ali's *wilaya*.

In its accepted Shi'i form, the verse refers to a specific incident and a specific figure, that of 'Ali. He prayed humbly to God, and as the verse states, gave charity while prostrating himself to God. This revision changes the identities of the believers' friends. Instead of God, Muhammad and Muslims, they become God, Muhammad, and 'Ali. The Prophet's words at the end of the epigraph, "prayer is the believer's *mi'raj*", must now be understood as referring directly to 'Ali. 'Ali's humility and generosity are the means of his ascension to Heaven. Since sura V enjoins believers not to make friends among the Christians and Jews, the new interpretation of V: 58 becomes an injunction against befriending any Muslims who do not follow the example of 'Ali.

In Shi'i Islam 'Ali's authority is second only to that of the Prophet. Both Muhammad and 'Ali receive their legitimacy from God. Muhammad is the *Mustafa*, the Chosen One, and 'Ali is the *Murtada*, the Approved One.³⁵⁸ The three (God, Muhammad, 'Ali) form the Trinity of Shi'ism.³⁵⁹ Muhammad and 'Ali are the executors of God's will. Inasmuch as they complete the revealed message and are necessary for its appearance, they become part of the entire unit. To the Shi'is, it is this Trinity which composes the eternal unity of God.

The return to the theme of unity is appropriate to a conclusion which includes the body of epigraphs in both the east and west mihrabs. The first inscription dealt with the *adhan*, the second with prayers, the third with the rewards of the True believer, and the fourth with the basis of his belief. In a cyclical relationship the epigraphs begin by proclaiming that the Unity of God (the *adhan* which includes the *shahada*) was taught by 'Ali. They end by emphasizing that this Unity can only be completed by 'Ali. The Sunni *shahada* and *adhan* are incomplete because they do not include the *wilaya* of 'Ali. Hence, the Sunni faith itself is deficient. The Sunni *mu'adhdhin* may call the faithful to prayer, he may proclaim the Unity of God, but this remains insufficient. The restoration of the Unity of God into the Sunni faith can occur only when its adherents convert to Twelver Shi'ism. In contemporary Safawid terms, this would necessitate the extension of Shah 'Abbas' authority over the entire Islamic world.

South Section

The south section or sanctuary of the mosque, being its most important part, is larger than the other eyvans and chambers (fig. 1). Consequently, its epigraphic program is also lengthier than the others. The inscriptions begin in the eyvan (figs. 18-19) and wind their way into the dome chamber covering the sides beneath the dome (figs. 20; 22). In this instance these inscriptions form one part and will be discussed under the heading 'South Eyvan'. The remainder of the epigraphs cover the drum of the dome and the area above the mihrab (figs. 20; 23-24). The inscriptions will be discussed in this order.

South Eyvan

A. Epigraph

A long band of *thuluth* script runs the whole length of the eyvan. It starts on the west side and winds its way into the dome chamber continuing above the mihrab and along the *qiblah* wall (figs. 19-20). The inscription reads:

Part a.

In the *Manaqeb* of Ibn al-Maghazili about Anas (it is said) that he (Anas) said: On the day of *mubahala* (invocation) when the Prophet, God's Praise upon him and the people of his Household, made brothers among the *muhajirin* (emigrants) and the *ansar* (supporters), 'Ali was standing where he (the Prophet) could see him and know his place yet he (the Prophet) did not make him brother of anyone, so 'Ali left with tears in his eyes. The Prophet, God's Praise upon him and the people of his Household, missed him and asked, 'What has Abu al-Hasan done?' came the reply; 'He left in tears, O Messenger of God.' He (the Prophet) said; 'O Bilal, go and fetch him to me.' So Bilal, upon whom be Peace, went to 'Ali, upon whom be Peace, and the latter had entered his house in tears. So Fatima said, 'What makes you cry? may God keep tears away from your eyes!' He ('Ali) said; 'O Fatima, the Prophet made brothers among the *muhajirin* and the *ansar* while I stood where he could see me and know my place but he made me brother of none.' She said; 'May God keep sadness away from you; perhaps he was but saving you for himself.' Bilal then said, 'O 'Ali, go (answer) to the Prophet, God's Praise upon him and the people of his Household.' So 'Ali came to the Prophet, upon whom be Peace, and the Prophet, God's Praise upon him and the people of his Household, said; 'What makes you cry, O 'Ali?' He replied, 'You made brothers from among the *muhajirin* and the *ansar* while I stood where you could see me and know my place, yet you made me no one's brother.' He (the Prophet) said, 'I had but saved

you for myself, does it not please you to be brother of your Prophet?' He ('Ali) said, 'Yes, O Messenger of God, that it does.' So the Prophet took his hand and led him up the *minbar* and said; 'O God, this (man) is from me and I am from him, except that he is to me what Aaron was to Moses. To whomever I am the *mawla*, 'Ali is also the *mawla*.' So 'Ali departed with pleasure in his heart. 'Umar b. al-Khattab followed him and said, 'Bravo! O Aba al-Hasan. You have become my *mawla* and the *mawla* of every Muslim.'

Part b.

From *Manaqeb* Ibn al-Ghazali after Jaber b. 'Abdallah who said; 'two Najranis came to the Prophet, God's Praise upon him and the people of his Pure Household, so he called them to Islam and they said, '*aslanna* (we have submitted/embraced Islam) O Muhammad.' He said, 'You lied. If you so desire, I will tell you what keeps you from Islam.' They said, 'come, tell us.' He said, 'Love of the cross, and the drinking of *khamr* and the eating of pig's meat.' And he called them to the *mula'ana* (oath of condemnation) so they promised to meet him early the following morning. The next morning the Messenger of God, God's Praise upon him and the people of his Household, went early taking (the hand of) 'Ali, Fatima, al-Hasan and al-Husayn, then he sent for them (the Christians) but they refused to respond and sent him the set *kharaj* (tithe). The Prophet, God's Praise upon him and the people of his Household, said, 'By Him who in Truth has sent me as Prophet, if they do, God shall consign them to the valleys of flame (lit: God shall put them in the valley and cause a rain of flame to descend upon them). Jaber said, 'this verse was revealed about them: "Come! let us gather together our sons and your sons, our women and your women, ourselves and yourselves; then let us earnestly pray, and invoke the curse of God on those who lie."''

- Part c. Ash-Shu'abi said: "Our sons are al-Hasan and al-Husayn, and our women are Fatima, and ourselves are 'Ali b. Abi Taleb."
- Part d. And this from the *Manaqeb* about Zayd b. Arqam; He said, "I went to the Messenger of God, God's Praise upon him and the people of his Household, and he said; 'I shall make of you brothers just as God made brothers from among his angels.'" Then he said to 'Ali, 'You are my brother and my friend' and recited this verse: 'brothers in the presence of God, joyfully facing each other on thrones of dignity.'"
- Part e. And from Muhammad b. Abdallah b. Abi Rafi', he said, "On the day of Uhud the crier called out, 'there is no sword save *dhu'l faqar* and no man save 'Ali.'"
- Part f. And also from his *Manaqeb*, the Messenger of God, God's Praise upon him and the people of his Household, said; 'It was written on the gate of Paradise, Muhammad is the Messenger of God, 'Ali is the brother of the Messenger of God, two thousand years before the heavens were created.'
- Written with Gratitude to God alone by 'Abd al-Baqi.³⁶⁰

B. Analysis - (Part a)

The first section of *hadith* (part a) is ascribed to Anas Ibn Malek (d. A.D. 795), a Sunni jurist and founder of one of the four orthodox schools of jurisdiction. Today, the Maliki school covers North and Central Africa, Upper Egypt, Sudan, and West Africa.³⁶¹ Like Ibn 'Abbas, Anas Ibn Malek was a Companion of the Prophet and one of the first of *qurra'* (Qur'anic scholars)³⁶². The authenticity of the *hadith* is then based on two factors, Anas' proximity to the Prophet, and his objectivity.³⁶³

The Prophet is said to have made 'Ali his 'brother' on two occasions, once before the *hijra* (migration), and again in Medina.³⁶⁴ Since the inscribed *hadith* mentions the *ansar* (Medinan supporters), the related event must then have taken place after the Prophet's migration to Yathrib. The word *mubahala* (invocation) is derived from the verb *nabtahil* (in this case, to invoke God's curse upon infidels) which appears in part b of the inscription. The second incident (part b) dates to the Year of Delegations, 630 A.D., after the Prophet conquered Mecca and consequently received several delegations which came to pay him allegiance.³⁶⁵ If both events (parts a and b) fall on the same day (as the terminology suggests), we may then conclude that the creation of bonds of brotherhood among Muslims occurred in 630 A.D.

On the day of *mubahala* the Prophet made brothers among the *muhajirun* and the *ansar*. The *muhajirun* were the Meccans who had left with the Prophet on his *hijra* to Yathrib, while the *ansar*, helpers, were the people of Medina who welcomed the Prophet and supported him in his wars against Quraysh.

Before the *hijra* of Muhammad the oasis of Yathrib had seen continuous fighting between its different clans. Apart from the eight Arab clans, there were three major Jewish ones who often sided with one group or another in their ongoing feuds. The hundred years of fighting before 620 A.D. culminated, in 618 A.D., in a great battle at a spot called Bu'ath in which most of the clans were involved. At about the same time (619 A.D.) Muhammad made a trip to the town of Ta'if in the hope of finding a base for himself, but his visit failed. On his

pilgrimage of the following year, he met six men from Yathrib who offered him the opportunity of establishing a base of operations in their city.³⁶⁶

Due to its ongoing feuds, Yathrib was ripe for a neutral outsider to act as leader. Contact between the Arabs and the Jews also introduced the former to the concept of a messiah and facilitated their acceptance of a religious leader. Thus on Muhammad's pilgrimage in 621 A.D., twelve men from Yathrib, representing all the major clans, met with him and expressed their readiness to accept him as leader/ Prophet. The pledge is known as the First Pledge of 'Aqaba. It was reinforced in 622 when seventy-five people from Yathrib met the Prophet during his pilgrimage and repeated the promises of the clan leaders. This became known as the Second Pledge of 'Aqaba, or the Pledge of War.³⁶⁷ Soon afterwards Muhammad began encouraging his Meccan followers to leave for Yathrib. By September of 622, about seventy of them had complied. Finally, only the Prophet, Abu Bakr, and 'Ali remained. The last is said to have slept in the Prophet's bed while he sneaked out of Mecca and hid in a nearby cave for three days.³⁶⁸ The *hijra* was completed on 24 September 622 which is the basis of Islamic chronology,³⁶⁹ and Yathrib became *Madinat an-Nabi*, the City of the Prophet, or simply Medina.

The Emigrants, having been supporters of the Prophet from the onset of his religious mission, regarded themselves in higher esteem than the Helpers, or *ansar* of Medina. Among the *ansar* themselves there were several ranks of importance corresponding to the number of battles

fought at the Prophet's side. This system of 'Priority in Islam' divided the *ansar* into several categories which decided the amount of pay they received.³⁷⁰

Finally, the Prophet proclaimed that the Emigrants and the *ansar* were brothers in faith and would be treated equally. There is an allusion to this policy in verse 72 of *sura IX*:

Those who believed
And adopted exile,
And fought for the Faith
With their property
And their persons,
In the cause of God,
As well as those
Who gave (them) asylum
And aid, - these are (all)
Friends and protectors,
One of another.

(IX: 72)

Again, the Brotherhood of Muslims is emphasized in *sura XLIX*, verse 10, which was delivered in a sermon following the annual pilgrimage of 632 A.D.³⁷¹

The Believers are but
A single Brotherhood
So make peace and
Reconciliation between your
Two contending brothers;
And fear God, that ye
May receive Mercy.

(XLIX: 10)

The replacement of the system of tribal affiliation by a religious brotherhood was a major factor in the maintenance of internal security within the Islamic community, and the motivating force behind external expansion. The day of *mubahala*, therefore, is of particular importance.

According to the *hadith*, the *muhajirun* and *ansar* were made brothers in a kind of ceremony in which 'Ali was ignored. 'Ali had been one of the first to embrace Islam. Indeed, according to the Shi'is, he was the very first person to meet Muhammad after the first revelation at the cave of Hira, and believe in his Prophethood.³⁷² He was a constant companion of the Prophet and participated in all battles except that of Tabuk when he was instructed to remain in Medina.³⁷³ 'Ali therefore combined in himself the requirements of priority and constant support, and expected to be one of the first to be joined in brotherhood with one of the *ansar*. On being ignored, he returned to his house where Fatima consoled him with the same words that were later used by the Prophet. It is an indication of 'Ali's importance to have had his absence noticed, for the Prophet sent his faithful Bilal, an Abyssinian ex-slave and the first recognized *mu'adhhdhin* in Islamic history,³⁷⁴ to bring 'Ali to him. Although the main objective of the ceremony was the creation of bonds of brotherhood between Emigrants and Helpers, 'Ali was then made brother of the Prophet.

On ascending the *minbar*, the Prophet proclaimed that 'Ali was to him what Aaron was to Moses. A similar *hadith*, known as *Hadith al-Manzilah*, is related in al-Tabataba'i's *Shi'ite Islam*:

"The Prophet of God said to 'Ali,
'Are you not satisfied to be to me
what Harun was to Moses except
that after me there will not be
another prophet?'"³⁷⁵

Muhammad is reported to have spoken in similar terms on another occasion, in this instance referring to Moses as his own brother in prophethood.

'O God! My brother Moses said to thee,
 "Expand my breast and make easy my tasks
 and make my tongue eloquent so that they
 will comprehend my words, and make my
 brother, Harun, my help and vizier."
 Oh God! I am also thy Prophet; expand my
 breast and make easy my tasks and make
 'Ali my vizier and helper.' 376

The incident in which Moses prays to God is contained in the Qur'an
 (with slight variation) in verse XXVIII: 34. God responds in the
 following verse:

We will certainly
 Strengthen thy arm through
 Thy brother, and invest you both
 With authority, so they
 Shall not be able to
 Touch you: With Our Signs
 Shall ye triumph, - you two
 As well as those
 Who follow you.

(XXVIII: 35)

The *hadith*, therefore, establishes the spiritual relationship
 between Muhammad and 'Ali. The Prophet is likened to Moses who preached
 the Unity of God and was persecuted by the Egyptians. Aaron, Moses'
 brother, acted as official spokesman and vizier, a position which the
 inscription allots to 'Ali. 'Ali's position is strengthened not only
 through his appointment by the Prophet, but also through his investiture
 by God. The Prophet's final statement, "'Ali is the *mawla* of whoever
 takes me as *mawla*', is an affirmation of 'Ali's authority over all
 Muslims. 377

'Ali's position was accepted by 'Umar b. al-Khattab who, as
 the *hadith* states, followed 'Ali and congratulated him on his appoint-
 ment. 'Umar's reported behavior was contradicted by his later actions

when he supported the caliphate of Abu Bakr and refused to acknowledge 'Ali's superiority.³⁷⁸ 'Umar and all the usurper caliphs had, therefore, disobeyed the Prophet and sinned against God. The institution of Sunnism is itself seen as against the revealed Truth, for Sunnis do not recognize 'Ali as the 'Approved' by God.

C. Interpretation - (Part a)

The inscribed *hadith* emphasized two points: the unity of all Muslims and the leadership of 'Ali. The brotherhood of Islam is an essential factor for the strength of the faith and it is a matter ordained by God (Verse XLIX: 10, quoted above). As one brotherhood, the Muslims share certain basic concepts: the Unity of God, the Prophethood of Muhammad and (according to Shi'ism) the Imamhood of 'Ali. The Unity of God was the message brought by earlier messengers, such as Moses, who is mentioned in the inscription. Moses remained firm in his belief despite Pharoah's persecution, just as the Prophet did vis-à-vis the Quraysh. Those who accepted Muhammad's message were brothers and were expected to remain united in faith. On refusing to acknowledge 'Ali's appointment as *mawla* the Sunnis had, therefore, broken away from the spiritual brotherhood. They were, as the *hadith* implies, no longer Muslims.

This argument serves to establish the legitimacy of Shah 'Abbas and the Safawids. Their chief saint and ancestor had been invested with divine authority, thus their own rule was one ordained and approved by God. Their enemies are the descendants of those who had refused to comply with the Prophet's orders and had abandoned faith.

All Sunnis, therefore, were outside True Islam and warring against them was a religious duty which the Safawids, like the Prophet and 'Ali, had to perform. As has already been seen, the threat of war is primarily directed at the Ottomans, upholders of orthodox Islam. In the south eyvan the threat can also be seen to apply to other categories of unbelievers, such as Christians.

B. Analysis - (Parts b, c)

In the second part of the inscription 'Umar Ibn al-Khattab as an example of hypocrisy and disbelief is replaced by two Christians from the city of Najran. Najran, which lies on the southern border of Hijaz, is cited in the Qur'an among the examples of believers persecuted by unbelievers. In this case the chief unbeliever was the Jewish Himyarite King of Yemen who, in the sixth century after Christ, had the Najrani Christians burnt at the stake.³⁷⁹

After the capture of Mecca in 630 A.D., delegations from all over the Arabian peninsula are said to have gone to Medina to offer homage to the Prophet. One such delegation which presented itself freely and with no hostility, was that of Najran.³⁸⁰ The Najrani Christians were granted protection in return for the specified amount of tax and certain services. A treaty was drawn up between Muhammad and the Christians which has been preserved in al-Baladhuri's *Kitab Futuh al-Buldan*. The text of the treaty is as follows:

They are entitled to the protection of Allah and the security of Muhammad the Prophet, the Messenger of Allah, which security shall involve their persons, religion, lands and possessions - including those of them who are absent as well

as those who are present - their camels, messengers and images (church pictures and crosses). The status they previously held shall not be changed, nor shall any of their religious services or images be altered. No attempt shall be made to turn a bishop from his office as a bishop; a monk from his office as a monk, nor a sexton of a church from his office, whether what is under the control of each is great or small. These Christians shall not be held responsible for any wrong deed or bloodshed in pre-Islamic time. They shall neither be called to military service nor compelled to pay the tithe.³⁸¹

According to Yousuf 'Ali, this treaty had been accorded the Christians in a spirit of tolerance after they refused to abandon their old ways and embrace Islam.³⁸² The *hadith* tells us that the Prophet had called two of the Christians of Najran to Islam and that they had pretended to submit. The Prophet, however, saw through their lie, for he was able to point out to them certain ingrained habits, "love of the cross, drinking of wine (*khamr*, literally, any alcoholic beverage), and eating of pig's meat," which stood in their way. The Qur'an issues specific injunctions against each of these vices. The belief in Jesus as God goes against the Unitarian spirit of Islam and it is refuted in several passages of the Qur'an including the entire *sura Maryam* XIX. Perhaps the Prophet's words "love of the cross" can be more specifically interpreted as the belief in Christ's crucifixion and subsequent resurrection. The Islamic view on this matter is most concisely stated in verse 157 of *sura IV Nisaa'* (Women):

That they said (in boast),
"We killed Christ Jesus
The son of Mary,

The Apostle of God"; -
 But they killed him not
 Nor crucified him,
 But so it was made
 To appear to them,
 And those who differ
 Therein are full of doubts,
 With no (certain) knowledge,
 But only conjecture to follow,
 For a surety
 They killed him not.

(IV: 157)

Islam states that not Christ but someone 'in his likeness' was killed, while he was protected by God. Whether the 'likeness' is the shadow which some of the early Christian sects believe it to have been, or an actual physical body, is a matter of conjecture, but according to Islam the essential point is the refutation of the resurrection, the divinity of Christ and hence, the Trinity.³⁸³

The prohibition against the drinking of *khamr* appears in three places in the Qur'an. The first instance, probably caused by an actual incident, is IV: 43 where believers are warned against approaching prayer in a state of drunkenness. Verse 219 of sura II states that the sin or evil of wine drinking far outweighs its profits, and finally, in V: 93, wine is called an abomination and "Satan's handiwork"; Muslims are ordered to abstain from drinking it. Food laws in Islam are simple; in fact the Qur'an explains that the elaborate food laws imposed upon Jews were a punishment from God (e.g. IV: 160). The few prohibitions appear in V: 4 where taboos are placed on dead meat, blood, flesh of swine, and that "on which hath been invoked the name of other than God".³⁸⁴

These three basic rules differentiated the People of the Book one from another, so that in order to become Muslims the Christians would have had to denounce the Trinity of God, save the drinking of wine for Paradise, and abstain from eating pork. Obviously, the Najranis were unwilling to comply and thus sent the Prophet the fixed *kharaj*, or land tax, imposed on non-Muslims.³⁸⁵

The Prophet had taken his daughter Fatima, her husband 'Ali, and their two sons Hasan and Husayn to the meeting place at the agreed time. When the Najranis failed to appear and condemn these practices, he invoked the curse of God upon them, praying that they be trapped in a valley on which God would send down a rain of flames, that is, he consigned them to Hell Fire.³⁸⁶

At this point in the inscribed *hadith* Jaber b. 'Abdallah states that a verse was revealed with exclusive reference to these people. This is part of verse 61 of *sura III, Al 'Imran* (The Family of 'Imran). In the *hadith* the first sentence is omitted as it is connected to the preceding verse. Both verses are quoted below.

60. The Truth (comes)
From God alone;
So be not of those
Who doubt.
61. If any one disputes
In this matter with thee,
Now after (full) knowledge
Hath come to thee,
Say: "Come! let us
Gather together, -
Our sons and your sons,
Our women and your women,
Ourselves and yourselves:
Then let us earnestly pray,
And invoke the curse
Of God on those who lie!"

(III: 61-62)

The truth which is referred to in these verses is the truth of the nature of Christ who, like Adam, was created from dust and has no claim to divinity. Verse 61 was thus revealed because the Christians refused to accept the inspired truth. In the wider context of the *sura* these verses are but a small fraction of the Islamic argument against the older practices. The *sura* is devoted to two main themes. First comes the establishment of the spiritual heritage of the Prophet through the family of 'Imran. Moses, John the Baptist and Jesus were precursors of the Prophet who was sent to complete the message. Secondly, the People of the Book must accept this fact, for the rejection of God's signs would bring about a fate not unlike that of Pharaoh's armies.

In *sura* III Christians are questioned as to why they reject these signs.

70. Ye People of the Book!
 Why reject ye
 The signs of God
 To which ye are
 (Yourselves) witnesses?

71. Ye People of the Book!
 Why do ye clothe
 Truth with falsehood,
 And conceal the Truth
 While ye have knowledge? (III: 70-71)

These same questions could be applied to 'Umar b. al-Khattab and all other Muslims who rejected the revealed truth of 'Ali's Imamhood (part a). 'Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Husayn thus join the Prophet in invoking God's wrath on unbelievers.

These four figures represent the body of the followers of the true faith. They are the only ones mentioned in the *hadith* although

the verse quoted (III: 61) specifies the calling of 'our sons, our women, and ourselves'. To prove that these four are sufficient representatives of the collectivity of Muslims, another short *hadith* is attached to the main one (part c). The *hadith* states, "our sons are al-Hasan and al-Husayn and our women are Fatima and ourselves are 'Ali b. Abi Taleb." The superimposition of these names onto the verse leads to the conclusion that the interpretation of the Qur'anic verses referred to in the inscriptions was a conscious and deliberate act which mirrored the Shi'i claims to the caliphate.³⁸⁷ Whether this last *hadith* appears at the end of an account, by as-Shu'abi, of the same event or whether it exists independently, is unknown at this point. If the latter case is true, we may see it as further proof of the deliberation behind the choice of texts for the Royal Mosque. Here fragments of evidence are pieced together to provide irrefutable arguments in support of the legitimacy of the Safawid claim as derived from that of the Imamate of 'Ali. The ceremonial cursing also provides a precedence for the ritual cursing of the first three caliphs which became popular at the time of Ima'il I. Although the interpretation of these inscriptions is in line with the usual attacks on Sunnis in general and Ottomans in particular, special attention will be awarded to the Christians. The appropriation of the land for *Ithna 'Ashari* Shi'ism would dictate appropriation of Iran to Islam (at least in a symbolic fashion),³⁸⁸ and this was particularly important in cosmopolitan Isfahan.

C. Interpretation - (Parts b, c)

A reference to Christianity is made in the inscriptions of the external minars. *Sura Ikhlas* (CXII) and *sura Isra'* (XVII: 111) are used to proclaim the Unity of God and to deny the Trinity, but the reference is general and not specific.³⁸⁹ On the minars, these proclamations simply supplement the basic associations between a minaret and Islam; they repeat the profession *la Ilaha illa Allah*. Their inclusion, therefore, is a matter of principle and not an indication of any specific events. Matters are different as regards the references in the south eyvan.

The Prophet's attitudes towards Christians were generally more lenient and favorable than those towards the Jews. The two *suras* which deal mainly with the 'People of the Book', *sura II*, The Cow and *sura III*, *Al 'Imran*, provide sufficient proof of this. Muhammad's mistrust of the Jewish clans around Medina caused him to massacre great numbers of them.³⁹⁰ When the Najran delegation refused to embrace Islam, however, they were awarded protection.³⁹¹ The reasons for these discrepancies are, of course, more socio-economic than religious, but the policy of tolerance towards Christians is important in that it reappears in full force at the time of Shah 'Abbas.

Safawid Isfahan was the home of large populations of Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, and Sunnis. Despite the policy of pragmatism adopted towards most of these groups, the imposition of *Ithna 'Ashari* Shi'ism as the official state religion necessitated some degree of opposition against all those who did not adhere to this sect. The

Sunni-Shi'i conflict was embodied in theological battles waged by eminent Shi'i theologians, such as Muhammad Baqir (1628-99) and his successor Mir Muhammad Husayn.³⁹² The Jews and Zoroastrians were targets for forced conversions and severe persecutions (especially in the decades after Shah 'Abbas' reign)³⁹³ and although there were some attempts to convert the Christians to Islam, these latter, especially the Armenians and Georgians, were generally better tolerated.

The privileged position which Christians enjoyed during Shah 'Abbas' reign was the result of this monarch's decision to make Isfahan a great trade center. After establishing Isfahan as his new capital in 1598, Shah 'Abbas fought the Ottomans in Armenia and Georgia. He captured these areas and proceeded to depopulate them and relocate their inhabitants. By doing this he was depriving the Ottomans of human booty and of control of the wealth and overland trade of the Armenians. By laying waste to the territories which lay between his retreating troops and those of the advancing Ottoman army, he also prevented the area from becoming an asset in Ottoman hands.³⁹⁴

Monshi reports that the Shah's reason for dislocating the inhabitants of such cities as Julfa (a major commercial center) was to protect them,³⁹⁵ but the Shah was more interested in their skills as craftsmen and traders. He had made a visit to Julfa in 1590 and been much impressed by the wealth of its inhabitants. Thus, after the capture of Erivan in 1604, Julfites and Armenians in general (as well as Persians, Christians, Jews, and foreign travellers) were forced to migrate to Isfahan and its suburbs. In the process, many Muslims were

displaced in order to make room for the newcomers. Some of the Armenians were accommodated in Isfahan itself while others, especially the majority of the Armenians of Julfa, were established in a suburb south of Isfahan. The Shah provided these Christians with masons and engineers to help them build a new Julfa. He granted them lands, exempted them from taxes and awarded them the freedom to practice their religious rites in public and build their own churches and cemeteries. They became free citizens with their own courts, judges, and administrative systems.³⁹⁶

By 1630 A.D. there were about 30,000 Armenians in New Julfa and 50,000 in the four other villages established around Isfahan.³⁹⁷ Through them Shah 'Abbas controlled the silk industry which was placed exclusively in their hands. In turn, they outbided the British and European traders and staved off European control of the Iranian economy for fifty years.³⁹⁸

The Julfites became wealthy entrepreneurs who enjoyed the Shah's favor and the benefits of his liberal attitudes. In 1617, the Italian traveller Pietro Delle Valle reported on the situation of Christians in Isfahan:

"Syrians, Georgians in much greater abundance, and an infinite number of Armenians. These latter are extremely rich, carrying on most of the commerce of the country, particularly with Turkey... Christians are allowed to wear green, which is expressly forbidden in Turkey."³⁹⁹

Apart from the symbiotic relationship which he established between the Armenians and his country, Shah 'Abbas showed great

interest in his 'guests'. He paid them numerous visits and attended many of their religious ceremonies. He had countless theological discussions with them and the missionaries who stayed at New Julfa, especially about such concepts as the Holy Trinity.⁴⁰⁰ Shah 'Abbas also promoted many of these Christians to positions of authority in his government. The notable Allahverdi Khan, a Georgian, became one of the most powerful men in Safawid Iran, and the bridge which crossed the main highway of Isfahan, the Zayanda-rud, was named after him.⁴⁰¹ This new class, therefore, also fulfilled 'Abbas' aims of establishing a third force which helped reduce the influence of the *Qizilbash* chiefs in his government.

In order to ensure the loyalty of his new subjects and to remove any hopes they might have harbored of returning to their homeland, the Shah totally destroyed their old cities and villages, with special attention to the original Julfa. The Shah was also aware that the Armenians he most valued still revered the Holy places at Etchmiadzin, the seat of the Catholicos and religious center of Armenia. He thus arranged to have several of the relics at Etchmiadzin, such as the right arm of Saint Gregory the Illuminator, the stone altar and other architectural ornaments, transported to Isfahan. These were placed in the care of the Armenian community leader, Khodja Nazar, and in St. George's Church at Julfa.⁴⁰² New Julfa thus became the religious and cultural center of the Christians of Isfahan and the whole of Iran. The New Julfa See had its own bishop with jurisdiction over Shiraz, Hamadan, Rasht, Anzali, Kashan, Qazvin, Tehran, Basra and Baghdad as

well as 74 more villages.⁴⁰³ With care and attention Shah 'Abbas had made of New Julfa what he was attempting to make of Isfahan, a rival religious center.

Like the Christians of Najran, those of Julfa had to travel northwards in order to reach the capital city, but the similarities between the two groups are not limited to their geographical locations with respect to Medina and Isfahan. In the villages the Armenians were allowed to keep wild boar and cultivate vines. Pork was served to the ambassadors who were accommodated at New Julfa.⁴⁰⁴ The wine was sold by the Armenians who resided in Isfahan. In fact, it is said that one of the chief reasons for allowing those Armenians to live in Isfahan was to supply its inhabitants with *khamr*. In 1654-55 when Shah 'Abbas II (1642-66) expelled the Armenians from Isfahan, his chief argument was that their wine trade had become uncontrollable.⁴⁰⁵

The third Christian vice mentioned by the Prophet is 'love of the cross', which can be generally applied to all Christians. The Julfa Armenians, however, had a special ceremony called *Surb Khatch*, the Feast of the Cross, which took place annually around 26 August. On that night the women would kindle fires and hold prayers near the graves of their ancestors.⁴⁰⁶

The *hadith* is therefore a condemnation of these practices, pointing out that although they were well tolerated, they were not condoned. The inscriptions may be seen as a gentle rebuke to the Christians of Isfahan and a stronger one to the Christians of Europe. At a time of increased diplomatic relations with the West, many

ambassadors and missionaries were welcomed into Isfahan. The missionaries attempted to convert the Armenians to Catholicism, a process which Shah 'Abbas vehemently opposed as it would have given the Church of Rome control of over 80,000 of his subjects. The Shah's response to these tactics was reported by Thomas Boys in 1609:

"If they will change their religion
(the Armenians) being his subjects,
they will accept his (religion)."⁴⁰⁷

Attempts at conversion were not limited to the Armenian Christians but extended to all Muslims and to the Shah himself. In the second half of the sixteenth century a Jesuit named Francisco da Costa misinterpreted Shah 'Abbas' pragmatism into a readiness to accept the 'Faith', which he reported to Pope Clement VIII. The Pope sent Costa with a layman named Diego de Miranda to express his joy at the Shah's "ready inclination toward the Christian religion", and to enlist his help against the Turks.⁴⁰⁸ Shah 'Abbas might have welcomed the second part of the invitation, but the quarrels between the two emissaries "in the course of which Costa stole Miranda's clothing and Miranda got Costa put in chains", caused the failure of the mission.⁴⁰⁹ After various similar incidents the Shah let it be known that he had grown tired of receiving religious men as ambassadors because "a religious man out of his cell is like a fish out of water".⁴¹⁰

Costa and Miranda could be interpreted as the two Najranis of the *hadith*. Such a conclusion is unlikely, however, because of the many accounts of individual intrigues and the escapades of such personalities as the Sherley brothers and the Iranian ambassadors who

converted to Christianity and never returned, especially the famous Don Juan of Persia.⁴¹¹ A better analogy can be found within the ranks of the Christians of Iran. The two Georgian princes Luarsab Khan, ruler of Kartlia, and Tahmuras Khan, governor of Kakhetia, are an example of two Christians who forsook Shah 'Abbas' protection and sided with his enemies. In 1613, they formed an alliance with each other against the Shah. Angered by their actions, Shah 'Abbas organized a punitive expedition against them which could only be averted if the two Christians presented themselves before him, apologized and made amends. Tahmuras Khan fled to the mountains from where he proclaimed that he was too terrified to come before the Shah and thus sent his mother and two sons as a delegation. Monshi reports that the Shah was prepared to accept the mother's pleas when Luarsab's nephew showed the Shah a letter which Tahmuras had written him. The contents of the letter angered the Shah and "gave the lie to what his (Tahmuras') mother was saying." The Shah was determined to march against Tahmuras who fled and joined Luarsab in Kartlia. The two then fled over the Ottoman border and took refuge with one of the local rulers.⁴¹² Shah 'Abbas had every reason to declare 'let us gather our women, our sons and ourselves, and invoke God's curse upon the liars'.

These two Georgian princes reached Sultan Ahmad I in 1615 and convinced him that the disturbances in Georgia were a result of Shah 'Abbas' intention to break the peace between the two nations. The Ottoman army was mobilised and Tahmuras returned to Kakhetia. In the same year, Tahmuras was able, with the help of the Georgians who had

previously declared their "Love for the Shah", to destroy the *Qizilbash* army and their camp at Bohran.⁴¹³

Eskandar Monshi describes the Shah's general policies toward the Georgians and his reaction to Tahmuras' temerity:

It had been the Shah's policy to devastate the Kakhetia region of Georgia, to subjugate the infidels there, and to convert them to Islam, and more than one hundred thousand women and children had already been taken captive in the course of his previous campaigns. When Shah 'Abbas, who was in Mazandaran, heard that Tahmuras had returned to Georgia and had defeated a *qezelbash* army, his rage knew no bounds, and he resolved to lead an army to Georgia to chastise those impious people who dared to slay Muslims.⁴¹⁴

Luarsab, who had fallen into the Shah's hands the previous year, was sent to Astarabad and kept in custody by the governor. The reserve army moved on to Georgia and surrounded Kakhetia. The Shah's orders were to spare no male Georgian, for he and his men were "striving in the Way of God" and had "to slay all those who attribute partners to God."⁴¹⁵ Tahmuras managed to escape and he remained a rebel, causing many revolts and uprisings, until 1036/1626-27. In that year he repented and sent an apology to the Shah who replied that Tahmuras should "wash away the stain of rebellion with the water of honest service and truthful speech, so that he may render himself fit to come into my presence." Writing in that year, Eskandar Monshi reported that Tahmuras "has not so far strayed from the path of obedience."⁴¹⁶ The Christian had successfully performed the mula'ana (oath of condemnation) and was

forgiven. He had repented and become a loyal follower of the Shah, thus accepting the revealed truth of the authority of the descendants of 'Ali.

B. Analysis and Interpretation - (Part d)

The next *hadith* in the series repeats the concept of brotherhood and is reported by Zayd b. Arqam. The name al-Arqam is associated with the earliest years of Islam. Around 614 A.D. Muhammad is reported to have made the house of al-Arqam the center of his activities at Mecca. Followers gathered there to be instructed in the Qur'an and the other tenets of the new religion, and in later years "Muslims would boast that an ancestor had become a Muslim 'while Muhammad was in the house of al-Arqam'".⁴¹⁷ It is possible to conclude, therefore, that the Prophet's words as reported in the inscription date back to this period. This would provide substantial proof that the proclamation of 'Ali's brotherhood to the Prophet had occurred in the earliest years of the establishment of Islam.

In the *hadith* the Prophet makes a direct reference to the brotherhood of angels and to Paradise. The verse which he recites is contained in virtually all descriptions of Paradise which appear in the Qur'an. It is only the first four words, however, (*Ikhwanan 'ala sururin mutaqabilin*) which are included in these descriptions.⁴¹⁸ The exact order of these words appears in one instance, in verse 47 of *sura XV, al-Hijr*, or the Rocky Tract. The verse completes the idea begun in verse 45 and all three of these verses are quoted below.

45. The righteous (will be)
Amid Gardens
And Fountains
(Of clear-flowing water).
46. (Their greeting will be):
"Enter ye here
In Peace and Security."
47. And we shall remove
From their hearts any
Lurking sense of injury:
(They will be) brothers
(Joyfully) facing each other
On thrones (of dignity).

(XV: 45-47)

These verses expound the meaning of the True Brotherhood which is to be realized only when the hearts and minds of men are purified by God and freed from all suspicions. This description is used to contrast the rewards of Paradise with the punishments of those who will enter one of the seven gates of Hell (XV: 44). The entire sura is devoted to arguing the Truth of the message and the gravity of the sin of rejecting it. In verse 6, the people of Quraysh speak to the Prophet in these words:

They say: "O thou to whom
The message is being revealed!
Truly thou art mad (or possessed)!"

(XV: 6)

In verse 9, God answers these accusations:

We have without doubt
Sent down the Message;
And We will assuredly
Guard it (from corruption).

(XV: 9)

The key word here is corruption. The text of the Qur'an was in danger of misinterpretation by those who did not, or would not, understand the

signs revealed to them in the spirit and sense with which they were intended. This argument ends with verse 25 where a new section begins in which God reminds man of his own creation. In verses 26-44 God orders his angels to prostrate themselves before Man, and all obey except *Iblis* who is then cursed by God. The discourse between *Iblis* and God is worthy of quoting, at least in part, because of its implications with regard to the Shi'i argument.

39. *Iblis* said: "O my Lord!
Because thou has put me
In the wrong, I will
Make (wrong) fair-seeming
To them on the earth
And I will put them
All in the wrong,-
40. "Except thy servants among them,
Sincere and purified
(By thy grace)."
41. (God) said: This (Way
Of My sincere servants) is
Indeed a Way that leads
Straight to Me.
42. For over my servants
No authority shalt thou
Have, except such as
Put themselves in the wrong
And follow thee."
43. And verily, Hell
Is the promised abode
For them all!"

(XV: 39-43)

Shortly thereafter the righteous servants are placed in Paradise on the thrones of dignity, in the same location and position which the Prophet foretold for himself and his friend-brother 'Ali. God, therefore, has explained that certain of his followers are 'cleansed from sin, and that even the abominations of Satan cannot touch them. Others are not

of the same disposition and it is for them that the seven gates of Hell are prepared. They follow the path of deceit and corruption, they neglect God's chosen and refute the Imamate of 'Ali and that of his descendants. 'Ali and his family will be among God's followers who enter Paradise. Like angels, the Imams will be close to God and have knowledge of all matters. They will bring the message of Man, record his deeds and watch over him.⁴¹⁹

The position of 'Ali and the Imams as those nearest to God is repeated by Eskandar Monshi. In his preface to the history of 'Abbas I, Monshi uses the following words:

"...praises of the dignity of the Prophet, and of the virtues and illustrious acts of 'Ali and the immaculate Imams, who adorn the throne of God and guide men on the path of salvation..."⁴²⁰

In a note, Savory (the translator) states that the original words would translate literally into "the throne of choosing (*estefa'*) and approving (*erteda'*)."⁴²¹ To a Shi'i mind these adjectives would refer directly to Muhammad al-Mustafa (the Chosen One) and 'Ali al-Murtada (the Approved One). The thrones of dignity, therefore, are a direct reference to these two men.⁴²²

As the descendants of 'Ali and the Imams the Safawids are, therefore, also 'Approved' by God. They are foremost in Islam and are destined to share the 'thrones of dignity'. Their enemies, whether Sunnis or Christians, must accept Safawid supremacy and pledge loyalty to the shah of Iran. Shi'is are also encouraged to remain firm in their faith, for only the guidance of those nearest to God can lead them to

salvation.

B. Analysis and Interpretation - (Parts e, f)

The next *hadith* in the inscription (part e) refers to the battle of Uhud between Muhammad and the Meccans. In March of 625 A.D., Abu Sufyan (the Meccan leader) marched with an army of 3200 men to destroy Muhammad and avenge the defeat of Badr (624 A.D.). Muhammad met him on the lower slopes of the hill of Uhud with enough men to ward off the challenge. The desertion of the Medinan 'Abd Allah b. 'Ubayy and his men, however, left a deep gap in Muhammad's troops. Thus when the battle began on the morning of 23 March, 625, Muhammad had an army of only 700 men.⁴²³ The Meccans were able to inflict severe losses before they finally retreated, but they failed in their main objective of destroying the threat of Muhammad.

The Muslims had been convinced that since God was on their side, it was impossible for them to be defeated. To justify this partial defeat the verses of *sura III* were revealed and the blame was laid on those of the Medinans who deserted, and other soldiers whose desire for booty was stronger than their faith (*III*: 137-180). Uhud was then to be understood as a lesson to the believers so that their mistakes might not be repeated in subsequent battles. The injury of Muhammad at Uhud also presented the Muslim community with the chance to ponder a new possibility: what would be the fate of the *umma* if its leader were killed in battle? God answered this question in verse 144:

Muhammad is no more
Than an Apostle: many
Were the Apostles that passed away

Before him. If he died
 Or were slain, will ye then
 Turn back on your heels?
 If any did turn back
 On his heels, not the least
 Harm will he do to God;
 But God (on the other hand)
 Will swiftly reward those
 Who (serve him) with gratitude.

(III: 144)

God's orders are for the Muslims to persevere in their war against infidels whether the Prophet is dead or alive. This was a matter of some importance during the battle itself when a cry was raised that the Prophet had been killed.⁴²⁴ The Prophet had merely been wounded and Abu Bakr, Talha and 'Ali are said to have been at his side. In a moment of panic, however, the unity of the Muslim forces was in danger of disintegration. The day was saved and later on the above verse was revealed. When a similar situation arose at the death of the Prophet eight years later, Abu Bakr had recourse to this verse which reminded the *umma* of the human nature of the Prophet.⁴²⁵

The statement 'there is no sword save *dhu'l faqar* and no man but 'Ali' is a repetition of 'Ali's rightful succession and his legitimate claim to the caliphate. *Dhu'l faqar* was the Prophet's magical sword which had notches, *fugra*, and which is mentioned in the *Sira* and several *hadith*. After the Prophet's death, the sword went to 'Ali and became his attribute and the symbol of his followers.⁴²⁶ Raised at the moment when the Prophet was believed dead, the expression supports the succession of 'Ali as the military leader after the Prophet. 'Ali had 'served God with gratitude' (verse III: 144), and his personal

merits and valor are expressed in recent Shi'i words, such as those of al-Tabataba'i, as follows:

The courage of Ali was proverbial. In all the wars in which he participated during the lifetime of the Prophet, and also afterward, he never displayed fear or anxiety. Although in many battles such as those of Uhud, Hunayn, Khaybar and Khandaq the aides to the Prophet and the Muslim army trembled in fear or dispersed and fled, he never turned his back to the enemy.⁴²⁷

The choice of 'Ali as the only perfect successor to the Prophet is reiterated in the last *hadith* (part f). The Prophethood of Muhammad and the Imamhood of 'Ali are reported to have been inscribed on the gate of Paradise thousands of years before the creation of the heavens.⁴²⁸ As a conclusion to the series of epigraphs in the south eyvan these statements affirm the authority of 'Ali and his descendants. They also place the Safawids in a position of power and authority in both spiritual (brotherhood) and political (*dhu'l faqar*) matters.

South Dome Drum Inscription

A. Epigraph

On the drum of the south dome runs a long band of blue *thuluth* script on white tile. The epigraph reads:

Part a.

From *Manaqeb* Ibn al-Maghazili after Ibn 'Abbas, who said, 'I was sitting with a group (of young men) of Bani Hashem at the Prophet's, God's Praise upon him and the people of his Household, when we saw a falling star (*Najm*). So the Messenger of God, God's Praise upon him and the people of his Household, said: "The person over whose house the star drops will be my successor." Some of the Bani Hashem men

went to investigate and found that the star had fallen over the house of 'Ali b. Abi Taleb, upon whom be peace. They said: "O Messenger of God, you were accused of being misled in your love for 'Ali, so God sent down (revealed) 'By the Star when it does down, your Companion is neither astray nor being misled from what was ordained in the highest horizons.'"

Part b.

And in the *Musnad* of Ibn Hanbal, 'Abd al Malek b. 'Attiyah is reported as saying, 'I went to Zayd b. Arqam and said to him: "my (maternal) uncle has referred me to you with respect to a *hadith* about the day of Ghadir Khumm, and I would like to hear it from you." He said: "you people of Iraq are what you are." So I told him, "have no fear from me (I won't do you any harm)." He said, "Yes, we were at Juhfa and the Messenger of God, God's Praise upon him and the people of his Household, came out at noon with the hand of 'Ali, upon whom be Peace, in his, and said 'O people, do you not know that I am closer to the Believers than their own selves?' They replied, 'Yes.' He said: 'He of whom I am the *mawla*, of him 'Ali is also the *mawla*.'"

Part c.

And from the *Manaqeb* of Ibn al-Maghazili after Jaber b. 'Abdallah, he (Jaber b. 'Abdallah) said: 'The Prophet, God's Praise upon him and the people of his Household, took 'Ali, upon whom be Peace, by the upper arm and said, "This is the Prince of the Pure, and the slayer of infidels. Whoever helps him shall be helped (by God) and whoever abandons him shall be abandoned (by God)." Then he raised his voice with the cry: "I am city of knowledge and 'Ali is its gate. Let whoever wants knowledge seek this door.'"

Was honored with writing it 'Abd al-Baqi al-Tabrizi in the year six and thirty and one thousand, thanking the most Exalted God. 429

B. Analysis - (Part a)

The first section of the *hadith* is based on the authority of 'Abdallah b. al-'Abbas who is also cited in the portal inscription. As a Companion of the Prophet Ibn 'Abbas was able to gather much information concerning the latter's life, not only from his own observation but also from his father al-'Abbas (the Prophet's uncle).⁴³⁰ Due to his firsthand observations and his proximity to the Prophet and to 'Ali, who is said to have been his teacher,⁴³¹ Ibn 'Abbas' collections are especially respected among the Shi'a.

The *hadith* includes Ibn 'Abbas himself in the event along with the clan of Bani Hashem to which the Prophet belonged. The incident is an affirmation of the Imamate of 'Ali b. Abi Taleb through a Divine decree, the Star.⁴³² The symbolic meaning of the word *Najm* plays an important role in the Qur'anic *sura* of the same title, *an-Najm*, LIII. In the first few verses the star is seen to submit in humility to the power of God, as it does in the *hadith* where it reveals His will, the imamate of 'Ali. From the *hadith* we learn that the Prophet favored 'Ali, and was probably criticized for his leanings. God thus sent his 'clear sign' to support the Prophet's preference. A 'clear sign', the star, is also a verse which the Hashemites use in addressing the Prophet. Their speech consists of verses 1 and 2 of *sura* LIII:

1. By the Star
When it goes down, -
2. Your Companion is neither
Astray nor being misled,

The *sura* continues:

3. Nor does he say (ought)
Of (his own) Desire.
4. It is no less than
Inspiration sent down to him:
5. He was taught by one
Mighty in Power. (LIII: 1-5)

The *sura* therefore affirms that the choice of 'Ali as successor of the 'Companion' (the Prophet) was made by God who inspired the Prophet with it. The incident acts as revelation to the group of close relatives assembled at the Prophet's house.

This early Meccan *sura* was revealed as a defense against the attacks of the tribe of Quraysh who accused the Prophet of madness.⁴³³ Their disbelief in the Prophethood of Muhammad is likened to the Muslims' disbelief in the Imamate of 'Ali, both of which were ordained by God. The punishments for the second sin are, therefore, identical to those of the first, destruction and misery. The entire *hadith* is a confirmation of 'Ali's position and its legitimacy.

The legitimacy of an Imam can only be proclaimed if he is approved by God and appointed by the Prophet. Once it is established, the Imam becomes the authority in spiritual matters and the guide of the whole community. The inclusion of the verses in the Shi'i *hadith* suggests that they were considered among the *mutashabihat*, verses open to *ta'wil* or interpretation. The knowledge which Muhammad received, be it revelation or Imamate of 'Ali, was communicated during his *mi'raj*. when he ascended to the sky and attained perfect knowledge.⁴³⁴

The basic theme of *sura an-Najm* (LIII) is the authenticity of

Muhammad's message as revelation from God (verses 1-18) and the grave error disbelievers commit by not accepting this message or submitting to the Divine Will of the One True God (verses 18f.). Apart from mentioning the pagan idols of the Quraysh tribe and warning them about the Last Judgement (verses 18-32), the sura discusses the prophets who preceded Muhammad, such as Moses and Abraham (verses 33f.), and the manner in which their teachings were received. Verses 50 to 62, where the sura ends, are of special importance and the most pertinent ones are quoted below:

50. And that it is He
Who destroyed the (powerful)
Ancient 'Ad (people),
51. And the Thamud,
Nor gave them a lease
Of perpetual life.
52. And before them,
The people of Noah,
For that they were (all)
Most unjust
And most insolent transgressors,
53. And He destroyed
The Overthrown Cities
(Of Sodom and Gomorrah),
54. So that (ruins unknown)
have covered them up.
55. Then which of the gifts
Of thy Lord, (O man,)
Wilt thou dispute about?
56. This is a Warner,
Of the (Series of) Warners
Of old!
57. The (Judgement) ever approaching
Draws nigh.

(LIII: 50-57)

This 'sermon', delivered to the Prophet's tribe, the wealthy Quraysh who controlled the Ka'ba, is a powerful reminder of the fate which other peoples and cultures suffered because they shunned the messengers of God. These stories of punishments, common in different combinations throughout the Qur'an, are called *al-mathani*, and there exist seven of them.⁴³⁵ They are considered among the 'signs' recited by the Prophet to his people who criticized them as 'old-world fables' (*asatir al-awwalin*).⁴³⁶ The four *mathani* mentioned in this *sura* refer to 'Ad, Thamud, and the people of Noah, as well as *al-Mu'tafikat*, the subverted cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. To the ancient people of 'Ad God sent Hud, but since they disbelieved their culture and cities were destroyed by a wind which blew for seven days and seven nights.⁴³⁷ To the Thamud people of ancient Arabia Salih brought the message, but their disbelief caused their destruction by an earthquake, a thunderbolt, or a mighty shout.⁴³⁸ As for Noah, the predecessor of Salih and Hud, he and his followers were saved while the rest of his people perished in the Flood.⁴³⁹ The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah paid no heed to the warnings of Lot and were destroyed with 'fire and brimstone'.⁴⁴⁰

To all these ancient civilizations a messenger was sent from among themselves, yet they did not accept his teachings and were quickly punished by God. This is the fate which the Qurayshites are warned about directly, through the verses of *sura* LIII, *an-Najm*. Yet apart from the significance of this *sura* to the composition of the *hadith* (citing the star), it is important to note its pertinence to the situa-

tion of the Imam 'Ali. There are many accounts, both Sunni and Shi'i, of the events immediately following the Prophet's death. These traditions have different leanings according to the sentiments of their compilers, but for the Shi'a they are of major importance in establishing the truth of the Imamate of 'Ali. These are the *hadith* of *Saqifah* which pertain to the election of the Prophet's successor.⁴⁴¹

According to the Shi'i accounts, the Prophet, while on his deathbed, asked for pen and paper in order to dictate his last will and testament. His intention was the appointment of 'Ali as his successor and new leader of the Muslims, but his request was refused on account of his illness. After his death 'A'isha stated that the Prophet had chosen Abu Bakr, 'Umar and 'Ubayda b. al-Jarrah as his successive followers.⁴⁴² 'A'isha's statements are highly questioned by the Shi'is for two reasons: first, she was Abu Bakr's daughter, and second, she is known to have been on bad terms with both 'Ali and his wife Fatima.⁴⁴³ Furthermore, Shi'i sources state that a group of the Companions, including Abu Bakr and 'Umar, met secretly and decided on the *bay'a* (pledge of allegiance) of Abu Bakr without consulting 'Ali or the people of the Prophet's household, so that the latter were presented with a *fait accompli*. 'Ali and a group of his friends including 'Abbas, Salman, Abu Dharr, Miqdad and 'Ammar⁴⁴⁴ (two of whom are mentioned in the epigraphs) protested, but to no avail. These partisans then broke away from the Sunni majority and thus began the political struggle for power.

The second caliph, 'Umar (634-644 A.D.), was appointed by

the first, and the third, 'Uthman (644-656 A.D.) was elected by a six-man council which continued to overlook the rights of the household of the Prophet to the leadership of Islam, proceedings which the Shi'a regarded not only as unfair but as contrary to Divine Will. It was only when 'Uthman was murdered that 'Ali had an opportunity to rise to the caliphate for a short period which was wrought with troubles and struggles against Mu'awiya. 'Ali's murder provided Mu'awiya with his chance, the Umayyad caliphate was established and Syria became the seat of power. ✓

According to Shi'i sources, Divine Law was often distorted by the first three caliphs to suit their own needs. Shi'is also claim that at the same time a ban was placed on the collation and writing of the Prophet's *hadith*, collections of which were burned by Abu Bakr and 'Umar. ✓ This situation continued throughout the Umayyad period and well into the 'Abbasid when many of the *mujtahids* were persecuted and banished.⁴⁴⁵ In this way the truth was suppressed until the time of the fifth and sixth Imams from whom most Shi'i *hadith* is descended⁴⁴⁶ (including those on the Royal Mosque).

C. Interpretation - (Part a)

Shi'is claimed that the Imamate and the Caliphate were two inseparable entities. This philosophy continued until the time of the fourth, fifth, and sixth Imams who, although still clinging to their legal inherited rights, isolated themselves from politics to a certain extent and maintained their positions as interpreters of God's words and his spiritual representatives on earth. Ja'far as-Sadiq (the sixth

Imam) elaborated on the theories of Zayn al-'Abidin (the fourth Imam) and Muhammad al-Baqir (the fifth Imam), and provided the basic principles for later Twelver theologians. His policy states that "it is not necessary for a rightful Imam to combine the temporal power in his person or even claim political authority - the caliphate - if the circumstances did not allow him to do so."⁴⁴⁷

Apparently, Shah 'Abbas felt that circumstances were on his side and although there was no living Imam for whom to claim the caliphate, there was the Imam's representative, the 'Shadow of God on Earth', the Shah of Iran. The three civilizations mentioned in *sura* LIII, *an-Najm* could easily be applied to the three groups which rejected Shi'ism, the first Sunnis, the Umayyads, and the 'Abbasids. The two subverted cities can be seen as Damascus and Baghdad, the two capitals of opposition against 'Alid claims. To these people was sent a new messenger, 'a warner of the series of warners', whose spiritual ancestors also talked of the One God and the Last Judgement. In these cases the primary warner is the Imam 'Ali whose words were not accepted. In the famous *Hadith al-Safinah* (*Hadith of the Ship*) of Ibn 'Abbas, the Prophet states:

My household is like the ship of Noah; whoever embarks upon it will be saved and whoever turns away from it will be drowned.⁴⁴⁸

This makes the Prophet the first warner in the series. Undoubtedly 'Ali was the second and al-Husayn the third, which leaves the fourth and last position open to any of the many contenders who were qualified to fill it. As last in line in this long series and as

a descendant of al-Husayn, Shah 'Abbas assumed the role of warner. He was fighting back Sunni propoganda with some of his own, but as the representative of the Mahdi, he had the power to warn of divine retribution. Sodom and Gomorrah were to be taken and destroyed, through divine will, on the hands of God's appointed representative. At least one of the *mu'tafikat* was to fall into the hands of Shah 'Abbas. In 1624 he entered the strategic city of Baghdad and in 1626, when this inscription was being added to the Royal Mosque, the Ottoman forces, under their leader Hafiz Ahmad Pasha, were forced to retreat from their defensive positions.⁴⁴⁹

Eskandar Monshi, in his account of the events of these years, provides evidence of 'miracles' performed by the 'Prince of Najaf' ('Ali) which further demoralized the Ottoman troops. The chronogram for the whole campaign was "'Ali b. Abi Taleb annihilated the Ottomans",⁴⁵⁰ indicating that 'Abbas' victory was facilitated by 'Ali and hence ordained by God.

In its original context the Star was a sign of Muhammad's Prophethood and proof of the validity of his words. As applied to Shi'ism the Star is a sign of 'Ali's ordained Imamhood and a warning to those who refused to accept his authority. In the Safawid context this sign becomes a divine decree and a political message warning the Ottomans about the failure of their military ventures. The *hadith* also provides textual proof of Shah 'Abbas' success, for it too was a matter ordained by God and in accordance with Divine Will. Although Shah 'Abbas was never able to capture the more powerful *mu'tafika*,

Istanbul, he was able to liberate Baghdad from 'pagan' Sunni hands and assert the power and prestige of Twelver Shi'ism. In 1626 A.D., therefore, the mission of the Star was fulfilled.

B. Analysis - (Parts b, c)

The second portion of *hadith* (part b) is taken from the *Musnad* (collections of *hadith*) of the Sunni jurist Ahmad b. Hanbal (d. 855 A.D.). Ibn Hanbal studied in Baghdad under al-Shafi'i (d. 820 A.D.) founder of the Shafi'i school, but later broke away to found one of the most orthodox schools of Islamic jurisdiction. The Hanbali school is based on the principles of rejecting '*ijma*' (consensus) and reserving *qiyas* (precedence) for rare occasions. Because of his extreme conservatism and his criticism of the governmental practices of the time, Ibn Hanbal was persecuted by the 'Abbasid caliphs who ruled during his lifetime. He was whipped at the order of al-Ma'mun (r. 813-33), and he refused to comply with threats and interrogations by al-Ma'mun. At the latter's death in 833 A.D. he was allowed to return from Tarsus, where he had been sent to be interviewed by the caliph, to Baghdad, but he continued his resistance under al-Mu'tasim (r. 833-42). He was eventually set free and lived in retirement under al-Wathiq (r. 842-47). Today the Hanbali school is limited to Arabia where the Wahhabis are its most notable adherents.⁴⁵¹

The fact that the *hadith* was included in a canonical work by a well-known Sunni jurist supports its authenticity. The reluctance of Zayd b. Arqam in disclosing the *hadith* to 'Abd al-Malek b. 'Attiyah indicates that the latter was also a Sunni. Ibn Arqam's words, 'You

the people of Iraq...', provide definite proof of that, for Iraq was the land of Sunnis, and Shi'as were considered the rebels among Muslims. This, as well as the taboos placed on the collation of *hadith* from earlier times, are sufficient justification for Zayd b. Arqam's fears. On being assured of his safety, he did, however, entrust the *hadith* to his Sunni colleague.

This *hadith* is among the most definitely established and most frequently recounted by both Sunni and Shi'i scholars.⁴⁵² Of the few scholars who pass over it in silence are Ibn Hisham, Tabari, and Ibn Sa'd. The reason for these omissions is, as put by Vaglieri, that these men "evidently feared to attract the hostility of the Sunnis, who were in power, by providing material for the polemic of the Shi'is, who used these words to support their thesis of 'Ali's right to the caliphate."⁴⁵³ Indeed, the '*Hadith* of Ghadir Khumm' is probably the most relevant and strongest argument in support of the Shi'i cause. Thus in the Royal Mosque it not only appears twice (in the east and in the south domes), but is also given a prominent position in the sanctuary (see figs. 20; 23-24). The incident and implications of Ghadir Khumm have been analyzed in detail under the discussion of the east dome. Only a brief description and a few additional points will be presented here.

The event mentioned in the inscription took place on the Prophet's return journey from his last pilgrimage, The Pilgrimage of Farewell. On 16 March 632, Muhammad stopped at a shady oasis, Ghadir Khumm, situated a few miles on the road from Mecca to Medina, which

would be the dispersal point for all the pilgrims.⁴⁵⁴ There he ordered a dais built, and after performing the noon prayers, came out holding 'Ali's hand and proclaimed him the leader of the *umma*. The Prophet uttered the famous words, 'He of whom I am the *mawla*, of him 'Ali is also the *mawla*'. This statement has been recorded by Ibn Hanbal as well as a multiplicity of other Sunni scholars such as Tirmidhi, Nasa'i, Ibn Maja, Abu Da'ud, Jahiz, and others.⁴⁵⁵ Sunnis and Shi'is, therefore, are in agreement about the authenticity of the event or the *hadith*. The disagreement arises in the interpretation of the word *mawla* which, like many an Arabic word, is rich in meanings and connotations. The Sunnis interpret the word as meaning 'friend' or 'confidant', thus translating the whole event into a simple proclamation by the Prophet of his kinship to 'Ali. The Shi'is, on the other hand, understand *mawla* as 'leader', 'master', or 'patron', whereby the Prophet's speech becomes an explicit nomination of 'Ali as his successor.⁴⁵⁶ The political implications attached by the Shi'is to this event made it of extreme value. It is still celebrated every year in the "Feast of Ghadir" which, since the Safawid takeover of Iran, has acquired additional political significance as it marks the transfer of power from 'Ali to the Twelver Shi'i shahs.⁴⁵⁷

In the *hadith* the Prophet poses the question, 'Do you not know that I am closer to the believers than their own selves?' to which the pilgrims respond with a unanimous cry of 'Yes'. Muhammad, however, was not simply posing a question, but reminding his followers of the verse which proclaims:

The Prophet is closer
To the Believers than
Their own selves.

(XXXIII: 6)

Their affirmative reply was, therefore, imperative upon the believers.⁴⁵⁸

The lines quoted above are from *sura XXXIII al-Ahzab*, The Confederates. One of the main themes of this Medinan *sura* is the truth of Muhammad's Prophecy. Although the Qur'anic allusion in the *hadith* is well veiled, it is nevertheless a reminder of certain incidents when the enemies of Islam threatened the body of the Faithful and the institution of the religion as a whole. Similarly, Sunni interpretation threatens the institution of Shi'ism as the True Religion based on the authority of the Prophet and the virtues of his family. As discussed in the portal inscriptions, the people of the Household of the Prophet are endowed with a purity of nature (*ma'sum*) which keeps them away from sin and error. They are thus best suited to lead the community of Muslims. In verse XXXIII: 33 God enforces his own promise to keep this family pure (this is the verse revealed for the Five of the Mantle):

And God only wishes
To remove all abomination
From you, ye Members
Of the Family, and to make
You pure and spotless.

(XXXIII: 33)

The *hadith* on the south dome also carries the readers back to the first verses of *sura al-Ahzab* and reminds them that the Prophet speaks the truth as revealed to him by God, and that despite all efforts at misinterpretation, the verses will continue to spread the truth of

the Imamate. In *sura* XXXIII God addresses the Prophet in this manner:

1. O Prophet! Fear God,
And hearken not
To the Unbelievers
And the Hypocrites:
Verily God is full
Of knowledge and wisdom.
2. But follow that which
Comes to thee by inspiration
From thy Lord, for God
Is well acquainted
With (all) that ye do.

(XXXIII: 1-2)

Outwardly, the Prophet is advised not give in to those Muslims who were hesitant in making battle against the enemies of Islam. As an enigmatic '*mutashabihat*' verse, it attacks those who refused to acknowledge the nomination of 'Ali as declared by the Prophet. These 'hypocrites' are likened to the ones who make false charges against Islam. The verses are also a reminder that the Prophet does not speak of his own accord, for 'it is no less than inspiration sent down to him' from the Lord. Here is a delicate link between this *hadith* and the one directly preceding it. The verses echo those mentioned in the '*Hadith of the Star*' as is evident from verses LIII: 3-5, quoted above. The implications of both *hadith* in the south dome, are, therefore, identical.

As its title suggests, *sura al-Ahzab* also refers to the Battle of the Confederates (the *ahzab* or parties). Two years after the encounter between Muhammad and his Medinan followers with the Meccans at Uhud (March 625 A.D.), Abu Sufyan started gathering his forces for another attack on the Prophet. He induced some of the nomadic tribes who had no real allegiances one way or another, to join

his troops. The Jewish clan of an-Nadir which had been exiled by the Muslims to Khaybar, also supported the Meccan effort. Abu Sufyan was thus able to gather an army of 7,000 to 10,000 infantry and cavalry men to fight against Muhammad's 3,000 men.⁴⁵⁹

As soon as Muhammad heard of the Meccan initiative, he began to fortify his position. At the suggestion of a Persian convert, Salman, a trench was dug on the north side of the oasis, the east, west and south sides being protected by lava flows.⁴⁶⁰ The Meccans and their confederates reached Medina on 31 March 627, but were unable to penetrate the Muslims' fortifications. After about a fortnight of intrigues and exceptionally cold weather accompanied by wind storms, the siege was lifted and the "vast confederacy faded away overnight."⁴⁶¹ Only three Meccans and six Medinans were killed, yet the battle which came to be known as *al-Khandaq*, The Trench, marked a great victory for the forces of Islam. Muhammad faced no more serious opposition from the Meccans and his religious call won him unlimited political power. Religious and political leadership were now consolidated in his hands.

As in other instances the victory was translated as the Will of God. The verses of *sura XXXIII* were revealed to assure the believers of God's help and to admonish those who had supported the Meccans (the Jews and nomads) and those who had hesitated in joining the battle. Verse 25 of *sura al-Ahzab* sums up the results of the Battle of *al-Khandaq*:

. And God turned back,
The Unbelievers for (all)
Their fury: no advantage

Did they gain; and enough
 Is God for the Believers
 In their fight. And God
 Is full of Strength, Able
 To enforce His Will.

(XXXIII: 25)

C. Interpretation - (Parts b, c)

Nor did the Ottoman forces gain any advantages over the Safawids. At the time of the inscription of this *hadith* in the Royal Mosque, the Ottomans were suffering a momentous defeat at the hands of the Shah's *Qizilbash* army. The Ottomans had lost Baghdad, the *mu'tafika*, in 1624, and shortly thereafter the forts at Kirkuk, Mosul and Shahrazur were captured by the Iranians. The Shah was able to visit the great Shi'i shrines at Karbala, Najaf, Kazimayn and Samarra.⁴⁶²

The Ottomans then appointed a new grand vizier and commander-in-chief of the forces along the Iranian frontier; his orders were to recover Baghdad. In November of 1625, Hafiz Ahmad Pasha reached the citadel at Baghdad and blockaded it on three sides, thus beginning a new *Khandaq* battle. Ahmad Pasha was unable to penetrate the fort due to the inner fortifications the Iranians had constructed. By the time Shah 'Abbas arrived to defend the city personally, the Ottomans had been laying siege to the fort for seven months, they had suffered heavy losses and were running out of supplies. Finally, after a direct confrontation between the two armies, Hafiz Ahmad Pasha was forced to withdraw his troops on 4 July 1626.⁴⁶³

In the Ottoman letter which never reached its destination, the writer describes the plight of his people and the situation to which the soldiers had been reduced:

Those conceited heroes who in the coffeehouses have mocked at the *gezelbash* for their cowardice now when they behold the most insignificant of them three miles away on the road, compare them with Rustam the son of Zal; and those brave lads who have come in with the hope of taking booty from the *gezelbash* now abandon their tents and gear and are thankful to save their lives! 464

The 'Prince of Najaf', the Prophet, and God had all come to the aid of the forces of Shah 'Abbas. No unbeliever could stand as an obstacle in the Shah's path, for 'Ali's powers had been transferred into his hands. The *hadith* affirms the legitimacy of the first Imam. The incident, the meeting at Ghadir Khumm, confirms the smooth transition of authority from one Imam to the next, till it came to rest in the person of the representative of the Mahdi. Shah 'Abbas, descendant of the Imam and devout believer in 'Ali, finds added confidence in the Prophet's words, "Whoever helps him ('Ali) shall be helped by God, and whoever abandons him shall be abandoned by God." These words were an additional impetus for the Shah's troops to fight the 'infidels', for they are a direct reminder of the Qur'anic verse:

If God helps you,
None can overcome you:
If He forsakes you,
Who is there, after that,
That can help you?
In God, then,
Let Believers put their trust.

(III: 160)

The Sunnis had chosen to read false meanings into the Prophet's words; They had not acknowledged the political authority invested in 'Ali, and had thus underestimated the power of his followers. They were forsaken

by God and unable to overcome the armies of the Faith. To them was administered a lesson, but they were now given a new opportunity to seek the road to salvation. In this instance the Prophet leaves no doubt as to the direction they should take, for he completes his frequent statement 'I am the city of knowledge and 'Ali is its gate' with the invitation to those who seek knowledge, be it temporal or esoteric, to embrace 'Ali as their foremost authority and their leader. Only then could they hope to reach the 'Abode of God', for 'Ali is "Bab Allah (the gate to God) and the *Sabil* (road) to him, and the *Dalil* (guide) thereto."⁴⁶⁵

The latest clashes between the Ottomans and the Safawids had demonstrated the truth of these words; they had proved that the authority of 'Ali and his followers ruled supreme. The epigraph in the south dome of the Royal Mosque stands, therefore, as an invitation to all Sunnis to repent, and to all Ottomans to surrender.

The Mihrab

A. Epigraph

Above the sanctuary mihrab of the Royal Mosque is the following inscription in *thuluth* script.

It is related about the Prophet, God's Praise upon him and the people of his Household, that he said; 'O 'Ali, if a devotee worshipped God as Noah did among his people, and if he had much gold which he spent in the way of God, and if his life was so extended that he performed the pilgrimage a thousand times on foot, and if he was then killed unjustly half-way between *as-Safa* and *al-Marwa*, and yet did not befriend you O 'Ali, he will not

enter Paradise.

Written by Muhammad Saleh, 1038.⁴⁶⁶

B. Analysis

The inscription outlines the Muslim's main obligations. These are worship and perseverance in faith, charity or *zakat*, the pilgrimage, and (indirectly) martyrdom. Worship is related to Noah, one of the earlier messengers who preached the Unity of God. Noah's message was rejected by his people who were consequently destroyed by the flood. Noah and his family, however, were saved. In *Hadith al-Safinah* the Prophet likens his own family to Noah's ship, the believers' vehicle to salvation.⁴⁶⁷

The duties outlined in the *hadith* are also mentioned in the Qur'an:

Those who show patience,
Firmness and self-control;
Who are true (in word and deed);
Who worship devoutly;
Who spend (in the Way of God);
And who pray for forgiveness
In the early hours of the morning.

(III: 17)

Spending in the 'Way of God', *zakat*, insures the purification of the believer's soul and shows his love for his Muslim brothers. This is the third of the five pillars of Islam, the first two being *shahada* and prayer which are here implied by the mention of Noah. The fourth pillar, the fast, is not mentioned but some emphasis is laid on the last, pilgrimage.

The pilgrimage to Mecca was a pre-Islamic institution which was taken over by the Muslims. As already mentioned, non-Muslims were

forbidden from approaching the Ka'ba or even Mecca, after its conquest in 630 A.D. With the Muslim takeover of this ancient sanctuary, several other holy sites were also incorporated in the Islamic repertoire. At first, the purpose of this amalgamation was to allay the Meccan fears that decreased importance of these areas would bring about a corresponding decrease in income.⁴⁶⁸

Thus the older practices were condoned in an effort to absorb some of the Meccans into the Islamic *umma*. Changes, however, were necessary. The Ka'ba's significance for instance, was changed from the house of the main pagan deity *Allah*, 'the god', to the house of God, Allah.⁴⁶⁹ Similarly, the two little hills near the well of Zamzam, Safa and Marwa, now absorbed in Mecca, enjoyed a renewal of religious significance at the hands of the Prophet. There the Meccans had placed male and female idols which Muhammad was forced to condemn. The hills and the spring retained their sanctity, however, through the tradition of Hajar, mother of Isma'il the oldest son of Abraham who, according to Islam, was the founder of the Ka'ba.⁴⁷⁰ Hajar and her son were wandering in the desert and praying for water when they happened to come upon the spring.⁴⁷¹ The site was taken as one of God's symbols which are worthy of veneration. Verse 158 of sura II states that circumambulation of Safa and Marwa during the *hajj* or the *umra* (Lesser Pilgrimage) is acceptable to God.

Behold! Safa and Marwa
Are among the Symbols
of God. So if those who visit
The House in the Season
Or at other times,
Should compass them round,

It is no sin in them,
 And if any one obeyeth his own
 Impulse to Good, -
 Be sure that God
 Is He Who recogniseth
 And knoweth.

(II: 158)

In the inscribed *hadith* the discussion centers around a Muslim who lives long enough to perform the *hajj* a thousand times and is oppressed and finally killed unjustly between the two hills. The implications are that this person is killed for no legitimate reason while performing sacred rites in a sacred precinct. His murderers disobey God by transgressing the verse which states that Mecca is a city of security (XCIV: 3) and thus forbids fighting and killing of any sort within its boundaries. Further, they kill a Muslim in the act of worship and he thus becomes a martyr in the Way of God. If he is killed after resistance and attempts at transmitting the message of Unity to these enemies, then he is also a *mujahid*, a holy warrior.

Such a person is certainly among the most righteous of Muslims. Yet if he does not perform the additional sixth pillar, the befriending of 'Ali (or becoming a Shi'i) then all his virtue and efforts have been wasted. Such a call to Shi'ism was undeniable and unequivocal, and it was undoubtedly wide-spread in Safawid Iran.

C: Interpretation

Probably due to an error in calculation and design, the final climax of the whole series of requirements and the end result of rejecting 'Ali is placed sideways at the end of the epigraph. The words 'will not enter Paradise' (literally: will not even get a whiff

of Paradise) are written in smaller characters in the same vertical space as the name of the calligrapher and the date of inscription. Since the planners, and especially the chief overseer, Muhibb 'Ali, did not consider the error grave enough to be rectified, it must be concluded that the worshippers could be relied upon to complete the statement themselves. A devout Shi'i would either know the text or be able to deduce automatically that the fate of anyone who did not follow 'Ali is Hell and not Paradise. The portal inscription has already forbidden any non-Shi'is from entering the Royal Mosque, the Second Ka'ba, on the grounds of paganism, so the possibilities of misreading or confusion must be considered extremely slight.

Placing the name of 'Ali above the mihrab is a normal Shi'i action. As a Shi'i prays toward the niche which denotes the Ka'ba and Mecca, he also prays toward 'Ali and, by the use of the *muh*r (clay tablet) toward Karbala. The imposition of 'Ali's name upon the direction of prayer serves as an indication of 'Ali's significance. He is the path toward God, the 'True *Qiblah*' of the faith, and the focal point of the mosque which was itself to be considered a Ka'ba.⁴⁷²

Whether this epigraph was put up before or after Shah 'Abbas' death is of no consequence, for it applies to his deeds and actions (and, theoretically, to those of all the Safawids), his virtues, and his final awaited or expected reward. Eskandar Monshi devotes numerous pages to the description of Shah 'Abbas' sincerity of faith, his charity and his pilgrimages.

Shah 'Abbas made several pilgrimages to such Shi'i holy sites

as the shrine of Shaykh Safi at Ardabil and that of the eighth Imam 'Ali al-Rida at Mashhad (among others). There he usually kept vigil all night and performed menial tasks such as sweeping and snuffing out candles.⁴⁷³

Perhaps 'Abbas' most celebrated pilgrimage is the one he undertook to Mashhad in 1009/1601-02. He had vowed to complete the journey from Isfahan to Mashhad on foot, and did so in twenty-eight days. In describing the event, Eskandar Monshi states that "since the advent of Islam, no prince has achieved such a feat - a feat that would be difficult for anybody to accomplish".⁴⁷⁴ Monshi also compares the march of Shah 'Abbas to that of the Byzantine emperor Heraclius. In 628 A.D., Heraclius undertook a pilgrimage from Constantinople to Jerusalem, but as Monshi explains, this pilgrimage was more in the nature of a "pleasure trip", so that he ends up by exclaiming "What a difference between the two!"⁴⁷⁵

Shah 'Abbas also instituted many *waqfs* or religious endowments on behalf of the Fourteen Immaculate Ones: Muhammad, Fatima, and the Twelve Imams. In each case, the Shah transferred the *thawab* (or spiritual reward) to one or more members of his family, for instance the descendants of Shaykh Lutfallah, Shah 'Abbas' father Muhammad Khodabanda or his mother Mahdi 'Ulya, or as in the case of the Royal Mosque, to Shah Tahmasp. The *waqf* grants of the Royal Mosque were in the form of agricultural and commercial property in and around Isfahan.⁴⁷⁶

Shah 'Abbas made use of the *waqfs* as a propaganda tool in

much the same way as he did epigraphy and architecture, so that under the guise of piety he emphasized his commitment to the *Safawiyya* order and its saints and Imams. Robert McChesney explains:

Re-affirmation of these commitments took a number of forms - the use of the propaganda tools available (court chronicles, poetry, official declarations) and the performance of symbolic acts. Shah 'Abbas in particular, became a master of the symbolic, exploiting to the full the numerous opportunities presented to him in order to strengthen public acceptance of and support for the legitimacy of his rule. His public actions, of which his *waqfs* are a significant element, should be understood within the general framework of the requirements imposed by three centuries of Safawi history and a century of Safawi rule. They should also be considered within the more specific context of recent political circumstances which threatened to undermine the pillars of Safawid legitimacy.⁴⁷⁷

These policies are a further factor in the determination and assessment of the significance of the *Masjid-i Shah*. Not only its interior and exterior inscriptions, or its purpose, but also its *waqf* was a tool of propaganda in the hands of a gifted politician.

Eskandar Monshi describes other acts of charity performed by Shah 'Abbas. In 1015-16/1606-08 the Shah constituted all his personal property into a trust (of which he retained control). He donated his Arabic scientific works (books on jurisprudence, traditions, et cetera) and Qur'ans to the shrine at Mashhad. Persian books (histories and poetic works), as well as a collection of Chinese porcelain, jewels, pure-bred horses, et cetera, were bequeathed to the shrine Safi al-Din at Ardabil.⁴⁷⁸

Commenting on this act, Eskandar Monshi wrote, "My learned readers will admit that the generosity of this benefaction is beyond the comprehension of human beings."⁴⁷⁹ Shah 'Abbas himself was never considered a mere human being, for he was the ninth lineal descendant of Shaykh Safi and had "traversed the stages of asceticism and self-denial" to become spiritually pure and to be the mediator for his people on the day of resurrection.⁴⁸⁰ Some of Shah 'Abbas' miracles are also described by Eskandar Monshi. On more than one occasion the Shah's life was saved through divine intercession.⁴⁸¹ On another occasion, during a hunting trip, a group of 3,000 gazelle took refuge near the Shah "circling around him several times like pilgrims circumambulating the Ka'ba."⁴⁸²

Shah 'Abbas, therefore, conformed to the specifications of a true believer. Further, he devoted most of his time to *jihad*, holy war against the infidel Sunnis. The message of the mihrab is, therefore, a reminder of the power of 'Ali and his descendants. As an architectural form, the mihrab was first developed to commemorate the presence of the Prophet in a mosque.⁴⁸³ The addition of 'Ali is thus a symbolic unification of the two components of Islamic leadership, religious and political. In Isfahan these qualities were manifested in Shah 'Abbas, the upholder of the Faith.

The entire south section of the Royal Mosque is devoted to the cause of Twelver Shi'ism. The eyvan and dome inscriptions make use of the most widely used *hadith* to argue the exalted position of the Imam. In the most sacred area of the mosque, the south mihrab, these

arguments are condensed into a sixth pillar of Islam. Performance of only five of these pillars, which is common Sunni practice, results in incomplete faith. Only the veneration of 'Ali and submission to his descendant and representative can guide a Muslim to the True Path.

Sanctuary Minars and Exterior of South Dome

The inscriptions of the sanctuary minars and the exterior of the south dome, because they are closely related, will be discussed together in the same section. A number of scattered epigraphs, both on the minars and dome, will precede the major inscription which runs in a circular band around the dome. Most of the minar epigraphs are identical to those on the portal minars and thus will be studied very briefly.

The sanctuary minars echo the function and shape of the portal minars. Being closer to the great dome, their symbolism is intensified. The great domes of Islamic architecture are seen as all-pervading spirits which encompass all being. Their circular shape reiterates the process of creation and the powerful energy behind it. Thus, the attribute of God, the Eternal is seen through the architectural form of a dome which has no beginning and no end. God the Eternal is also God the One, and this attribute is expressed by the minars themselves. The minars resemble the first letter of the Arabic alphabet which is also the first letter of the word Allah, *alef*. They are tall verticals which stand as counterparts to the number one. Their shapes repeat the *shahada* 'There is no god but God', and enhance it with the addition 'The First, the One, the Only'. Together the

great dome and its flanking minars are seen as a complete statement on the nature of God in Islam.⁴⁸⁴ That this interpretation is relevant to the Royal Mosque is indicated by the epigraphs which cover the minars and dome.

On the upper part of each of the sanctuary minars (figs. 27; 29) is the following inscription in *thuluth* script.⁴⁸⁵

A. Epigraph

God and His Angels
Send blessings on the Prophet
O, ye who believe!
Send ye blessings on him
And
Say: "Praise be to God,
Who begets no son,
And has no partner
In (His) dominion
Nor needs He any
To protect Him from humiliation:
Yea, magnify Him
For His greatness and glory!"

B. Analysis and Interpretation

These verses define God as the absolute self-sufficient and unified entity. The first verse (XXXIII: 56) identifies the transmitter of this knowledge to mankind, the Prophet Muhammad, who is thus worthy of the praise of God, angels and all men. The overriding emphasis of the second verse (XVII: 111) is the Unity of God. The verse attacks all polytheists who ascribe partners to God and emphasizes His all-powerful nature and His Unity.⁴⁸⁶ Thus, in shape, symbolism and epigraphy, the minars make the attestations of unity and identify the mosque as an Islamic structure:

Grabar interprets the minaret as "a symbolic expression of the presence of Islam in the city."⁴⁸⁷ The minars of the Royal Mosque

perform an additional function. The mosque itself is the major architectural achievement of a Twelver Shi'i who claimed noble spiritual lineage. The entire body of epigraphs in the mosque uphold the Shah's faith. Likewise, the inscriptions of the sanctuary minars are directed primarily at fellow Muslims of a different sect. While the portal minars simply proclaim the general nature of the mosque to outsiders, the minars closer to the dome define the subtle distinctions within Islam itself. Thus, the name 'Ali' is incorporated within the overall decorative design of the sanctuary minars.. In a checkerboard pattern of small mosaic tiles the two words 'Muhammad' and 'Ali' are inscribed on the minars.⁴⁸⁸ The difference in the form of the *kufic* words is so slight that they cannot be easily distinguished from one another (fig. 29) The constant repetition of the names is in line with the function and purpose of the minarets. The repetition of the formula *La ilaha illa Allah* is performed by the architectural form, the symbolism and the inscriptions. To this basic attestation of faith is usually added 'Muhammad is the messenger of God', and in this case a particularly Shi'i attestation which was first instituted by Shah Isma'il, 'Ali is the *wali* of God'. Though the complete profession is not physically portrayed, it is implied by the single word 'Ali' in the repetitive pattern.

The same convictions are repeated on the exterior of the great dome where the following phrases are inscribed:

A. Epigraph

subhan allah (Exalted is God)
alhamdu lillah (Praises be to God)

La ilaha illa allah (There is no god but God)
allahu Akbar (God is Great)
al hukmu lillah (The Dominion is for God)

A long *thuluth* band encompassing the drum enhances these messages while providing additional information about the Day of Judgement. This is the proclamation of *sura Dahr* LXXVI which is here inscribed in its entirety.⁴⁸⁹ The meaning of the title and the implications of the *sura* have already been discussed, and it has been quoted above in full.⁴⁹⁰ The same *sura* appears in the north eyvan of the Royal Mosque directly facing the great dome. Thus worshippers are received by the words of *sura Dahr* as they enter the mosque and faced with them again as they leave it.

B. Analysis and Interpretation

The main theme of the *sura*, the power of God as creator (LXXVI: 1-3) and the everlasting life awarded to true Muslims (LXXVI: 5-22), thus accompanies the believer on his way to prayer and again on his way back to the business of life. Particularly apt for the position of the *sura* are the verses LXXVI: 7; 23-26. They provide basic instructions on the mode of behaviour expected of true Muslims: performing their vows, being kind to the poor and fearing only God. Verse LXXVI: 25 invokes the believers to 'celebrate the name of God morning and evening', and this recitative celebration is performed by the phrases inscribed on the dome where praises and laudations are repeated in an endless ongoing cycle.

The *sura* ends with an admonition and a brief description of the fate of disbelievers. The minarets have identified disbelievers as

non-Muslims and non-Shi'is. Their fate, described on the dome, exhorts those within the Royal Mosque to be constant in their faith and their support of the Twelve Imams and their descendants. In this intricately woven message, the image of Paradise (which occupies more than half the length of *sura Dahr*) is extended as a temptation to all men, as a promised reward for true faith and piety, and for obedience to the Shah.

A final epigraph, also inscribed on the exterior of the dome, combines historical and religious information while repeating the essential message of the mosque (figs. 25-28).

A. Epigraph

In the name of God the Merciful,
 the Compassionate.
 Praise be to God, the One and Only,
 The Everlasting Eternal King, the
 Infinite Eternity, He who raised the
 dome of the sky and thus built a
 lofty roof without pillars, and He
 decorated the eyvan of the celestial
 sphere and illuminated it with a
 shining sun and a luminous moon
 and innumerable stars / in the best
 of numbers* / He created the world
 and put in it a number of philosophies
 and affairs that cannot be counted
 or calculated. He established a
 structure on firm and solid foundations
 and brought into existence a marvelous
 unprecedented building that
 can neither be shaken nor destroyed.
 And Blessings and Peace upon our
 Prophet and our *seyyed*
 (lord), the most glorious of messengers
 and the illustrious, truthful, faithful
 Prophet, the mercy of mankind, the
 seal of prophets and messengers
 Abi'l Qasim Muhammad, God's
 Blessings and Peace upon him
 and the people of his Household

and his Companions who spent
 their lives in the way of God
 and who loyally pledged
 allegiance to the Prophet,
 putting their hands in his;
 especially his cousin and son-in-law,
 his *wasi* (viceregent) and his *khalifa*
 (successor caliph), his brother
 and his appointed entrusted minister,
 the Imam of the world and the
 guide of truth, the word of
 piety and God's greatest
 argument and proof, our *mawla*
 (leader) and guide 'Ali b. Abi
 Taleb upon whom be Peace and
 Eternal Everlasting Blessings.

And further

(The man who) was honored with
 the building of this sacred site,
 this lofty shelter, this noble dome
 which rises to the glorious
 suspended heaven for the *al-masjid*
al-jami' (cathedral mosque)
 which is founded on holiness
 and piety, he is the one
 designated by the words of
 the Exalted (God), "the
 mosques of God shall be visited
 and maintained by such as
 believe in God and the Last
 Day and establish regular prayer".
 The king of kings, the enslaver
 of the valiant heroes of the
 nations, the greatest Shahenshah,
 he who is supported and made
 victorious by God, he who is
 singled out and allotted the
 protection of the Lord of the World,
 the shadow of God on earth, the
 sultan son of the sultan son of the
 sultan, ABU'L MUZAFFAR SHAH
 'ABBAS AL-MUSAWI AL-HUSAYNI
 AL-SAFAWI BAHADUR KHAN.

May God make his reign eternal,
 and his army victorious, may
 He perpetuate his kingdom,
 protect his person and health,
 increase his sagacity and wisdom,
 and eternalize the duration of
 his vanquishing state, and may

He defeat his enemies by
 virtue of his ('Abbas') rights,
 may He make him content and
 lengthen his life and prosperity.
 May He be Benevolent to and
 bestow His Grace and
 Blessings upon the triumphant
shi'a (sect) *al Ithna 'Ashariyya*
 (the Duodeciman), may He
 make it victorious even over the
 strongest oppressors,
 and may He slay those of the
 beloved among Bani Umayya
 and all those who
 succeeded them in their depravity,
 and may He make their abode
 the Abode of Hell and their
 destiny the most wretched of
 destinies.

O God, support him ('Abbas) and
 grant him victory, (I entreat
 you) by Muhammad and his
 pure and holy Family.

In the year seven and thirty and
 one thousand.⁴⁹¹

* Since there are no punctuation marks in the original text, the phrase 'in the best of numbers' may belong either to the sentence preceding it or the one after it.

B. Analysis and Interpretation

In one long paragraph this inscription praises God and His Creations, it sings the praises of the Prophet and Islam, and presents 'Ali b. Abi Taleb as the 'greatest argument and proof' of the faith. The importance of the *Masjid-i Shah* is established, and the virtues of its builder enumerated. This text identifies true Muslims as the adherents of Twelve Imam Shi'ism and contrasts them with unbelievers and heretics; the Umayyads and those who loved, followed and succeeded them. Finally, it entreats God to bestow his benevolence upon Shah 'Abbas, grant him victory and eternalize his kingdom. This epigraph,

therefore, stands as the final statement and argument of the *Masjid-i Shah*.

The first part of the inscription is devoted to the description of God's glory and power. Its style is close to Qur'anic prose, and it may have been modelled on the opening verses of *sura XIII, Ra'd* or Thunder. Verses 2-4 of this *sura* enumerate the wonders of creation and the Divine Signs inherent in it. Two verses are quoted below.

2. God is He Who raised
The heavens without any pillars
That ye can see; is firmly
Established on the Throne (of Authority)
He has subjected the sun
And the moon (to His law) !
Each one runs (its course)
For a term appointed.
He doth regulate all affairs,
Explaining the Signs in detail,
That ye may believe with certainty
In the meeting with your Lord.
3. And it is He Who spread out
The earth, and set thereon
Mountains standing firm,
And (flowing) rivers: and fruit
Of every kind He made
In pairs, two and two:
He draweth the Night as a veil
O'er the Day. Behold, verily
In these things there are Signs
For those who consider!

(XII: 2-3)

The beauty and perfection of the 'celestial sphere' is a most suitable inscription for the exterior of the great dome of the Royal Mosque. The interior of the dome is decorated in a manner resembling heaven, with a great *shamsa* and innumerable 'shining stars' (figs. 23-24). It is, therefore, the visual counterpart of the 'dome of the sky', the 'lofty roof raised without pillars' (epigraph) and

the 'Throne of Authority' (XIII: 2). God Himself rests upon the Divine Throne, and His Timelessness is manifested in the ever-revolving sphere.

The 'lofty roof raised without pillars' also recalls Eskandar Monshi's Qur'anic quotation in reference to Isfahan: "Eram with lofty pillars the like of which were not produced in the land" (LXXXIX: 7-8).⁴⁹² This earthly miracle is also the subject of the boast "*Isfahan nisf-i Jahan*", 'Isfahan is half the world', the other half being Paradise.⁴⁹³ Thus, the great dome of the greatest mosque of Isfahan provides a second celestial seat for 'the Lord of the World'. Like the eternal structure built by God, this mosque is based on firm and sound foundations, the foundations of true faith which can 'neither be shaken nor destroyed'.

The great dome and the faith it represents rest on four symbolic pillars. The first is the Unity of God which is manifested at the apex of the dome⁴⁹⁴ and at the heart of Islam. The second pillar is Muhammad 'the seal of prophets' and the founder of Islam. Of the Companions who devoted and gave their lives for the faith, one stands out as the third pillar of the 'earthly paradise'. He is the one appointed as viceregent and caliph, the 'Word of Truth' and 'God's greatest argument and proof'; the *mawla* of all true Muslims, their guide from the paradise on earth to the Eternal Paradise, 'Ali b. Abi Taleb. Upon these three pillars is raised the structure built by God and one of his 'philosophies and affairs', Shi'ism.

Shi'ism in its 'purest' form, the *Ithna 'Ashari* faith, is housed in a mosque built by one whose virtue and piety establish him as the fourth pillar of the structure which 'rises to the glorious suspended heaven'. Shah 'Abbas' achievement is of such import and splendor that verse IX: 18 (which is part of the inscription) seems to have been revealed specifically for him. The verse proclaims:

The mosques of God
 Shall be visited and maintained
 By such as believe in God
 And the Last Day, establish
 Regular prayers (and practice
 Regular charity, and fear
 None at all except God.
 It is they who are expected
 To be on true guidance.⁴⁹⁵

(IX: 18)

The *Masjid-i Shah*, therefore, is the mosque of God, the one true Mosque of Piety,⁴⁹⁶ which is built and frequented only by those 'on true guidance'. No other mosques can be acceptable to God, for they are founded on false foundations and can easily be destroyed. These are the mosques built by Bani Umayya and all the treacherous rulers who followed them. They are weak in faith and plunged deep into disbelief, thus the structures (mosques and beliefs) founded by them cannot be presided upon by God, for He condemns them as 'mosques' of impiety built to sway believers off the path of guidance.

This is the only inscription in the Royal Mosque in which the enemies of the Twelver Shi'is are mentioned by name. Since the Shi'is hold the first three caliphs in slightly higher esteem than the Umayyads, they have been excluded from the inscription. The Umayyads and all their successors are allotted the most evil of destinies and

the eternal abode of hell. The disbelievers are to be defeated twice. On earth, the greatest *Shahenshah*, 'the shadow of God on Earth', will lead his followers and his army to a great victory over the forces of evil. In the afterlife, God will further the revenge over the oppressors by depriving them of His compassion and by alienating them from His presence. This is a fitting punishment for those who do not consider God's signs, who ignore His wondrous creation and disbelief in the Last Day and in the Imamate of 'Ali. They are mentioned in the same *sura* in which God speaks of the creation of heaven and earth:

If thou dost marvel
 (At their want of faith),
 Strange is their saying:
 "When we are (actually) dust,
 Shall we indeed then be
 In a creation renewed?" They are
 Those who deny their Lord! They
 Are those round whose necks
 Will be yokes (of servitude):
 They will be Companions
 Of the Fire, to dwell therein
 (For aye)!

(XIII: 5)

Denying God's signs, His revealed message in which Muhammad and 'Ali are the manifestations of the Eternal Light, is to deny God Himself. This denial and the temporal power which was sought after so fervently by the disbelievers, can only last a short period of time. Life in the Hereafter, however, is everlasting, and the disbelievers will have an eternity in which to regret their sins and suffer for their wrong-doings.

This final epigraph which is placed on the Great Dome of the Royal Mosque, sums up the entire message, purpose and meaning of the

structure. This inscription requires no interpretation, for it states the case of the Twelver Shi'i Safawids openly and without enigmatic allusions. Because of its clarity it stands as a testing ground for the conclusions of the various inscriptions throughout the mosque. Scattered though they are, they form a unified coherent body of political messages aimed at strengthening the thrust of Shah 'Abbas' campaigns, and destroying the propaganda of the opposing Ottoman regime. This is Shah 'Abbas' personal admonishment and sign, the revealed truth, "But most men believe not" (XIII: 1).

CHAPTER TWO

FOOTNOTES

¹ It is difficult to ascertain the original number of epigraphs since some have not survived. Of the Arabic inscriptions studied in this thesis, many are extremely short and, although placed in different locations, work in conjunction with related inscriptions. Thus their number differs according to the manner in which they are perceived. Within this study there are approximately twenty-five major subdivisions.

² Several inscriptions date to the reign of Shah 'Abbas' successor, Shah Safi I (1629-1642) while others were added by the Qajar rulers who conquered Iran in 1779 A.D. See Hunarfar, pp. 443-44; 453; 458-460.

³ Hunarfar, pp. 433; 435-36; 443-46; 454; 458-60; 464. The last inscription pertains to the restoration work under Muhammad Riḍā Shah Pahlawī dated 1328 (solar), 1950 A.D.

⁴ The Persian inscriptions await such a time when they can be properly translated from seventeenth century Persian into English.

⁵ Shah 'Abbas died on 24 Jomada I, 1038/19 January 1629, Monshi, vol. II, p. 1301. The inscriptions dated 1038/1629 have been included in this study along with two dated 1039 and 1040. An exception was made in the last two cases because the content and the locations of these inscriptions are closely associated with earlier ones.

⁶ The original Arabic inscriptions with accompanying French translations appear in *Athar-e Iran*, vol. VII, number 4, 1937, pp. 107-116. Hereafter, *Athar-e Iran*. Portions of these inscriptions, in English, are in D.N. Wilber, *Persian Gardens and Garden Pavilions*, Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D. C. 1979, p. 41. Hereafter, Wilber; and the same in Pope, *Survey*, vol. IV, p. 1793.

⁷ The term 'iconic' does not denote the use of images or icons, which would be sacriligious in a mosque. Rather it is used to describe the function of the epigraphy which is similar to that of icons in a Byzantine church. These epigraphs have never been translated or analysed.

⁸ The poems are mostly in Persian. One Arabic couplet appears among the portal inscriptions, Hunarfar, p. 430.

⁹ These words are used by Nasr in *Anthology*, p. 7. Quoted in the introduction.

The Portal Minars

¹⁰ Pope, *Survey*, vol. III, p. 1185.

¹¹ The inscriptions are specified in Hunarfar, p. 433.

¹² The verse appears in its complete form on the sanctuary minars, Hunarfar, pp. 460-62. Since the Shi'is adhere to the concept of Unity as strongly as the Sunnis, the omission must be perceived as an innocent mistake. It is possible, however, to attempt to interpret the mistake as a conscious error directed at the establishment of the Safawid shahs as the 'partners of God' or executors of his will. Khata'i (Shah Isma'il I) composed mystic poetry in which he claimed to be 'Absolute Truth';

The mystery of Ana'l Haqq is
hidden in this my heart. I am
the Absolute Truth (or "God")
and what I say is Truth.
I belong to the religion of the
"Adherents of the Vali (i.e. 'Ali)"
and on the Shah's path I am
a guide to every one who
says: "I am a Muslim".

(From Minorsky, p. 1047a). Claiming divinity in esoteric faiths, however, is not uncommon practice and this theory must be discarded. Another possibility is the consideration of 'Ali as the partner of God (see quotations in the Introduction). The veneration of 'Ali is typical of Shah Isma'il and all the Safawid shahs, but as his name does not appear anywhere on the portal minars, it is unlikely that the omission implies that he is the partner of God. Considering the general theme of all the epigraphs on the minars, the idea of 'partnership' must be discarded altogether.

¹³ The inscriptions on the third register are repeated several times.

¹⁴ Bell and Watt, *Introduction to the Qur'an*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1970, p. 149. Hereafter, Bell and Watt.

¹⁵ Bernard Lewis, *The Arabs in History*, Harper and Row, Publishers, New York, 1967, p. 30. Hereafter, Lewis. Evidence of this group is provided by the Qur'an where several verses speak of the pagans who ascribed 'daughters' to God, and who forsook their idols in times of hardships only to revert to their polytheistic ways in times of ease. See VI: 136-137; XXIII: 84-6/89-91; XXIX 61-5; XXX:33; XXXVIII: 9; XXXIX: 8-11; XLIII: 8-15.

¹⁶ Grabar, "Dome of the Rock", p. 53. Only the order of the quotations has been altered. In the Dome of the Rock the inscriptions begin with CXII followed by XXXIII: 56 and XVII: 111.

¹⁷ Grabar, *Formation*, p. 120. In the Royal Mosque the goldasteh is above the west eyvan.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ The *shahada* itself is composed of several vertical strokes formed by the *alefs* and the *lams*. For the symbolic interpretations of minarets see Ardalan and Bakhtiar, *The Sense of Unity*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1973, pp. 73-74. Hereafter, *Sense of Unity*. The word *manar* literally means 'a place of light' and thus associates the Islamic minaret with one of the ancient structures from which it may have been derived: the fire towers of Zoroastrianism.

²⁰ The importance of the word is emphasized in the Qur'an especially in LXVIII: 1 which begins "By the Pen...". The concept of the createdness of the Qur'an is one of the main beliefs of Shi'ism which claims that the Qur'an "is the word of God, His revelation sent down by Him, His speech and His Book...", Shaykh as-Saduq (Shaykh ibn Babawayh al-Qummi - died 381/991-2), quoted in Jafri, pp. 311-12. The Mu'tazila division of Sunnism contributes to this belief, but Sunnism in general believes that the Qur'an is eternal and uncreated.

The Portal

²¹ The complete Arabic original is in Hunarfar, p. 429, with French translation in *Athar-e Iran*, pp. 107-109; English portions in Wilber, p. 41; Pope, *Survey*, vol. IV, p. 1793. The above translations agree on "the most honored because of his personal valor (or worth)" instead of "the most honorable in descent" for *akramahum hasaban*. I have chosen to render it differently for two reasons: 1) noble descent implies personal worth, and 2) the Arabic term can have either of the two meanings or both at once, a fact of which the 'composer' of the formula was probably aware, and which repeats the Safawid claims to noble lineage.

²² Hunarfar, pp. 429-30; *Athar-e Iran*, pp. 109-111 (with omissions in Arabic text). Due to the absence of punctuation marks, the text is problematic towards the end. *Athar-e Iran* mentions Muhibb 'Ali and 'Ali Akbar and adds, 'may God honor them greatly', but Beg Lala appears a second time at the end of the text reproduced in Hunarfar.

²³ The formulae are not unique to Iran or even to the time of Shah 'Abbas. An Ottoman letter written by Sultan Selim I to his opponent Shah Isma'il, demonstrates that the terminology is standard and was in common use. The Sultan likens himself to the Persian heroes Kay Khusraw and Dara while identifying the Shah with the Turkish Afrasiyab. The letter is quoted in Browne, vol. IV., pp. 13-14.

But to proceed, This excellent address hath been issued on our part, we who are the Refuge of the Caliphate, the slayer of the infidels and polytheists, the extirpator of the Foes of the Faith, the humbler of the Pharaohs' pride (literally, 'he who rubs in the dust the noses of the Pharaohs' - alluding to Sultan Salim's conquest of Egypt and overthrow of the Mamluks; p. 14, n. 1), the tarnisher of the khaqan's crowns, the King of those who fight and strive for Religion, whose court is as that of Firidun, whose justice and equity is as that of Kay-Khusraw, that Dara of noble descent, Sultan Salim Shah, son of Sultan Bayazid, son of Sultan Muhammad Khan, to thee, who art ruler of the Persians, the Dahhak of the time, the Darab of combat, the Afrisiyab of the age, the famous Amir Isma'il.

²⁴ Wiet, "The Arabic Inscriptions of Persia", Pope, *Survey*, p. 1793.

²⁵ al-Tabataba'i, p. 137. In Shi'ism the veneration of holy sites takes on a literal aspect. Mud from the area of Karbala (site of the third Imam's martyrdom) is still fashioned into tablets, called *muhr*, on which the Shi'is place their foreheads when prostrating themselves in prayer. *Sense of Unity*, p. 141.

²⁶ The identities of the kings who are 'humbled at his door' are alluded to by the use of the titles sultan and khaqan. Sultan was used by the Ottomans, and khaqan is of Mongol origin (though a later variation, khan, was used by the Iranians, as in Bahadur khan). The relation between khaqan and khan is mentioned by Browne, vol. IV, p. 14, n. 2.

²⁷ al-Tabataba'i, p. 137.

²⁸ The authenticity of the Safawids' origins is discussed in Savory, pp. 1-27. The genealogical table in Monshi, vol. I, p. 13, is based on older sources such as *Safwat al-Safa* of Ibn Bazzaz written c. 1349-50, and appears in later ones such as *Silsilat al-Nasab-i Safawiyya* by Shaykh Husayn b. 'Abdal Zahidi, written between 1667-1694. These sources are listed in Savory, *The Development of the Early Safavi State under Isma'il and Tahmasp, as studied in the 16th Century Sources*, Ph.D. thesis, 1958, Oxford, pp. v-ix.

²⁹ McChesney, p. 176.

³⁰ Savory, p. 63.

³¹ Ibid, pp. 69-70.

³² Ibid, pp. 70-73.

³³ Ibid, pp. 73-75.

³⁴ Monshi, vol. II, pp. 1038-39, quoted in the introduction.

³⁵ McChesney, p. 179; Introduction.

³⁶ Minorsky, trans. and ed., *Tadhkirat al-Muluk, A Manual of Safavid Administration* (c.1137/1725), E. V. W. Gibb Memorial Trust, Cambridge, England, 1943; reprint 1980, p. 57. Hereafter, *Tadhkirat*.

³⁷ Monshi, pp. 1170-71. Shah 'Abbas sent Muhibb 'Ali to assess the possibility of redirecting the waters of the Kurang river (Karun) into the Zayanda-rud, but later lost confidence in the latter's ability to complete the project in the contracted time.. Also mentioned in *Tadhkirat*, p. 128; Hunarfar, pp. 429-30, n. 2, discusses the title.

38 Qureshi, "Muslim India before the Mughals", *Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 2A, pp. 9-12. The Khalji dynasty ruled between 1290-1321. Ala'al-Din was accused by a contemporary historian of attempting to 'set himself up as a prophet, and to undertake the conquest of the world like Alexander'; p. 11.

39 Page, *A Historical Memoir of the Qutb, Delhi*, Architectural Survey of India, Calcutta, 1926, pp. 36-7; a similar inscription is on pp. 37-8. Hereafter, Page.

40 Hunarfar, p. 431.

41 Sura IX is the only sura in the Qur'an which is not prefixed by the usual *Bismillah*. The Prophet himself directed that it should follow *Anfal* though he did not specify in which capacity. Yousuf 'Ali, p. 436; Bell and Watt, p. 60, maintain that the reason for the omission is not the affinity between the two suras, but rather that sura IX begins with a "proclamation which already attested as being issued in the name of God; the *bismillah* was therefore superfluous". This proclamation is what gives sura IX its second name, *Bara'at* or Immunity:-

A (declaration) of immunity
From God and His Apostle,...

42 Bell and Watt, pp. 14-15; Yousuf 'Ali, p. 436, verses IX: 30-129, revealed in 630 A.D., sum up the events of the expedition.

43 Watt, "Muhammad", *Cambridge History of Islam*, Vol. 1A, p. 53.

44 Watt, *Muhammad; Prophet and Statesman*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1980-2, p. 220. Hereafter, Watt, *Muhammad*.

45 *Ibid*, pp. 219-220. *Ahl adh-dhimma* ('people of the security-undertaking) includes all Jewish, Christian, and other non-Muslim groups which had an agreement with the Islamic empire based on the following three factors: 1) protection, 2) internal autonomy, and 3) tribute. Tribute was in the form of *kharaj* (land-tax) and *jizya* (poll-tax). Watt, *Islamic Political Thought*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1980, pp. 49-50. Hereafter, Watt, *Political Thought*.

46 Watt, *Muhammad*, pp. 220-221.

47 For instance, Watt, *Muhammad*, p. 222, and Watt, *Political Thought*, p. 25; Grabar, *Formation*, p. 105.

48 Watt, *Political Thought*, p. 25.

49 Watt, "Muhammad", *Cambridge History of Islam*, Vol. 1A, p. 44.

50 Yousuf 'Ali, p. 472.

51 The form of this early mosque or *masjid* is not known. It was probably no more than a simple sanctuary called *masjid* because of its derivation from the verb *sajada*; to prostrate oneself to God. According to Grabar most of the villages around Medina had a *masjid* which the Prophet used on his visits. Grabar, *Formation*, p. 107.

52 Watt, "Muhammad", *Cambridge History of Islam*, Vol. 1A, p. 44.

53 Yousuf 'Ali, p. 472. The battles occurred in 625 and 630 respectively.

54 Qur'an IX: 117-118. This argument is also supported by a Shi'i *Hadith* taken from *Sharh Ibn Abi'l-Hadid*. While suffering from the illness that led to his death, the Prophet reportedly ordered his army to march on Medina under the leadership of 'Usamah ibn Zayd. This, of course, supports the Shi'i claim that 'Ali was more worthy of the position of caliph since he was of stronger faith and the first believer. I have found no other reference to this incident, but its implications are in line with those in the general discussion.

55 Qur'an, IX:107.

56 Qur'an, IX:101-106.

57 Savory, pp. 51-52.

58 *Ibid*, pp. 53-55.

59 *Ibid*, p. 56.

60 *Ibid*, pp. 59-62.

61 Monshi, Vol. I, p. 197; A. Welch, *Artists for the Shah*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1976, pp. 159-160.

62 Savory, pp. 65-66, the new elements consisted of the *ghulamān-i-khassa-yi sharifa* (slaves of the royal household) and of Georgian noblemen.

⁶³ Browne, vol. 4, p. 111, two sons were blinded and two executed.

⁶⁴ Verses 1-29, which define the new state policy, were read out on the day of Pilgrimage in a *khutbah* by the Imam 'Ali, thus giving them wide publicity and making them of special importance to Shi'is. Yousuf 'Ali, p. 436.

⁶⁵ Above, under Portal.

⁶⁶ Savory, p. 42.

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 67.

⁶⁸ Monshi, Vol. II, pp. 826-836.

⁶⁹ Monshi, Vol. II, pp. 826-828.

⁷⁰ Qur'an, XVI: 91.

⁷¹ Monshi, Vol. II, p. 829. The inhabitants of Tabriz are reported to have been practicing *taqiya* whereby a Shi'i is allowed to conceal his true faith in order to assure his safety. al-Tabataba'i, pp. 223-225.

⁷² Savory, pp. 85-87.

⁷³ Ibid, pp. 87-88.

⁷⁴ Ibid, pp. 88-89; Munshi, Vol. II, p. 1226.

⁷⁵ Jafri, pp. 89-90; Vaglieri, "The Patriarchal and Umayyad Caliphates", *Cambridge History of Islam*, Vol. 1A, p. 70; Lewis, p. 61. The sources differ as to the city to which 'A'isha was sent. Lewis states that she was "sent back to Mecca", while the first two propose Medina.

⁷⁶ Jafri, p. 96; also mentions another verse applicable to this occasion, XLVIII: 10.

⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 88.

⁷⁸ Vaglieri, "The Umayyad and Patriarchal Caliphates", *Cambridge History of Islam*, Vol. 1A, p. 71.

- 79 Jafri, p. 96.
- 80 Vaglieri, "The Umayyad and Patriarchal Caliphates", *Cambridge History of Islam*, Vol. 1A, p. 71.
- 81 Jafri, p. 96; also applies verse LXXII: 15.
- 82 Ibid, p. 97; the quotation is from Tabari's collection of *hadith*.
- 83 Itzkowitz, p. 69; quoted in the introduction.
- 84 Louis Gardet, "Religion and Culture", *Cambridge History of Islam*, Vol. 2B, p. 589; Jafri, p. 31.
- 85 Jafri, pp. 31-32.
- 86 See Introduction.
- 87 Jafri, pp. 294-95; 97.
- 88 Jafri, pp. 296-97. Umm Salima is reported as asking; "Am I not from the people of your House?" to which the Prophet replied, "No, may you be well; only these under the mantle are the people of my House and my charge." (reported in Kulayni, *Kafi*, I, pp. 330f.) This speech was used to counter the claims of all Hashemites 'Alids or 'Abbasids, who were not descended from Fatima. A similar *hadith* is that of *hadith al-thaqalayn* (the Two Charges; the Qur'an and the Family) quoted in the discussion of the East Dome.
- 89 Qur'an XXXIII: 33. This implies that the verse was revealed at that moment and that it is considered by the Shi'ites to be of the *mutshabihat*. Thus they apply it specifically to the Prophet and his four relatives. The same is true of XLII: 23:
- No reward do I
Ask of you for this
Except the love
Of those near of kin
- which Sunni Islam interprets as applying to the entire Muslim community.
- 90 Those who do not acknowledge these four pillars are, therefore, forbidden entrance to the Royal Mosque and hence to Paradise. The word *wasala*, here translated as 'close/related to', has the double meaning of descent. The *hadith* could read 'Whoever is descended from them is close to God', which would strengthen the Safawid's claim to

supremacy. It has been rendered as 'close' in keeping with the spirit of the Arabic text which relies on subtlety and implied meanings rather than on the explicit.

⁹¹ Yousuf 'Ali, p. 436; above, n. 64. This makes the sura of prime importance to Shi'ism. When the chapter was revealed in 9 A.H., the Prophet had sent Abu Bakr to lead the people in the *hajj*. People asked the Prophet whether the chapter would be dispatched for delivery by Abu Bakr, to which he replied, "No, I will not send it except through someone from amongst the people of my family". He then sent 'Ali to Mecca to deliver the Qur'anic message. Reported by a number of historians and traditions like Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, IV, p. 190. Related in Jafri, pp. 18-19.

⁹² In Shi'ism Friday prayers are looked upon differently. This point will be discussed later.

⁹³ This declaration is extremely close to John the Baptist's proclamations about Christ, and to Christ's own words "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life; no man can come unto the Father but by me" (John 14:6). Thus it is tempting to liken 'Ali to a Messiah. None can receive the pleasures of life or eternity without first passing through this 'threshold'. 'Ali is then the guide and the method through which the faithful can become purified. This expression is also used by Eskandar Monshi in the prologue to Book III of his *History of Shah 'Abbas*, Vol. II, p. 1135.

⁹⁴ Jafri, p. 296.

⁹⁵ al-Tabataba'i, p. 103; 114; from *Bihar al-Anwar*, Vol. I, p. 55.

⁹⁶ Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, trans. Franz Rosenthal, ed. N. J. Dawood, Bollingen Series, Princeton, 1981, p. 269. Hereafter, *Muqaddimah*.

⁹⁷ Monshi, Vol. II, pp. 1038-39; Introduction.

⁹⁸ *Muqaddimah*, p. 269.

⁹⁹ 'Abd Allah b. al-Zubayr was a 'Alid who controlled Arabia and part of Iraq. Vaglieri "The Umayyad and Patriarchal Caliphates", *Cambridge History of Islam*, Vol. 1A, pp. 80-84. 'Abd al-Malik was trying to establish the caliphate in Syria and thus had to minimize the importance of the holy sanctuaries in Ibn al-Zubayr's domains. The conflict resulted in the construction of the Dome of the Rock in

Jerusalem. Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1932, Part One, pp. 42-43. Creswell quotes Ya'qubi's *hadith* which is relevant to this discussion;

Then 'Abd al-Malik forbade the people of Syria to make the pilgrimage (to Makkah); and this by reason that 'Abd Allah ibn az-Zubair was wont to seize on them during the time of the pilgrimage, and force them to pay him allegiance - which, 'Abd al-Malik having knowledge of, forbade the people to journey to Makkah. But the people murmured thereat saying, 'How dost thou forbid us to make the pilgrimage to Allah's house, seeing that the same is a commandment of Allah upon us?' But the Khalif answered them 'Hath not Ibn Shihab az-Zuhri (a celebrated Traditionist) told you the Apostle of Allah did say: *Men shall journey to but three Masjids, Al Masjid Haram (at Makkah), my Masjid (at Madinah), and the Masjid of the Holy City (which is Jerusalem)?* So this last is now appointed for you in lieu of the Masjid al Haram (of Makkah). And This Rock, of which it is reported that upon it the Apostle of Allah set his foot when he ascended into Heaven, shall be unto you in the place of the Ka'abah'. Then 'Abd al-Malik built above the Sakhra a Dome, and hung it around with curtains of brocade, and he instituted door-keepers for the same, and the people took the custom of circumambulating; the Rock, even as they had paced round the Ka'abah, and the usage continued thus all the days of the dynasty of the Omayyads.

From Ya'qubi's *History*, (874 A.D.), II, p. 311, as translated by G. Le Strange, in *The Palestine Exploration Fund, Q.St.*, 1887, p.93, and in his *Palestine Under the Moslems*, p. 116. Quoted in Creswell, p. 43. Creswell also points out that history repeated itself with the Safawid Shahs Isma'il, Tahmasp, and 'Abbas who "having established the Shi'a faith as the state religion, loaded the Shrine of Imam Riza at Mashhad with costly gifts and rich endowments, in order to divert the stream of pilgrims from Makka to Khurasan, and to keep the immense sum total of their offerings-in the country". Ibid, note 2. This is here applied to the Royal Mosque and to the capital Isfahan. The theory of the Dome of the Rock as a rival sanctuary is refuted by Grabar, "Dome of the Rock", pp. 33-62; *Formation*, pp. 48-67.

100 Monshi describes several instances where the Shah made the pilgrimage on foot and performed several menial tasks at the shrines. Of special interest is the pilgrimage to Mashhad in 1601-02 A.D. in which Monshi compares 'Abbas' dedication to that of other rulers, both Muslim and Christian. Monshi, p. 800. Other instances, pp. 873; 946; 1033. 'Abbas also instituted several *waqfs* to the Fourteen Immaculate Ones. Monshi, pp. 953-56.

101 Hunarfar, pp. 430-31.

102 Yousuf 'Ali, p. 443, n. 1266.

103 Jafri, pp. 264-65. Another privilege which the family of the Prophet lost after his death was the *khums*, a religious tax consisting of 'one fifth' of the total. This was discontinued in Sunni Islam but still persists among the Shi'is. al-Tabataba'i, pp.45; 70, n. 26.

104 Vaglieri, "The Patriarachal and Umayyad Caliphates", *Cambridge History of Islam*, Vol. 1A, pp. 80-82.

105 Some collections of maxims came to be known as *hadith*, for example the collection of Forty Hadiths by the fifteenth century Sufi maulana Djami, called *Arba'un Hadith*, in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris. Mentioned in Melikian-Shirvani. "Iranian Metal-Work and the Written Word", *Apollo*, April 1976, p. 287. Hereafter, Shirvani, "Iranian Metal-Work".

106 A. Welch, *Calligraphy in the arts of the Muslim World*, Asia Society, New York, 1979, pp. 138-39. Hereafter, Welch, *Calligraphy*.

107 James Allan, *Islamic Metalwork: The Nuhad Es-Said Collection*, Philip Wilson Publishers Ltd., London, 1982, pp. 110-13. Hereafter, Allan; Linda Komaroff, "Timurid to Safavid Iran: Continuity and Change", *Marsyas*, Vol. 20, 1979-80, pp. 11-16.

108 Melikian-Shirvani, "Safavid Metalwork", *Studies on Isfahan*, ed. Holod, vol. VII, Part II, p. 559. Hereafter, *Studies on Isfahan*.

109 Shirvani, "Safavid Metalwork", *Studies on Isfahan*, vol. VII, Part II, p. 559.

110 Allan, p. 112.

111 Shirvani, "Safavid Metalwork", *Studies on Isfahan*, Vol. VII, Part II, p. 558, mentions three types of litanies; those calling Divine Blessing on the Twelve Immaculate Imams or Fourteen Pure Ones, prayers naming 'Ali, and poems celebrating 'Ali with such extremist accents as to come close to identifying him with God, e.g. "'Ali is He that is the Lord of my Fountain/The Two Worlds are his two generous palms..." (pp. 558-59). That these litanies were used in Sufi ceremonies is suggested by Shirvani in "Iranian Metal-Work", p. 287.

112 Jafri, pp. 300-04.

113 Ibid, p. 301.

114 Hunarfar, p. 431.

North Eyvan

115 Specified in Hunarfar, p. 446.

116 Yousuf 'Ali, p. 1654; Nöldeke attributes sura LXXVI to the Second Meccan Period. See Bell and Watt, p. 110.

117 Ibid. Yousuf 'Ali states that the title recalls "a Pagan Arab idea, which personified Time as existing spontaneously from eternity to eternity and responsible for the misery or the happiness of mankind".

118 Gustave E. Grunebaum, *Medieval Islam*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1953, pp. 229-30. This is one of three groups interested in the nature of life, the other two being the *tabi'iyun* (naturalists) and the *ilahiyun* (followers of the dogma of a god).

119 Yousuf 'Ali, p. 1656, n. 5835. Other verses describing Paradise specify gold as well, e. g. XLII: 71. In verses LXXVI: 15-16, Crystal is used as a quality of the metal (crystal-clear), but the substance is alluded to and thus included in the discussion.

120 *Sense of Unity*, pp. 61-3. Quotation from p. 63.

121 Of course, this is a mystic interpretation, but it is important to the understanding of the sura and the glorification of God's rewards to believers, which is a major theme.

122 Nader Ardalan, "Color in Safavid Architecture: the Poetic Diffusion of Light", *Studies on Isfahan*, p. 171.

123 These and other Sufi symbols are discussed in *Sense of Unity*, pp. 48-54. The system of seven colors includes white, black, sandalwood (group of three), green, blue, red, yellow (group of four).

124 Hunarfar, p. 440.

125 Hunarfar, p. 443; below, Domed Hall inscription.

126 al-Tabataba'i, pp. 59; 46-7.

127 Also discussed in the analysis of the south dome inscription (below), where Shah 'Abbas' victory is compared to the Battle of the Trench, and Baghdad to one of the Qur'anic subverted cities.

128 Monshi, vol. II, p. 1265.

129 Monshi, vol. II, pp. 1268-72.

130 Monshi, vol. II, p. 1266. The peace referred to here is that of Amasya (1555 A.D.), discussed above with connection to the portal inscription.

131 *Anthology*, pp. 137-40.

132 Monshi, vol. II, p. 1272.

133 *Ibid.*

134 *Ibid.*, pp. 1272-73.

135 *Ibid.*, p. 1273.

136 *Ibid.*

137 *Ibid.*, pp. 1273-74.

138 *Ibid.*, p. 1273. Monshi follows this procedure in most of his accounts.

139 Ibid, p. 1271.

140 Ibid, p. 1272.

141 Savory, p. 89.

142 Discussed below under the South Dome. Monshi actually reproduces only the portion of the letter whose author (a senior officer) he regards as "having no ax to grind", and thus giving the 'facts as he saw them', which of course best agree with Monshi's and the Safawids' own interests. Monshi, p. 1275.

143 Monshi, p. 1279.

144 Hitti, *Islam: A Way of Life*, Ragnery Gateway, Illinois, 1970, p. 43. This is therefore a 'competition' between the major saints of the two sects.

145 Monshi, vol. II, p. 1280.

East Section

146 Above, under Portal.

147 Hunarfar, p. 464.

148 It could be suggested that this is a printing error but this is unlikely.

149 Bell and Watt, pp. 55-56.

150 Hitti, p. 163; discussed under Portal Minars.

151 Yousuf 'Ali, p. 691.

152 Ibid; Grabar, "Dome of the Rock", p. 37, mentions the *masjid al-aqsa* at al-Ji'ranah, near Mecca, where there also existed a *masjid al-adna* (Nearest or Closest Mosque).

153 Yousuf 'Ali, p. 691.

154 Shah Isma'il enforced this addition (I attest that 'Ali is the wali of God) shortly after his accession in 1501. Browne, vol. IV, p. 54.

155 From *Bihar al-anwar*, vol. XVIII, p. 9; quoted in *al-Tabataba'i*, p. 188.

156 The idea of 'Ali as intercessor on Judgement Day is closely connected with the litany which appears among the portal inscriptions of the Royal Mosque, 'Call upon 'Ali in adversities...' Above, p.60. While the subject of partnership is brought up by the inscriptions on the portal minars, p.12.

157 Jafri, p. 52.

158 *al-Tabataba'i*, p. 68; they are also known as the 'Four pillars of Shi'ism'.

159 Vaglieri, "The Patriarchal and Umayyad Caliphates", *Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 1A, p. 68. Because of the position of Negroes in early Islamic society, he is also said to have married a Negro woman in order "to be lowered in the eyes of his fellows"; von Grunebaum, *Medieval Islam*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 1953, p. 354,. Hereafter, Grunebaum. Negroes discussed pp. 209-11. Whether this marriage was for unselfish reasons or attributable to Abu Dharr's humility, is not clear.

160 Jafri, p. 52.

161 From *Ya'qubi*, vol. III, p. 171; quoted in Jafri, p. 83.

162 Reported in several collections, e.g. Baladhuri and *Ya'qubi*; quoted in Jafri, pp. 84-5; 98, n. 14; 16.

163 From *Ibn Majah*, vol. I, p. 68; quoted in *al-Tabataba'i*, p. 52. Other *hadith*, pp. 51-3.

164 The inerrancy of prophecy is discussed in *al-Tabataba'i*, pp. 144-45.

165 The contention that verse V: 70 was revealed for this purpose is in *al-Tabataba'i*, pp. 178-79.

166 *al-Tabataba'i*, p. 176.

167 Specified in *Hunarfar*, p. 449.

168 Yousuf 'Ali, p. 1389; Lewis, p. 45; Jafri, p. 109; Watt, *Muhammad*, p. 182; Watt, "Muhammad", *Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 1A, p. 50.

169 Watt, *Muhammad*, p. 182.

170 Lewis, p. 45.

171 Watt, *Muhammad*, p. 182.

172 *Ibid*, pp. 182-83.

173 'Abd Allah b. 'Ubayy had been involved in the 'Affair of the Lie' in which he propagated a scandal involving the Prophet's wife 'A'isha. Other scandal-mongers involved in the affair were flogged, but Ibn 'Ubayy was spared. He never became an enthusiastic Muslim, however, and was among the deserters of the battle of Uhud in 625. *Ibid*, pp. 165-66; Watt, "Muhammad", p. 47. The 'Affair of the Lie' is discussed in the Qur'an, XXIV, *sura Nur*.

174 Watt, *Muhammad*, p. 184. The Meccan deputations were often answered by Hassan ibn Thabet who acted as spokesman and official poet to the Prophet, Hitti, p. 143.

175 *Ibid*, pp. 184-85. Muhammad's provision to send back Meccans was not to be reciprocated.

176 *Ibid*, pp. 186-87.

177 The entire episode is summarised in XLVIII: 18;

God's Good Pleasure
Was on the Believers
When they swore fealty
To thee under the Tree:
He knew what was
In their hearts, and He
Sent down Tranquility
To them; and He rewarded
Them with a speedy Victory.

178 One point in favor of the negotiations is that they took place during a sacred month and in a sacred precinct where killing was prohibited. Yousuf 'Ali, p. 1389. This, however, had not stopped the Prophet at the battle of Badr which took place in Ramadan (March 624).

- 179 Watt, *Muhammad*, pp. 188-89.
- 180 Jafri, pp. 130-31. Seventy other men were Companions who had fought at Badr and four hundred from among the *Muhajirun* and *Ansar*.
- 181 The *bay'a*, or pledge of allegiance, was the usual form of 'election' before the establishment of the hereditary system by Mu'awiya.
- 182 From Hadid, *Sharh*, I, pp. 166f; quoted in Jafri, p. 91. The events described above are discussed under Portal.
- 183 Jafri, p. 97.
- 184 Itzkowitz, pp. 100-01. The treaty between the Ottomans and the Hapsburgs was a disguise for the Ottoman defeat at the battle of Senta in 1697.
- 185 The Ottoman 'violation' is discussed above, under Portal.
- 186 Savory, p. 89; Monshi, vol II, p. 1226; This part of the inscription is not dated, but the remainder of the epigraph in the east dome has the date 1038/1628-29. It is, therefore, safe to assume that the inscription of the upper parts was put up in the same year or shortly before. There is a faint possibility that XLVIII: 1-10 was inscribed after Shah 'Abbas' death in February 1629, in which case it would be a perfect affirmation of the covenant between God and Shah Safi, and a call to the Iranians to pledge themselves to their new leader.
- 187 Monshi, vol. II, pp. 1272-74.
- 187a Hunarfar, p. 449.
- 188 Information about Ibn Hanbal under South Dome.
- 189 Jafri, p. 109. Jafri gives the spelling al-Bara'a instead of al-Bara'a as the name appears in the Arabic text. Ibn 'Azib is mentioned among the *Muhajirun* and *Ansar* who were domiciled at Kufa shortly after it was founded. Seventy of them fought with the Prophet at Badr and three hundred renewed their allegiance at Hudaibiya. Since Ibn 'Azib is among the few mentioned by name, he must have had a role in both events.

- 190 Ibid, p. 52. He was from the tribe of Khazraj.
- 191 Hunarfar, pp. 438-39.
- 192 Discussed in Introduction.
- 193 Hunarfar, p. 446.
- 194 'Ali had recently returned from an expedition to Yemen. Those who had been fighting with him accused 'Ali of not being fair in the distribution of booty. Vaġlieri, "Ghadir Khumm", *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. II, p. 994.
- 195 al-Tabataba'i, pp. 178-79. Quoted in the discussion of the east eyvan.
- 196 This is actually only a portion of verse V: 4.
- 197 al-Tabataba'i, p. 178. The injunction mentioned by the 'Allamah is that of forbidden foods incorporated in the *sura* in general and in verse V: 4 itself.
- 198 Quoted in al-Tabataba'i, p. 180. Thirty-nine versions of this *hadith* are recorded in Sunni sources and eighty-two in Shi'i ones, p. 218, n. 12. This *hadith* is related to the portal inscription where the Prophet specifies 'Ali, Fatima, Hasan, and Husayn as his charge.
- 199 Ibid, p. 181. One hundred versions are from Sunni sources and seventy from Shi'i ones, p. 219, n. 16.
- 200 Ibid, pp. 180-81.
- 201 Savory, p. 27.
- 202 Another factor in this claim is the Safawid contention that the Imam Husayn married the daughter of the last Sasanid king, Yazdigird III, thus endowing them with traditional Iranian "kingly glory". Savory, p. 27.
- 203 'Umar utters similar words in the *hadith* inscribed in the south eyvan, Hunarfar, pp. 439-40. He was among the men and women who went to 'Ali's tent after the proclamation and greeted him

with the title *Amir al-mu'minin*, Prince of the Faithful, Vaglieri, "Ghadir Khumm", *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Vol. II, p. 993.

204 Jafri, pp. 42ff.

205 Savory, pp. 27-8, states that the ritual cursing of the three caliphs has always been the proper duty of all Shi'is.

206 al-Tabataba'i, p. 68, n. 6.

207 Vaglieri, "Ghadir Khumm", *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Vol. II, p. 994.

208 Watt, "Muhammad", *Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 1A, p.51.

209 Hitti, p. 163.

210 Ibid.

211 al-Tabataba'i, p. 193. The Arabic text (in the inscription) is difficult at this point. It states, literally, that the Prophet "struck his hands on 'Ali's legs above the saddlebow and lifted him off the ground". Since there is uncertainty as to what 'above the saddlebow' implies, I have rendered the general meaning of the text.

212 G. Rentz, "Djazirat al 'Arab", *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Vol. I, pp. 544-45.

213 Most *hadith* in favor of Abu Bakr are on the authority of 'A'isha who claimed that while on his deathbed in her house, the Prophet gave her instructions on the succession. She also disliked both 'Ali and his wife Fatima. When she received news of 'Ali's nomination while on her way back from the 'umra, she turned back to Medina. 'Ali is known to have accused 'A'isha of the murder of 'Uthman. Jafri, pp. 34; 94.

214 al-Aswad was a Yemeni who had hoped to stir up enough opposition to deter the advance of Islam. To do this, he claimed prophethood. 'Ali had been on an expedition to crush the movement shortly before meeting the Prophet at Ghadir. Watt, "Muhammad", *Cambridge History of Islam*, Vol. 1A, p. 54.

215 Monshi, Vol. II, p. 1272.

216 Specified in Hunarfar, p. 450.

217 Watt, "Muhammad", *Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 1A, p. 44; Above under Portal where the significance of the mosque of Qoba is also discussed.

218 Yousuf 'Ali, p. 58, n. 147.

219 al-Tabataba'i, p. 114.

220 This verse is inscribed inside the Shabistan mihrab, Hunarfar, p. 453. Around the mihrab are the first verses of sura *Isra'*, which speak of the Prophet's ascension. The Shabistan, therefore, although it is of later date (1070 A.H.), presents the same argument.

221 Yousuf 'Ali, p. 57, n. 140.

222 Iztkowitz, p. 69; above, Introduction.

223 The Connections between the Mosque of Piety and the mosque of Qoba and their implications are discussed under Portal.

West Section

224 Above, under Portal.

225 Hunarfar, p. 450.

226 Hunarfar, p. 451.

227 The inscription specifies that the light is embedded in the *sulb* of each of the ancestors. One translation of the word *sulb*, 'loins', implies physical procreation while intellectual progression is implied by the translation 'backbone' since the backbone is associated with the spinal cord and thus connected to the center of intellectual perception. The *hadith* thus reflects the laws of Medieval medicine where reproduction is intimately connected with brain activity and 'loins' and 'backbone' have virtually the same meaning. See O. Cameron Gruner, *A Treatise on the Canon of Medicine of Avicenna*, Augustus M. Kelley, Publishers, New York 1970, pp. 143-45 and diagram facing page 143. I would like to thank Dr. Eike Kluge for pointing out to me the connections between the *hadith* and the treatise of Ibn Sina.

228 Monshi, vol. I, pp. 13-17. The genealogy presented by Monshi is used here because it bears directly on the relationship between the inscription and the Safawids.

229 Ibid, p. 15.

230 Ibid, p. 16. This is surprising as Abu Taleb is significant as Muhammad's adoptive father and, more importantly, 'Ali's natural father.

231 Quoted in Hunarfar, p. 451, n. 1. This *hadith* is not inscribed in the Royal Mosque. In the *hadith* from *Yanabi' al-Mawaddah* 'Ali and Muhammad are presented as direct substitutes for Light in the sentence "God implanted that Light in the backbone of Adam, and 'Ali and I remained one until we were separated in the backbone of 'Abd al-Mottaleb".

232 The split first occurred when Mu'awiya usurped the caliphate from Hasan by forcing him to abdicate. Hasan and his descendants argued their authority and claim on religious bases. Jafri, pp. 130-73.

233 *Maqaddimah*, p. 155.

234 Quoted in *al-Tabataba'i*, p. 181; above, East Dome. In many versions of this *hadith* the term *hawd* (pool), which is the meeting place between the Prophet and his *umma* in Paradise, replaces *Kawthar*. Thus, the *hadith* is usually known as *Hadith al-Hawd*. Sachedina, "A Treatise on the Occultation of the Twelfth Imamite Imam", *Studia Islamica*, vol. 48, 1978, p. 112. Hereafter, Sachedina.

235 Quoted in *al-Tabataba'i*, p. 181.

236 Ibid, p. 180; quoted in full above, East Dome. These *hadith* provide proof of the infallibility of the Imams, especially the 'Five Pure Ones'. See Browne, IV, pp. 394-95; Fischer, *Iran, from Religious Dispute to Revolution*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. and London, England, 1980, pp. 27; 268, n. 12. Hereafter, Fischer. The doctrine is closely related to verse XXXIII: 33, and *hadith al-Kisa*, see above, Portal; Jafri, p. 297.

237 It is obvious that this verse is one of the basic sources of the *hadith*. The symbolism of Light, both in Sufi interpretation and in the Verse of the Throne, (XXIV: 35) is too involved to be included within the confines of this study. For interpretation in Iranian Sufism see Henry Corbin, *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, Shambhala, Boulder and London, 1978. The Verse of the Throne and its counterpart, the Verse of Darkeness (XXIV: 40) are studied by al-Ghazali in *Mishkat al-Anwar*; see W.H.T. Gairdner (trans.), *Al-Ghazali's*

Mishkat al-Anwar", Royal Asiatic Society Monograph Series, vol. XIX, London 1924. There are other Quranic verses in which the symbol of Light is used and some will be quoted below.

238 The Prophet states in several *hadith* that the descendants whose love is obligatory upon Muslims are: 'Ali, Fatima, Hasan, and Husayn. He also often states "Hasan and Husayn are my sons", *al-Tabataba'i*, pp.181; 194. A further example is *hadith al-Kisa*, see note 88, above.

239 Monshi, vol. I, p. 23. The sword as symbol of authority is related to the *hadith* in the south eyvan where the Prophet's sword, *dhu'l-Mifqar* is mentioned.

240 *Ibid*, p. 13. Monshi also mentions several 'wonderful signs' and miracles in relation to Shah 'Abbas, Vol. II, pp. 764-65; 928-30. Of these genealogies are *Safwat al-Safa* of Ibn Bazzaz (c.1349-50) and *Silsilat al-nasab al-Safawiyya* by Shaykh Zahidi (late seventeenth century), Savory, Ph.D., pp. iii; ix.

241 In two successive campaigns by Selim I conducted in 1516 and 1517.

242 Halil Inalcik, "The Rise of the Ottoman Empire", *Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 1A, p. 321.

243 *Ibid*.

244 *Ibid*, p. 322.

245 In the west eyvan this inscription is dated 1040 A.H., i.e. six years after the completion of the epigraphic band on the drum of the west dome. The affinity between the two arguments (verse and *hadith*) supports the hypothesis of a planned epigraphic program for the entire mosque. The last inscription on the west dome (on the sides) is dated 1039 A.H., but also continues the same argument. Verse IX: 18 appears among the portal inscriptions where it is discussed at length.

246 *al-Tabataba'i*, p. 220, n. 33.

247 Of course, this is the actual argument utilised by Abu Bakr and the 'Abbasids in their ascendancy to the caliphate.

248 In connection with the exile of Abu Dharr, above under East Eyvan. Jafri, p. 85.

- 249 Itzkowitz, pp. 4-5.
- 250 Itzkowitz, p. 31. Earlier propaganda methods were the poems of Khata'i (Shah Isma'il I) who used the Turkish tongue in order to infiltrate the Ottoman population.
- 251 Among these exiles were the 'Amilis who emigrated to Iran; below, East Pillared Hall.
- 252 The attack and conquest of Baghdad is discussed under the North Eyvan and, in the South Section.
- 253 Hunarfar, pp. 451-52.
- 254 Yousuf 'Ali, pp. 1468; 1706, n. 6026.
- 255 In LXXVI: 5, *zangabil* is substituted by *Kafur*, camphor, which again enhances the pleasant effect of the wine while inhibiting its side-effects.
- 256 Yousuf 'Ali, p. 1658, n. 5850. Some of the mystic interpretations of these verses are discussed under the North Eyvan. The mystic interpretations are relevant to the Safawids since they were originally a Sufi order.
- 257 Shirvani, "Iranian Metal-Work", pp. 289-91. A bowl of this type dating to the fourteenth century, is preserved in the *Masjid-i-Jami'* at Herat. The associations between 'divine drunkenness' and Sufism are also expressed in Safawid miniature paintings such as the *Allegory of Drunkenness*, an illustration for the *Diwan* of Hafiz. See S.C. Welch, *Wonders of The Age*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1979, pl. 44. Hereafter, S. C. Welch.
- 258 The qualities of the *jam*, 'red crystal', associate it with a mixture of wine. The act of 'smelling' may then be transferred to one of 'drinking'.
- 259 See the discussion under "The Mysterious Letters", Bell and Watt, pp. 61-65.
- 260 Yousuf 'Ali, p. 790, n. 2534.
- 261 Based on Ibn Hisham's collection. 'Umar confronted his sister and her husband who had secretly converted to Islam. They

were reading this *sura* from a written copy in their possession which they showed to 'Umar. He was so touched by it that he became a Muslim. Discussed in Yousuf 'Ali, p. 788.

262 Yousuf 'Ali, p. 790f. interprets the verse differently by applying it to all Muslims. While this is an acceptable general interpretation, it does not conform with the situation presented in the inscription which necessitates the application of the verse only to the Prophet. In view of the previous conclusions, the Prophet's distress may also be the result of people's refusal to accept 'Ali's caliphate, which is a matter ordained by God through many of the *mutashabihat* verses.

263 The original words 'saluted 'Ali with it', probably imply passing the cup while saying 'Peace be upon you' or a similar formula.

264 Hunarfar, pp.442-43.

265 This is a controversial verse which Sunnis and Shi'is read and interpret differently. Since the *hadith* connects it directly with 'Ali, I have presented the accepted Shi'i reading; See al-Tabataba'i, pp. 177-78. For a detailed discussion of the verse and its Sunni reading see below under the discussion of the inscriptions of the pillared hall east of the south dome. The Shi'i interpretation of the verse further supports the hypothesis that each of the verses in this *hadith* are to be interpreted strictly in reference to each individual presented with the *jam*.

266 Yousuf 'Ali, p. 1672, n. 5889.

267 Jafri, p. 130.

268 From Hadid's *Sharh*, XVI, p. 24 and other sources. Quoted in Jafri, pp. 135-36. Original sources listed p. 170, n. 17. The additions are Jafri's.

269 Hadid, *Sharh*, XVI, p. 25 and other sources. Quoted in Jafri, p. 135, original sources listed p. 170, n. 18.

270 The abdication took place in the same year, after Mu'awiya succeeded in convincing Hasan's followers to desert. Details of the abdication and further stipulations are in Jafri, pp. 137-51.

271 At the time of abdication Mu'awiya was fifty-eight (died at seventy-seven), Hasan thirty-eight (died at forty-five or forty-six). Jafri, p. 158.

272 The wife was Ju'da bint al- Ash'ath, who is reported to have been tempted by Mu'awiya with a monetary reward and promise of marriage to Yazid. The Latter paid the money but refused to allow the marriage saying that he valued the life of his son. Jafri, p. 158; al-Tabataba'i, p. 195, n. 55 for original sources.

273 Quoted in Jafri, p. 156; original sources p. 172, n. 74. This view is shared by Sunni's and Shi'is alike.

274 This verse is also mentioned under Portal.

275 Jafri, p. 175.

276 Quoted in Jafri, p. 176; original sources p. 217, n. 4.

277 Before responding to the Kufans' call Husayn tried to secure their support by reminding them of his position. A letter he sent them helps clarify the use of the disputed terms, *wasi*, *wali* and *warith*. Husayn wrote:

God has chosen Muhammad from among his people, graced him with His Prophethood and selected him for His message. After he admonished the people and conveyed His message to them God took him back unto Himself. We, being his family (*ahl*), his close associates endowed with the quality of guardianship (*awliya'*), his trustees and vice regents (*awsiya'*), and his heir and legatee (*warith*), are the most deserving among all the people to take his place... If you listen to me and obey my orders I will guide you to the right path.

From Tabari, II, p. 240, quoted in Jafri, p. 179-80. As the early Shi'is formulated their doctrines and vocabulary, therefore, they were aware of their connotations and impact.

278 Jafri, pp. 186-87.

279 Ibid, pp. 187-88.

280 Quoted in Jafri, p. 189, original sources listed p. 218, n. 37.

281 The last statement is included in the *Masjid-i Shah*.

portal inscriptions, Hunarfar, pp. 431.

282 Quoted in Jafri, pp.189-90; original sources listed p. 218, n. 39.

283 In the post-Safawid Qajar period the *Ta'ziyah* (Mourning of Muharram) developed a dramatic art form, the *Rawzah-Khani* which depicts the martyrdom of Husayn and his family. The imagery utilised by the poets leans heavily toward the imagery of the Royal Mosque *hadith*. One mystical line equates Husayn to 'the beloved'.

The Friend kills the beloved, the
lovers are slain.

Other examples place the martyrs in Paradise

Paradise is their place, overpowering
they have gone to Paradise,
They have become annihilated in God,
with Him they have become He.

Or,

Those who have no pain for Hasan
and Mir Hussein, the Creator, the
powerful Lord, will not forgive them.

The *Takiyeh* theatres where *Rawzah-Khani* were performed were decorated with monumental paintings depicting the tragedy. Though the Qajars ruled Iran from the eighteenth century on, their religious leanings were so sympathetic with those of the Safawids that in 1261 A.H. Muhammad Shah Qajar put up an additional inscription in the west *eyvan* which present him as the patron of the *Masjid-i Shah*. Hunarfar, p. 460. Information about the *Rawzah-Khani* and *Takiyeh* from *Ta'ziyah: Ritual and Drama, in Iran*, Peter J. Chelkowski, ed., New York University Press, 1979. Quotations pp. 216; 220; 221. *Takiyeh* paintings illustrated figs. 7-12.

284 This conclusion is directly related to the *hadith* of Light and of the Mantle discussed above.

285 Jafri, p. 135.

286 al-Tabataba'i, p. 213.

287 From Abu Da'ud, *Sunan*, II, p. 135; Quoted in Jafri, p. 268.

288 Ibid.

289 This tradition is attributed to the sixth Imam, Ja'far. Quoted in Jafri, pp. 294-95.

290 al-Tabataba'i, p. 213.

291 Ibid, p. 214.

292 Sachedina, pp. 120-21.

293 The accession of the 'Abbasids to the caliphate was achieved through the overthrow of the Umayyads. This revolt was itself motivated by the concept of an infallible imam, or Mahdi. A major role in the revolt was played by the *Kaysaniyya* sect, who believed their Mahdi to be Muhammad b. al-Hanafiyya, a son of 'Ali by a Hanafite woman. D. Sourdel, "The Abbasid Caliphate", *Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 1A, pp. 104-07.

294 Jafri, p. 149.

295 Ibid, p. 165. Hujr was a danger to Mu'awiya because he was backed by a group of staunch 'Alids willing to fight for their Imam. They were promised freedom in return for the denunciation but they refused.

296 Charles Pellat, "Le culte de Mu'awiya au III^e siècle de l'hégire", *Studia Islamica*, vol. 6, 1956, p. 56. Hereafter, Pellat.

297 Ibid, p. 54.

298 Itzkowitz, p. 69.

299 Apart from Husayn, only the Prophet enjoys multiple blessings.

Domed Hall East of the South Dome

300 Hunarfar, p. 442.

301 The addition was enforced by Shah Isma'il I. 'I bear witness that 'Ali is the friend (*wali*) of God' was added to the *shahada*, and 'hasten to the best of deeds' to the call to prayer. Browne, vol. 4, p. 54. In Sunnism the number of prayer calls is five, one for each of the canonical daily prayers. Shi'is perform only three canonical prayers a day, combining afternoon prayers with noon prayers and night prayers with evening prayers. Presumably then, the number of Shi'i *adhan* per day is three. See Nasr's appendix on "Ritual Practices in Shi'ism" in al-Tabataba'i, pp. 231-33.

- 302 Bell and Watt, p. 23.
- 303 In XXVI: 193, the phrase 'to thy heart and mind' is used.
- 304 This is related to the interpretation of the term *wahy*, discussed in Bell and Watt, pp. 19-25.
- 305 Bell and Watt, p. 10.
- 306 al-Tabataba'i, pp. 219-20, n. 32.
- 307 al-Tabataba'i, p. 49.
- 308 Ibid, p. 105.
- 309 Ibid, p. 99.
- 310 From *Tafsir al-Safi*, p. 8; and *Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. XIX, p. 28; quoted in al-Tabataba'i, p. 95.
- 311 al-Tabataba'i, p. 13.
- 312 The term is used by Nasr, p. 153, where it is contrasted with the 'Islam of Abu Bakr', or Sunnism.
- 313 Hunarfar, p. 442.
- 314 Yousuf 'Ali, p. 1547, note 5461.
- 315 The term 'imam' as understood by Sunnis and Shi'is is discussed in Nasr, pp. 161-62. There are also sects within Shi'ism which divert from the line of Husayn or, like Isma'ilism, do not consider the number of Imams to be twelve.
- 316 al-Tabataba'i, pp. 210-11.
- 317 From *al-Fusul al-muhimma* of 'Abdallah ibn Mas'ud, p. 271. Quoted in al-Tabataba'i, p. 211, similar *hadith* are quoted on pp. 213-14.
- 318 Nasr, "Ritual Practices in Shi'ism", in al-Tabataba'i, Appendix III, p. 231.

319 The number of such emigrants or recruits was so large that two works *Lu'lu'at al-Bahrayn* (The Pearl of Bahrain) and *'Amal al-'Amel* (The Work of 'Amel) were devoted to their biographies. Nasr, "Religion in Safavid Persia", *Studies on Isfahan*, Part I, p. 274.

320 Monshi, vol. I, p. 247. The historian states that 'Abd al-Samad "revived Friday prayer, which had been in abeyance for a considerable time because of differences of opinion among theologians regarding the conditions pertaining to it", but gives no details of these conditions nor mentions the person who took the responsibility of leading these prayers (in the Royal Mosque). It could safely be assumed, however, that due to the importance of Shaykh 'Abd al-Samad, he himself might have led the prayers. Information about 'Abd al-Samad in Hunarfar, p. 455, note 1.

321 Monshi, vol. I, p. 248.

322 Ibid, p. 248; Hunarfar, pp. 455-57, n. 1.

323 Ibid, p. 248. Obviously, Shaykh Baha'i's status as *Shaykh al-Islam* was more considerable than usual, and close to that of the *sadr* (a leading religious authority). See *Tadhkirat*, pp. 43; 111-12 where the position is only slightly better than that of the *Qadi*, or judge. *Shaykh al-Islam* also dealt with religious law, *Shari'a*, prohibiting what was forbidden by it and ordering what was advised. *Vakil-e halaliyat* is not explained but it translates roughly into 'deputy of good/permitted deeds' so it may be either a position of enforcing religious law or managing endowments.

324 Monshi, vol II, p. 954.

325 Ibid, vol I, p. 249.

326 Ibid.

327 Ibid, vol. II, p. 1189. Another source give the date 1031 A.H., see Hunarfar, p. 456.

328 Monshi, vol. II, p. 1190; Hunarfar, pp. 456-57.

329 Savory, pp. 154-55.

330 Monshi, vol. I, p. 249. *Ethna 'Ashariyat Arba'* literally means Twelve Four, or Four for the Twelvers.

- 331 Browne, vol. 4, p. 407.
- 332 See for example the poem in the domed hall west of the south dome, Hunarfar, p. 443.
- 333 Above, under Portal. This example came to Iran at a much earlier date, as is shown through its appearance on metalwork, Allan, p. 112, but there may be others whose provenance has not yet been discovered. Although Iranian Shi'is in general also hated the Ottomans, a Shi'i living under Ottoman rule and suffering their persecution would hold more intense feelings toward them. Shaykh Baha'i spent all of his life in Iran but his father had been forced to leave his native land by the Ottomans, and many other Shi'i theologians were executed in order to suppress any pro-Safawid movements.
- 334 For the Shaykh's connection to the Madrasah Sulaymaniyya and the Royal Mosque, see Hunarfar, p. 455.
- 335 There were two religious classes in Shi'i Iran. The official one was composed of men appointed by the Shah and his representatives, e.g. the *mulla bashi* (highest authority), the *sadr*, the *shaykh al-Islam*, etc... The second class was composed of the *mujtahids*, those who dealt with sacred law and stayed away from political practices. The imams who led the prayers were chosen from the second class, although occasionally a leading *mujtahid* would also become an official religious dignitary and continue to lead prayers. This was the case with Shaykh Baha'i. The two religious classes are discussed in Nasr, "Religion in Safavid Persia", *Studies on Isfahan*, Part I, pp. 275-77. Definitions of the titles of religious officials and their duties are in *Tadkhirat*, pp. 41-43.
- 336 Hunarfar, p. 429; Above, portal inscriptions.
- 337 Monshi, vol. II, pp. 724-25. The chronogram for the commencement of work in the *Nagshe Jahan* district was "the sapling bore fruit in accordance with the Shah's wishes", yielding 1006 A.H./1598 A.D.
- 338 Wilber, p. 42, gives the year 1617, while Pope, *Survey*, vol. III, p. 1199, citing Monshi, gives 1620. I have not been able to find the reference in Monshi under the events of any year between 1617 and 1620. Hunarfar, p. 466, gives the year 1026/1617.
- 339 'Ali Bakhtiar, "The Royal Bazaar of Isfahan", *Studies on Isfahan*, Part I., pp. 322-30.
- 340 Wilber, p. 42. The paintings were recently uncovered by a team of restorers led by G. Zander and E. Galdieri from the Istituto

Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente (ISMEO). The other wall paintings uncovered by this team, those of the 'Ali Qapu, the Chihil Sutun, and the Hasht Bihisht palaces, are discussed by Ernst Grube, "Wall Paintings in the Seventeenth Century Monuments of Isfahan", *Studies on Isfahan*, Part II, pp. 511-42.

341 Monshi, vol. II, pp. 1145-45.

342 The Ozbeg leader was Abd Allah II. Savory, p. 83.

343 Monshi, vol. II, P. 757; Savory, pp. 83-84. The Safawids had already routed part of the Ozbeg army when Din Muhammad Khan appeared with one thousand heavily armed men.

344 Savory, p. 84.

345 Of course many merchants were not Shi'a and the inscriptions act as a warning to Shi'i merchants not to be swayed by their fellows' practices.

346 Hunarfar, p. 442.

347 *Muqaddimah*, p. 297.

348 I have not been able to find any verses which correspond exactly to this *hadith*. It must also be pointed out that the text of the inscription is difficult toward the end, so that the specifications of rewards are not very clear.

349 Yousuf 'Ali, p. 1001.

350 Hunarfar, p. 443.

351 The verse itself is complete. The missing words at the beginning of the epigraph probably were the usual addition which defines the words as emanating from God, that is, 'God, Exalted and Mighty, has said...'. .

352 Although the Shi'ite reading is more pertinent to the objectives of the Royal Mosque, I have chosen to present the more generally accepted reading first. The Arabic original, of course, remains unchanged and only the meaning differs. It is the form of the translation which alters with the respective Sunni and Shi'i readings and not the body of the verse. This verse is also inscribed in the east dome where it is directly related to 'Ali.

353 The 'Allamah presents first the usual reading which has been included above, then brings in the second while pointing out that it is the latter version which is acknowledged by him. al-Tabataba'i, p. 177.

354 Ibid, al-Tabataba'i's exact reading is as follows:

Your friend *wali* can be only Allah;
And His messenger and those who
believe, who establish worship and pay
the poor-due while bowing down (in prayer).

355 Abu Dharr appears in the inscriptions of the Royal Mosque. Some information pertaining to him is supplied in the discussion of the east eyvan inscriptions.

356 From Tabari's *Dhakha'ir al 'uqba*, Cairo, 1356, p. 16. Quoted in al-Tabataba'i, pp. 177-78. 'The mosque of the Prophet' sets the scene of the incident in Medina.

357 The second part of this *hadith* is discussed in the section on the south eyvan. The second part ends with Abu Dharr's words, "the words of the Prophet had not as yet finished when the verse was revealed". This is verse V: 58 discussed here.

358 These are the sobriquets of Muhammad and 'Ali. They reappear (symbolically) in the inscriptions of the south eyvan.

359 Taken literally, the term 'Trinity' goes against the basic ideals of Islam. In Christianity the Trinity derives from the neo-platonic triad of being (*esse*), living (*vita*) and reason (*logos, intelligentia*). 'Being' is the Father while 'living' and 'reason' are the Son and the Holy Spirit. The three terms have Qur'anic counterparts in the attributes of God, "the Living" (*al-hayy*), "the Knowing" (*al-'alim*) and "the Powerful" (*al-qadir*) (respectively; II:255, II:29, XXX:54), Fischer, pp. 2-3. According to the Royal Mosque *hadith* the last two attributes are manifested in Muhammad and 'Ali who thus become essential components of the ultimate unity of God. The Trinity is essentially composed of Truth (God), Revealed Truth (Prophet Muhammad) and Esoteric Truth (Imam 'Ali). Compare to the *hadith* of Light inscribed in the west dome.

South Section

- 360 Hunarfar, pp. 439-41.
- 361 J.L. Michon, "Religious Institutions", *The Islamic City*, pp. 21-22.
- 362 Louis Gardet, "Religion and Culture", *Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 2B, p. 588.
- 363 The incident related by Anas Ibn Malek is described in such Shi'i collections as *al-Fusual al-Muhimma*, *Tadhkirat al-Khawass*, and *Yanabi' al-Mawaddah*. Listed in *al-Tabataba'i*, p. 220.
- 364 Jafri, p. 17.
- 365 Philip Hitti, *Islam: A Way of Life*, Regnery Gateway, Illinois, 1970, pp. 20-22. Hereafter, Hitti. Yousuf 'Ali, p. 138, n. 400, maintains that the Year of Deputations, or Delegations, was 10/632 in which case it would correspond to the Final Pilgrimage and the incident of Ghadir Khumm.
- 366 Watt, "Muhammad", *Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 1A, p. 39.
- 367 *Ibid*, p. 40.
- 368 *Ibid*, pp. 40-41; *al-Tabataba'i*, p. 191.
- 369 Dating actually commences on the first day of the Arab year in which the *hijra* took place, i. e. 16 July 622. Watt, "Muhammad" *Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 1A, p. 41.
- 370 Watt, *Political Thought*, p. 47.
- 371 Hitti, p. 22; Yousuf 'Ali, p. 1402, refers it to the Year of Deputations.
- 372 *al-Tabataba'i*, p. 191.
- 373 *Ibid*.
- 374 Hitti, p. 157. In the East Domed Hall it is 'Ali who is presented as the first *mu'adhdhin*.

375 al-Tabataba'i, p. 181.

376 Quoted in al-Tabataba'i, pp. 177-78; original sources listed p. 218, n. 7. This part of the *hadith* completes that discussed under the East Pillared Hall (east mihrab) at the end of which verse V: 58 was revealed.

377 This proclamation is identical to that of the Hadith of Ghadir discussed under East Dome and South Dome. The appointment of 'Ali as viceregent and vizier occurred on other occasions. According to another tradition the Prophet said, "This person ('Ali) is my brother, inheritor and viceregent. You must obey him". People then laughed and told Abu Taleb ('Ali's father), "He has ordered you to obey your son". al-Tabataba'i, p. 68, n. 3. Since Abu Taleb died in 619 A.D. this proclamation must have occurred at Mecca at least three years before the *hijra*.

378 Jafri, pp. 27-57 - chapter on Saqifa. - where numerous traditions in favor of the caliphates of Abu Bakr and 'Umar are also related (pp.32-36). 'Umar's behaviour on this occasion is also identical to that on the day of Ghadir.

379 See Qur'an LXXXV: 4; Yousuf 'Ali, p. 1714, n. 6055.

380 Hitti, p. 20; Yousuf 'Ali, p. 138, n. 400.

381 Quoted in Hitti, p. 20. These Christians became *dhimmis*, and although the treaty specifies that they would not be compelled to pay the tithe, our *hadith* mentions a kind of tax, *Kharaj*.

382 Yousuf 'Ali, p. 138, n. 400.

383 See Yousuf 'Ali, p. 230, n. 663; Fischer pp. 1-3 presents a Shi'i argument against the Trinity.

384 These injunctions also appear in II: 173-74; VI: 121; 138-146 and other verses, with further additions.

385 The *Kharaj* was exacted from *ahl adh-dhimma*, along with the *jizya* or poll tax, which a Muslim would not have to pay. Watt, *Political Thought*, p. 50.

386 The exact words could be an allusion to the 'boiling waters of the bottomless pit' which appears in several descriptions of Hell in the Qu'ran, for example LV: 44.

387 In this connection the Prophet's attitude toward Hasan and Husayn may be mentioned. In the *Manaqib of Ibn Shahrashub* (vol. IV, pp. 21; 25) and in *Dhakhā'ir al-'uqba* (pp. 67; 121) the Prophet is reported as saying "Hasan and Husayn are my children" which induced 'Ali to tell his other children, "You are my children and Hasan and Husayn are the children of the Prophet". This is interpreted by Shi'ism as a designation of Hasan and Husayn as followers of the Prophet by Muhammad himself. The above quotations are from *al-Tabataba'i*, p. 194.

388 *Ithna 'Ashari* Shi'ism was the official religion of Iran, but various sects and religions such as Sunnism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, etc... existed even within the capital itself. (see Introduction).

389 Hunarfar, pp. 431-33; Above, under Portal Minars.

390 For example the execution of all the men of Qurayzah and the expulsion of the clan of an-Nadir. Watt, *Muhammad*, pp. 171-75; 148-151.

391 Hitti, p. 20; the agreement is quoted above.

392 Vartan Gregorian, "Minorities of Isfahan; The Armenian Community of Isfahan 1587-1722", *Studies on Isfahan*, Part II, p. 655.

393 *Ibid*, pp. 656-57.

394 *Ibid*, pp. 662-63.

395 Monshi, vol. II, p. 859.

396 Gregorian, pp. 633-65, Carswell, *New Julfa*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1968, p. 6. Hereafter, Carswell.

397 Gregorian, "Minorities of Isfahan", *Studies on Isfahan*, Part II, p. 667.

398 *Ibid*, p. 671.

399 *Ibid*, p. 668, quoted from *Travels in Persia*, John Pinkerton ed., *A General collection of the Best and Most Interesting voyages and travels*, London 1811, vol. IX, pp. 27-43.

400 Carswell, p. 6.

- 401 Savory, p. 96. Allahverdi Khan had actually become commander of the *ghulam* regiment and Governor-General of Fars by 1595, so he was one of the earlier emigrants to Iran. *Ibid*, p. 81.
- 402 The arm and other relics were smuggled back to Etchmiadzin on its restoration in 1634. The stone altar remains in St. George's. Carswell, p. 7.
- 403 Gregorian, "Minorities of Isfahan", *Studies on Isfahan*, Part II, p. 667.
- 404 This was a practical arrangement since the Armenians were often the only ones able to communicate with the foreigners.
- 405 Carswell, p. 12. The Armenians also distilled their own 'strong water' (spirits), so the word *khamr* can have its complete meaning. Contemporary accounts state that the Armenians were moved out for selling wine to the Muslims (*Ibid*, note 56), but since that was normal practice it is easier to believe that the sales had become too excessive and overt, or that Shah 'Abbas II had an ulterior motive in evicting the Armenians from his capital.
- 406 Carswell, p. 13. These ceremonies must have been of an essentially symbolic nature, for the Julfites had only been in Iran for a few decades.
- 407 Thomas Boys to the Earl of Salisbury, June 10, 1609 in Sainsbury, ed., p. 186. Quoted in Gregorian, "Minorities in Isfahan", *Studies on Isfahan*, Part II, pp. 671-72.
- 408 Savory, p. 107.
- 409 *Ibid*.
- 410 Quoted in Savory, p. 116.
- 411 Many cases are discussed in Savory, chapter 5, "Relations with the West during the Safavid Period", pp. 104-27.
- 412 Monshi, Vol. II, pp. 1081-1083.
- 413 *Ibid*, pp. 1103-1109.
- 414 Monshi, vol. II, p. 1113.

- 415 Qur'anic phrases used by Monshi, vol. II, p. 1114.
- 416 Monshi, vol. II, p. 1286.
- 417 Watt, *Muhammad*, pp. 56-57. Zayd b. Arqam may, therefore, be identified as a son of the owner of the house.
- 418 The whole sentence seems to be in the spirit of a verse, but I have been unable to find a single example which includes it all.
- 419 These are some of the angels' duties as recorded in the Qur'an, XV: 8; XVI: 2; XIII: 11-12, etc. These duties are compared to those of the Household of the Prophet who have authority in interpretation of religious texts and are "inerrant in the explanation of the teachings and injunctions of Islam". Since the Prophet is reported to have said "Whosoever interprets the Qur'an according to his own opinion has made a place for himself in the Fire", this duty is indispensable to the *umma*. al-Tabataba'i, pp. 93-95.
- 420 Monshi, vol. I, pp. 1-2.
- 421 Monshi, vol. I, p. 2, n. 1.
- 422 Mustafa and Murtada are the respective sobriquets of Muhammad and 'Ali. Also mentioned in Savory's note, *Ibid*.
- 423 Watt, "Muhammad", *Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 1A, p. 47.
- 424 Yousuf 'Ali, p. 159, n. 400.
- 425 *Ibid*.
- 426 The sword later went to the 'Abbasid caliphs. According to one tradition the words *la yuktal Muslim bi kafir*, 'no Muslim shall be slain for an unbeliever', were inscribed on it. The sword is mentioned in the traditions of Ibn Sa'd. E. Mittwoch, "Dhu'l-Fakar", *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. II, p. 233.
- 427 al-Tabataba'i, p. 193.

428 A similar *hadith* is inscribed in the west dome where it is attributed to the Prophet's Night Journey. See Hunarfar, p. 452; above, under West Dome.

429 Hunarfar, pp. 438-39.

430 Jafri, pp. 231-32; Gardet, "Religion and Culture", *Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 2B, pp. 588-89.

431 al-Tabataba'i, p. 105.

432 Yousuf 'Ali, p. 1443, n. 5085 also identifies the star with Pleiades of the constellation Taurus.

433 Yousuf 'Ali, p. 1443, n. 5086.

434 Verse LIII: 9 states

And was at a distance
Of but two bow-lengths
Or (even) nearer. (LIII:9)

The two bow-lengths are interpreted by Sufi mystics as "two drawn bows, with their chords touching", thus forming a full circle of union between man and God. The Lote Tree is also a symbol of perfect knowledge. Yousuf 'Ali, p. 1444, n. 5089. This union is believed to have been achieved by 'Ali, the father of Sufism. In Sufi, Sunni and Shi'i spiritual chains 'Ali appears at the head of the *silsilah*, and as the spiritual pole (*qutb*) he is 'Universal Man', the 'Manifestation of the Divine Names' and the spiritual guide of the lives and actions of men. al-Tabataba'i, p. 55 where 'Ali is not given the title 'father of Sufism' but is considered the first scholar of metaphysics and the teacher of a number of religious scholars who became the forefathers of Sufism.

435 Discussed in Bell and Watt, pp. 127-135.

436 Ibid, p. 126.

437 Ibid, pp. 127-128; Yousuf 'Ali, p. 358, n. 1040. These people are identified as the builders of Eram, the city of great pillars, mentioned in LXXXIX: 7-8, and referred to in Monshi's description of Isfahan, see Introduction.

438 Bell and Watt, p. 128; Yousuf 'Ali, p. 360, n. 1043. These people are associated with al-Hijr in North-west Arabia. The site of *Mada'in Salih* (The Cities of Salih) is currently being excavated by an archeological team from the University of Riyadh.

439 Bell and Watt, p. 129.

440 Bell and Watt, p. 130; Yousuf 'Ali, p. 535, n. 1574.

441 This event is discussed in the chapter on *Saqifah* in Jafri, pp. 27-57; see also Mawlana Muhammad 'Ali, *A Manual of Hadith*, The Ahmadiyya Anjumah Isha'at Islam, Lahore, u.d., pp. 399-402. Hereafter, *A Manual of Hadith*.

442 Jafri, p. 34. In the *Hadith of Ink and Paper* the Prophet is quoted as saying, "Prepare ink and paper so that I will have a letter written for you which will be a cause of guidance for you and prevent you from being misled." (The choice of words is very appropriate to the accusations made in the inscriptions of the Royal Mosque). From *Tarikh-i Tabari*, vol. II, p. 436; and other sources including Bukhari's *Sahih*; quoted in al-Tabataba'i, p. 69, n. 11.

443 Ibid, pp. 34; 95; al-Tabataba'i, p. 52. 'A'isha is even accused of having the caliph 'Uthman murdered (Jafri, pp. 94-99). In view of her nomination of 'Ubayda b. al-Jarrah for the caliphate, she could in fact have been exacting revenge on 'Uthman whom she disliked. That would also explain her turning back towards Mecca on hearing of 'Ali's nomination and her participation with Talha and Zubayr in stirring the people against him.

444 al-Tabataba'i, pp. 41-42.

445 al-Tabataba'i, pp. 44-45; 70-71. Incidents of destruction of *hadith* are quoted from *Kanz al-'ummal* of Ala'al-Din Muttaqi. An account by 'A'isha on Abu Bakr's destruction of *hadith* is reported on p. 70, n. 28, (al-Tabataba'i). 'Umar's argument for the destruction of various books is also reported in Fischer, pp. 38-9.

446 See Jafri's chapter, "The Imamate of Ja'far as-Sadiq", pp. 259-288. At the fall of the Umayyads the Shi'is had high hopes of regaining the caliphate, but once again their position was usurped by the 'Abbasids who were descended from the Prophet's uncle and claimed to be among *ahl al-bayt*.

447 Jafri, p. 283.

448 Quoted in Jafri, p. 180. Visually represented in a miniature of Firdawsi's *Shahnama*, 'Parable of The Ship of Shi'ism'. See S.C. Welch, pl. 7.

449 Savory, p. 90.

450 Monshi, pp. 1272-1280. Accounts of these events are given under East Section.

451 Vaglieri, "The Patriarchal and Ummayyad Caliphates", *Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 1A, p. 124; Hitti, pp. 46, 49; J.L. Michon, "Religious Institutions", *The Islamic City*, pp. 21-22. The persecution of religious scholars under the 'Abbasids came to be known as the *mihna* (ordeal or inquisition). All officials were required to profess that the Qur'an was created and not eternal.

452 al-Tabataba'i, pp. 68-69.

453 Vaglieri, "Ghadir Khumm", *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. II, p. 993.

454 Jafri, p. 19.

455 Ibid, pp. 19-20.

456 Jafri, p. 21.

457 al-Tabataba'i, p. 218, editor's note, 6. For details of the Feast of Ghadir see above, under East Dome.

458 The same idea is incorporated in another *hadith* in which the Prophet states, "none of you has faith unless I am dearer to him than his father and his son and all mankind". *A Manual of Hadith*, p. 25. These concepts are closely connected with Sufi esotericism, but the Sufi interpretation will not be included here.

459 Watt, *Muhammad*, pp. 166-67. Watt, "Muhammad", *Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 1A, pp. 48-49.

460 Watt, *Muhammad*, pp. 167-68.

461 Watt, "Muhammad", *Cambridge History of Islam*, p. 49. Some accounts give the period of 27 days for the siege, Yousuf 'Ali, p. 1100.

- 462 Savory, p. 89. Najaf is the burial place of 'Ali, Karbala of Husayn, Kazimayn of Musa al-Kazim, the seventh Imam and the Safawids' direct link with 'Ali. 'Ali al-Naqi, the tenth Imam, and al-Hasan al-'Askari, the eleventh, are both buried at Samarra. Chittick, ed. *A Shi'ite Anthology*, p. 137-139.
- 463 Savory, pp. 89-90.
- 464 Monshi, vol. II, pp. 1278-79.
- 465 The theories of Ja'far 'as-Sadiq, the fifth Imam, as stated in Jafri, pp. 294-95. Quoted in Introduction.
- 466 Hunarfar, p. 441.
- 467 The *Hadith* of the Ship is quoted in the discussion under South Dome; Jafri, p. 180.
- 468 Watt, *Muhammad*, pp. 60-65, discusses the 'Satanic Verses'; and the shrines of Al-Lat, al-'Uzza and Manat in Ta'if, and around Mecca and Medina.
- 469 The Arabic word *allah* can be understood in either sense. In choosing the second, Muhammad diverted from the polytheism of the Meccans but still shared the name of their deity and its 'house'. See Bell and Watt, pp. 116-17.
- 470 The celebrated "Black Stone" in the Ka'ba is believed to be the sole remaining portion of Abraham's original temple to one God.
- 471 Yousuf 'Ali, p. 62, n. 160.
- 472 Even though the inscriptions point out the importance of the Royal Mosque as a new Ka'ba, the Ka'ba in Mecca as *qiblah* did not completely lose its importance. Evidence of this is borne out by the fact that great effort was expended in changing the axis of the mosque so it would face Mecca.
- 473 Monshi, vol. II, p. 801.
- 474 *Ibid*, p. 800.
- 475 *Ibid*, pp. 800-01.

476 McChesney, pp. 178-80. A table of the endowments of the Infallible Ones appears on p. 176. By far the most popular personages in receiving *thawab* were Shah Tahmasp and Shah Isma'il, presumably because they were the real founders of the dynasty. The largest land donation for the Royal Mosque endowment was made by Muhibb 'Ali. A list of the endowments inscribed on the portal of the Royal Mosque was destroyed in post-Safawid times. See discussion under Portal; Historical - secular inscriptions.

477 McChesney, pp. 182-83. One method of using the *waqf* as a tool of punishment was the exclusion of certain individuals from the *thawab* benefits, p. 185.

478 Monshi, vol. II, pp. 954-55. A manuscript of 'Attar's *Mantiq al-Tayr*, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (dated c. 1609) includes *waqf* stamps and must be among those donated at this time, see A. Welch, *Artists for the Shah*, p. 184.

479 Ibid, p. 955.

480 Ibid, pp. 955-56.

481 Ibid, pp. 928-30, for one example.

482 Ibid, p. 765. The 'miraculous' nature of the Safawid Shahs is not restricted to 'Abbas. Water with which Shah Tahmasp had washed his hands was said to cure illnesses, and his soldiers rushed into battle with no armor believing that they were protected by his divine powers. A description by a contemporary Italian traveller is given in the Conclusion.

483 Grabar, *Formation*, p. 121.

484 This interpretation is elaborated upon under Portal Minars and based on *Sense of Unity*, pp. 73-75.

485 Specified in Hunarfar, p. 462.

486 This part of the verse (has no partner in his dominion) is omitted in the portal minars, Hunarfar, p. 433; above, under Portal Minars.

487 Grabar, *Formation*, p. 120.

488 Hunarfar, pp. 460-62.

- 489 Ibid, p. 462.
- 490 Above, under North Eyvan.
- 491 Hunarfar, p. 463.
- 492 Monshi, vol. II, p. 1038, with slight variation.
- 493 Savory, p. 154.
- 494 Since the dome interior is seen as an 'all pervading spirit which encompasses all being', at its highest point the spirit is contracted to the limit and expresses the Unity of the Spirit of God. *Sense of Unity*, pp. 74-5.
- 495 The part in parentheses is not included in the inscription.
- 496 For the complete discussion of this verse see West Eyvan.

CHAPTER THREE

CONCLUSIONS

The *Masjid-i Shah* stands as a principal monument of Shah 'Abbas' policies. With the help of the best architects, engineers and craftsmen, the Shah strove to complete the 'second Ka'ba', the *qiblah* in which were condensed his hopes and beliefs. The situation governing the creation of the Royal Mosque reflects these ideas. The sense of urgency which permeated the actual process of construction indicates the need to demonstrate the Shah's program to resolve the national and international problems which faced Iran. Hopes for stability and prosperity, as well as deliverance from the immediate dangers situated at the borders of Iran, were voiced by Eskandar Monshi in his statement "may it (the Royal Mosque) bring him (the Shah) the stability of his kingdom."¹

In order to achieve this desired state of stability and power, Shah 'Abbas made use of the religious beliefs which had been instituted and promulgated by his ancestors. By asserting his authority as the divinely designated leader, he hoped to gain the unswerving loyalty of his subjects and to thwart the foreign powers which threatened the independence of his country. Thus, the main theme of the epigraphic program of the *Masjid-i Shah* was to be the legitimacy of the rule of *ahl al-bayt* and the grave error committed by those who do not acknowledge the authority of the descendants of the Prophet. Shah 'Abbas' own position and the legitimacy of his

family rested upon the institution of 'Ali b. Abi Taleb as a chief protagonist of Islam.

As has been seen, several proclamations in favor of 'Ali's rightful succession adorn the surfaces of the Royal Mosque. In each case epigraphy and architecture work together to elaborate upon this basic theme. They progress together from the more general assertions in the transitional eyvans to culminate with the most specific proclamations in sacrosanct areas, such as the mihrabs.

The proclamations begin on the exterior of the edifice, on the portal, where a series of historical and iconic epigraphs serve to introduce the outsider to the tenets of *Ithna 'Ashari Shi'ism*. Particular attention is accorded to the definition of *ahl al-bayt* as well as that of the mosque. In his *hadith* the Prophet nominates 'Ali as his *wasi* and vice-regent, and mentions Fatima, Hasan and Husayn as the purest of Muslims. He compares himself to a 'city of knowledge' and designates 'Ali as the 'gate' and the path toward clear understanding of the tenets of Islam.

In the same inscription 'Ali states that the mosque is itself a city of knowledge capable of elevating a believer to higher spiritual levels. On entering the mosque, therefore, the Muslim comes a step closer to the attainment of Truth, but this progression is governed by the nature of the mosque he enters. The Qur'anic verse with which the epigraph begins (IX: 108) specifies two types of mosques, those founded on pure foundations and their direct opposites, the mosques of impurity. To enter the wrong mosque, therefore, is to approach the

city of knowledge through the gate which leads to perdition. Likewise, the acceptance of the prophethood of Muhammad without the acknowledgment of the *wilaya* of 'Ali leads to the destruction of the Muslim's faith.

Behind the portal inscriptions are those of the north eyvan. As a second step into the mosque of purity, the north eyvan offers the believer the words of *sura Dahr*, LXXVI. The *sura* relates the process by which man was created, and the destiny which awaits him. The *sura* is directed at the true believers who choose the Royal Mosque as their path to salvation. It promises them a "Garden of Bliss" as a reward for an "endeavour accepted and recognised" (LXXVI: 22). As for those who "love the fleeting life" and thus walk on the materialistic path, they are threatened with annihilation (LXXVI: 27-28). Directly facing the north eyvan is the inscription of the exterior of the sanctuary dome in which, once again, the mosque is used as a metaphor for faith. Shah 'Abbas is mentioned in the same inscription as one of the pillars of the true mosque, thus the threat of annihilation applies equally to those who do not embrace true Islam as to those who do not pay allegiance to the Shah of Iran.

In the east section the discussion gradually progresses from a private nomination of 'Ali as *wali* during the Prophet's *mi'raj*, inscribed in the eyvan, to a more public proclamation in the dome epigraphs. *Sura Fath*, XLVII serves as an indicator that only Muslims who accept 'Ali can attain victory. 'Ali as holder of both *nass* and *'ilm* is the main subject of the mihrab inscription, thus becoming

intimately associated with this architectural form, and as previously seen, the designated *qiblah* of the True Faith.

The True Faith and the True Mosque are also discussed in the inscriptions of the west eyvan. The relationship between the true mosque, or faith, and 'Ali is elaborated upon in the dome chamber. Muhammad defines the source of his Prophethood, the Light of God, which is also the source of 'Ali's Imamhood. The journey of Light among the descendants of the Prophet through 'Ali and Fatima is supported by the *jam* which transports God's grace to Muhammad, 'Ali, Hasan and Husayn. The Light, like the caliphate and imamate which were awarded to the descendants of Husayn after the abdication of Hasan, remained among the progeny of the third Imam. The Light reappeared in the person of one of the descendants of the seventh Imam, the founder of the *Safawiyya* order, Shaykh Safi al-Din.² This reappearance signalled the coming of a king endowed with both knowledge and power, and capable of the destruction of the forces of evil; a Safawid descendant who would uphold *Ithna 'Ashari* Shi'ism and be the representative of God on Earth. It is unfortunate that the inscription of the west mihrab has not survived to provide the climax of this argument.

Closer to the sanctuary, in the prayer hall east of the south chamber, the argument becomes more intense, revolving exclusively around the figure of the Imam. As previously shown, each mihrab carries an independent coherent message, yet it is only when the sum total of these segmented epigraphs is studied that the full force of

the argument comes through. In this instance a further association links the epigraphs of the Royal Mosque with the neighboring bazaar, creating an unmistakable link between the words and the space in which they exist.

Adequately, the theme of the prayer hall epigraphs is prayer. Prayer, one of the pillars of Islam and the reason for the hall's existence, revolves around 'Ali. 'Ali is the pole of the faith and the guide to Truth whose sermons lead believers to the True Path. The conclusions to these covert statements are substantiated by a short inscription on one of the partition walls of the hall:

Had all the people been united in
the love of 'Ali b. Abi Taleb, God
would not have created the Fire.³

Unlike the messages of most of the epigraphs of the *Masjid-i Shah*, the message of this inscription is straightforward and clear: prayer outside the corpus of 'Ali's teachings leads directly to the fire.

In the west prayer hall this theme is elaborated upon by the inscription of a long Persian poem in which are incorporated some of the Arabic titles and definitions of the first Imam.

Love of 'Ali is Bliss
Partner in heaven and hell
Truly Mustafa's *wasi*
The Imam of man and *jinn*
O Subjugator of enemies
O *Wāli* of the *Walī*
O Manifester of miracles
O Murtada 'Ali.⁴

Although this poem was added at a later date, it serves as an indicator of the importance of 'Ali.

'Ali's high standing is repeated in the south eyvan

inscriptions where Muhammad informs believers that 'Ali's name and position as brother of the Prophet were inscribed on the gate of Paradise thousands of years before the creation of the heavens. This statement is used to support the major event recorded in the epigraph, the nomination of 'Ali as the Prophet's brother and vizier on the day of *mubahala*.. In the same inscription esoteric knowledge and spiritual leadership are combined with temporal rule by the symbolic use of *dhu'l faqar*, Muhammad's sword, which is awarded to 'Ali. The designation of 'Ali as the only rightful *wasi* of the Prophet is repeated in the south dome inscription. Once again news of this designation comes from God who sends a 'clear sign', the star, to reveal His wishes. The Prophet publicizes this revelation at Ghadir Khumm where he proclaims 'Ali the "Prince of the pure and the Slayer of infidels."

The final statement is that of the sanctuary mihrab. The inscription, a *hadith* attributed to the Prophet, proclaims that the sin of rejecting 'Ali's Imamhood far outweighs all the virtues of the most virtuous of men. Professing the Unity of God, being generous and charitable, performing the pilgrimage and dying for the sake of Islam, account for nothing if the Muslim does not add the *wilaya* of 'Ali to his set of beliefs. Thus, 'Ali's name is inscribed on the sanctuary minars along with that of the Prophet, so that all Muslims might see that their proximity to God is subject to their acceptance of both Prophet and Imam.

The Safawids used the Imamhood of 'Ali as a primary tool in their claim to leadership. Shah 'Abbas inscribed 'Ali's name on his

mosque as it had been inscribed on the gate of heaven. Like his predecessor, Shah Isma'il I, 'Abbas hoped that this act and belief would bring about victory. Isma'il had himself assumed a title identical to that of 'Ali, *wali allah*, which he passed on to his descendants.⁵ The Safawids thus became the Mahdi's representatives, performing the duties of guides and intermediaries between man and God. The concept of the intermediary is an essential factor in Twelver Shi'ism. As Seyyed Husain Nasr explains,

Man is in need of an intermediary between himself and God. Even after the descent of a revelation, the role of the intermediary must continue. Therefore, after the Prophet of Islam there must be Imams who act as intermediaries between men of later generations and God.⁶

The role of spiritual guide, or *murshid-i kamil*, was the traditional right of the *mujtahids* or the Sufi saints. The shah was expected to be a powerful secular leader and not a spiritual one. With the rise of the Safawids through the influence of the *Safawiyya* order, the shah began to assume both roles at once, to hold within him both 'Ali's *'ilm* and his *nass*. Following the traditions of Sufi saints, supernatural powers and insights were ascribed to the Shah, especially by the devoted *Qizilbash* troops. The *Qizilbash's* loyalty to Shah Isma'il prompted them to rush into battle without armor, confident in the Shah's power to protect them. They also appealed to him rather than to God for help, and attested "There is no god but God, Isma'il is the *wali* of God."⁷ After Isma'il's defeat at the battle of Chaldiran, however, the *Qizilbash* dissociated themselves from the Shah

and challenged his authority. After this monarch's death, civil war broke out between rival *Qizilbash* factions vying with one another for control of the state.⁸

A certain degree of stability was reinstated by Shah Tahmasp who was also successful in asserting that the shah was the "living faith". Tahmasp's success in this venture is indicated by the account of the contemporary traveller Vincenzo D'Allessandri who wrote,

The reverence and love of the people for the king... are incredible, as they worship him not as king, but as a god, on account of his descent from the line of 'Ali, the great object of their veneration. Those who are in sickness or hardships do not call to aid the name of God so much as that of the king, making vows to present him with some gift, and some go to kiss the doors of the palace, that house being considered fortunate which is able to get some cloth or shawl from the king, or else some water in which he has washed his hands which they consider a preventative of fever... his sons and sultans speak to him as if they could not find epithets worthy of such greatness, saying, "Thou art the living faith, and in thee we believe". And not only in the neighboring cities can one observe the signs of reverence, but also in the distant towns and places many hold that besides having the prophetic spirit, he has the power of raising the dead and working other like miracles.⁹

Though fanatical in spirit, these beliefs, which echo some of the inscriptions of the Royal Mosque, served to establish the early Safawids on the seat of authority. When Shah 'Abbas came to power he maintained the title of *murshid-i kamil*, but unlike his predecessors, he utilised it in changing the social structure of Iran. 'Abbas' claims of noble lineage were one aspect in his scheme for the

consolidation of the country. By maintaining the cult of the *Safawiyya* shaykhs and keeping alive the thrust of Safawid ideology, Shah 'Abbas increased the prestige of the religious classes and at the same time forced them to acquiesce to his position as the supreme leader. The weakening of the influence of religious authorities is reflected in the decline of the authority of the *sadr* and the *shaykh al-Islam* and the corresponding increase in the importance of secular positions such as that of the *divan-begi* and the vizier.¹⁰

Of even greater significance is the suppression of the Turkish *Qizilbash* leaders who had had a major influence in the affairs of state. The diminishing of *Qizilbash* power was effected by increasing and regrouping the various clans and thus diluting their influence.¹¹ Shah 'Abbas further weakened the *Qizilbash* by introducing foreign elements into the army and government. Promotions thus rested on personal merit and achievement rather than on tribal affiliation. The new elements in the administration were recruited from Georgia, Circassia, and Armenia. They formed a new middle class which controlled the economy of the country (under the supervision of the Shah) and served as the Shah's new army and third force. The introduction of the *ghulman-i khassa sharifa* (*ghulams* of the Private Household) also decreased the Shah's dependence upon the *Qizilbash* for military and administrative services. By training these new elements, Shah 'Abbas was able to fill many governmental positions with competent administrators and to form a standing army of forty thousand men.¹² Thus, Shah 'Abbas succeeded in unifying the country which Chardin described as being "split up among various vassals" and needing to be

conquered "as if it were a foreign land."¹³ In this conquest the Royal Mosque and its epigraphs stand as an affirmation of Shah 'Abbas as 'godhead' and as a monument to the transformation of a system of government based on "tribal feudalism" into "patrimonial absolutism".¹⁴

As has also been seen, apart from being a general assertion of Shah 'Abbas' 'right to rule', the inscriptions contain various direct references to the internal situation in Iran. In speaking of treachery and hypocrisy for example (portal, south section, east dome),¹⁵ the epigraphs advise total obedience to the Shah, for in disobeying him, his subjects would be disobeying the Prophet who decreed the authority of the descendants of 'Ali. This acts as a weapon of psychological warfare directed at both the religious leaders and the *Qizilbash*. The revolts and intrigues of these groups had plagued the reigns of both Shah Tahmasp and Shah 'Abbas, and their total submission was essential for the well-being of the country. In this sense, the *Masjid-i Shah* can be seen as a symbolic monument for the appropriation of Iran to Safawid, particularly ''Abbasi',¹⁶ ideology. Applied to external affairs it becomes a monument of symbolic appropriation of the land for Shi'i ideals and, once again, for the Shah of Iran.

The Royal Mosque addresses the international situation which faced Shah 'Abbas on his accession to the throne in 1588. The country was not only torn by civil wars, but also greatly reduced in size through the occupation of the provinces in the west and north-west by the Ottomans and those in the east by the Ozbegs.¹⁷ Both of these adversaries adhered to the Sunni sect of Islam which challenged the

authority of the descendants of the Prophet and separated the concept of the caliphate from that of the imamate. The *Masjid-i Shah* argues against this philosophy by furnishing textual evidence as proof of the supreme authority of the Imam. The *hadith* and Qur'anic quotations chosen for this purpose are used as examples of accepted conduct as decreed and taught by the Prophet. The majority of the Qur'anic verses, a prime example of which is verse V: 58 which appears in the west dome and in the east pillared hall, are open to Shi'i *ta'wil*. Since these verses are the words of God they provide, according to Shi'ism, uncontested proof of the investiture of the Imam as the living spiritual authority.

Furthermore, the recounted incidents and inscribed verses also contain direct references to the contemporary military situation. Verse LXII: 9 in the pillared hall which directs our attention to the bazaar and the monumental painting depicting Shah 'Abbas' victory over the Ozbegs, acts as a reminder of the Ozbeg defeat in 1598. While the Ozbegs were defeated, the more powerful, essentially expansionist power to the west of Iran continued to thrive and to threaten Shah 'Abbas' internal security. That the *Masjid-i Shah* was built in a period when Ottoman-Safawid relations were at their most intense, indicates that the mosque itself was to be used as an instrument in calling the Iranians to holy war. The epigraphs in the Royal Mosque can, therefore, be seen as an inscribed *da'wa*, a call to *jihad* and to the recognition of Safawid ideals.

The texts chosen for the epigraphic program of the Royal

Mosque, especially the Qur'anic quotations, are records of Shah 'Abbas' campaigns and exploits against the Ottomans. Historically, these verses are related to the Prophet and his own campaigns against the enemies of Islam. On an intermediate level, many of the verses and the incidents which they describe are related to 'Ali and his own exploits against the usurpers of his divinely decreed authority. Analogies are drawn between Muhammad's and 'Ali's situations and that of Shah 'Abbas. The pagans against whom the Prophet waged war are likened to the first three caliphs and the Umayyads who challenged 'Ali. The descendants of the Infallible Imam are then presented as the last in the series of *mujahidun* (religious warriors) against the descendants of the 'pagans', the Ottomans.

The comparison is best illustrated by the portal inscription in which a single verse leads to a complex and involved interpretation. Verse IX: 108 enjoins believers to pray only in the mosques whose foundations are pure and true. By implication, there must exist mosques with impure foundations, and those are discussed in verse IX: 107 which is not included in the inscription. The mosques of purity and impurity are related to a specific historical incident in which a group of dissidents built a mosque which was to be the site of the Prophet's assassination. While on his Tabuk expedition in 630 A.D., the Prophet learnt of the true purpose of this mosque and thus denounced its builders as well as those who had betrayed his mission (those who refused to join the expedition and who broke their oaths) as unbelievers and hypocrites. In contrast to the mosque of dissension stood the mosque of Piety at the suburb of Qoba. In 624 A.D. this

mosque had been the site of the shift of *qiblah* from Jerusalem to Mecca. The verse revealed to the Prophet on that occasion (II: 144) is conveniently inscribed in the east chamber mihrab where it is directly related to 'Ali.

'Ali himself had faced a similar situation, involving a number of hypocrites, after his accession to the caliphate in 656 A.D. For these enemies and agitators 'Ali coined the terms *an-Nakithun*, *al-Mariqun* and *al-Qasitun*, indicating that they had missed the True Faith and acted against religion. These terms have been seen to apply to Shah 'Abbas' own enemies, for contemporary to this epigraph he was planning and organizing a campaign against the Ottoman forces based in Baghdad and in some of his western provinces.

It may be suggested at this point that verse IX: 108 should be applied exclusively to the nature of the mosque, without being extended to cover the situation which governed its revelation or the analogies between the earliest incident and later ones. That Shi'ism considers the Qur'an to be of multiple meanings applicable to various situations. has already been indicated by the interpretation of verses LIII: 1-2 (the falling star) and V: 58 (giving charity while kneeling) among others. Modern Shi'ism has recourse to these and similar verses for the support of the appointment and infallibility of the Imam.¹⁸ Further proof is furnished by the Royal Mosque itself where, on the sides of the east dome, certain verses are attached to specific individuals among the family of the Prophet. Once again, the word of the Qur'an is used as an introduction to the primary beliefs of

Shi'ism. Verses associated with 'Ali, Hasan or Husayn serve as indicators of the roles each of the protagonists played in the development of the faith. They also record the most significant actions and attributes for which each of the individuals is remembered. Upholding these protagonists and expounding their virtues thus formulates an attack upon Sunni saints, specifically Abu Hanifa who is buried not too far from 'Ali's own shrine. As Abu Hanifa's power dwindles before that of 'Ali, so too do his followers, the Ottomans, pale before the might of Shah 'Abbas.

Certain Qur'anic passages are also of universal appeal for architectural use. Verses XXX: 56, XVII: 111 and sura CXII, inscribed on the Royal Mosque minars form part of the epigraphic program of the Dome of the Rock.¹⁹ Others, such as verse LXII: 9 and XLVIII: 1-10 appear among the inscriptions of the Quwat al-Islam mosque in Delhi.²⁰ In each of these cases the structures were themselves used as vehicles and signs of the spread of Islam, and are thus connected with the prevailing political events. Oleg Grabar commented on the standard use of Qur'anic passages in the following words:

...as our knowledge of Islamic art progresses, it becomes more and more evident that Qur'anic citations were used in the manner of Biblical subjects in Christian iconography. They were the vehicles - or at least one of the vehicles - through which the culture separated the typical from the topical, the transcendent and permanent from the unique and permanent. ...through its iconography, Islamic architecture will acquire a new dimension not only for the art historian but for the social and

political historian as well.²¹

The non-Qur'anic epigraphs of the Royal Mosque support this contention. The prevailing contemporary events, which can be explored through the epigraphs, also provide evidence for the existence of a strong link between epigraph, mosque and political history. This is not the case in the *Masjid-i Shah's* neighboring mosque, the Shaykh Lutfallah. Built between 1603 and 1608, the Shaykh Lutfallah Mosque was also an integral part of the *Naqsh-e Jahan* district. Like its larger counterpart, this mosque was supplied with an epigraphic program. The inscriptions of the Shaykh Lutfallah Mosque, however, are comprised mostly of long litanies and prayers interspersed by various Qur'anic citations.²² While the litanies are of a pious and zealous nature, they are devoted mostly to the recounting and blessing of the Twelve Imams. The spirit of *jihad* seen in the Royal Mosque is not apparent here, and certainly nowhere are any enemies of Shi'ism mentioned by name as they are in the Royal Mosque (exterior of the south dome). Thus, the Shaykh Lutfallah stands as a devotional chapel in contrast to the Royal Mosque's standing as a political statement.

Executed in fine *thuluth* script and placed high above the ground, the inscriptions of the Royal Mosque may never have been read by the casual visitor. Certainly, the Ottomans and Ozbegs, apart from those attached to diplomatic missions, could not even have had the chance to read the charges levelled against them by the mosque. As such the epigraphs stand primarily as symbols, their presence is necessary for the mosque to be considered complete. These inscriptions, however, are based on an ancient and firmly established oral tradition.

The 'sermons' delivered by the epigraphs are merely a reflection of the Twelver religious views and of Shah 'Abbas' diplomatic procedures. The established importance of the Royal Mosque and its standing as a political monument are reflected in the attention awarded to it by later shahs and dynasties. As is the case with the Dome of the Rock and the Quwat al-Islam Mosque, later rulers recognized the significance of the *Masjid-i Shah* as a symbolic political statement and expressed this recognition by inscribing their names on it. By so doing, these monarchs transferred the roles of warners and religious warriors from the original builder of the mosque to themselves. With each additional name a further dimension was added to the argument of the epigraphs.

The designer of the epigraphic program of the Royal Mosque remains a mysterious figure. An argument for the identification of this personality with that of Shaykh Baha' al-Din 'Amili has been presented in the discussion of the epigraphs in the east pillared hall. Shaykh Baha'i was indeed the mastermind behind the planning of the New Isfahan, and Shah 'Abbas' right-hand man in various affairs, but seventeenth century Isfahan was not in any way short of religious scholars, as can be seen from Eskandar Monshi's history of the period. As with everything else relating to his kingdom, however, Shah 'Abbas would have personally seen and approved the plans for the inscriptions. He could possibly have directed the epigraphic design himself, choosing texts that were most in line with his policies and beliefs. In either case, the inscriptions stand as the symbolic images of what he

considered the ultimate Truth, for writing occupies the final place in *'alam al-mithal* (the world of images), being the last expression of the ideas otherwise manifested in speech.²³

Finally, the epigraphs of the Royal Mosque are closely connected with the concept of the Mahdi. The philosophy of the Hidden Imam arose at a time which the followers of the Shi'i faith considered a period of oppressive rule. All the sects which adhere to the concept of al-Mahdi are, in effect, awaiting a saviour who will restore justice and reinstate the position of the people of the Household. His reappearance will herald a complete change in which stability and peace will be restored, states of affairs not unlike those desired by Shah 'Abbas. The epigraphs of the Royal Mosque indicate that its purpose was to be a signal for the beginning of a new era of justice in which the Safawids would be recognized as the legitimate rulers of Iran and the possessors of Muhammadan Light.²⁴

Eskandar Monshi, in one of his many prayers for Shah 'Abbas writes,

May his reign be coterminous with
the second coming of the Lord of
the Age. May his subjects rest
secure in the shadow of his majesty
and justice on earth, and in the
next world, through his mediation
on the day of resurrection, quaff
the waters of Paradise.²⁵

Shah 'Abbas' policies, his social reforms and expansionist plans, were directed at stabilising the nation. This venture was so effective that Browne was compelled to compare Shah 'Abbas to Solomon:

There is a well-known tradition of the Muhammadans that Solomon died standing, supported by the staff on which he leaned, and, that his death remained unknown to the *Jinn*, who laboured at his command in the construction of the Temple, for a year, until the wood-worm ate through the staff and the body fell to the ground. This legend may well serve as a parable of the century of Safawi rule which followed the death of Shah 'Abbas the Great, who, by his strength and wisdom, gave to Persia a period of peace and outward prosperity which for nearly a hundred years protected his successors from the results of their incompetence.²⁶

Shah 'Abbas brought peace and prosperity to Iran. He performed the duty of a warner and an exterminator of the forces of evil. By doing this he brought about a situation not unlike that which would prevail under the Twelfth Imam. Although Shah 'Abbas may not have been the Mahdi, the Royal Mosque, the document of his accomplishments, reveals that he fulfilled the role of the Twelfth Imam.

CHAPTER THREE

FOOTNOTES

¹ Monshi, vol. II, p. 1039.

² Monshi, vol. I, p. 23.

³ Hunarfar, p. 444. This inscription is not dated and because of its isolated position it has not been discussed before. Another straightforward inscription in the same spirit as the one on the wall and of the same date as the poem in the west prayer hall is on the mihrab of the Nasiri Madrasa. It states, "*Bismillah*, the Messenger of God, God's Blessings and Peace upon him and the people of his Household, has said, 'If the trees were pens and the seas were paper and the earth an inkwell and men and *jinn* (spirits) were accountants and writers, they would not be able to list the virtues of 'Ali b. Abi Taleb, upon whom be God's Praise' ". Ibid, p. 455.

⁴ Hunarfar, pp. 443-44. The inscription is on the stone water channel of the pillared hall and ends with a reference to the 'second Ka'ba' and the date 1095 A.H.

⁵ Savory, p. 23.

⁶ Nasr, "Ithna 'Ashari Shi'ism and Iranian Sufism", *Religion in the Middle East*, general ed. A.J. Arberry, vol. 2, *Islam*, ed. C.F. Beckingham, Cambridge University Press, G.B. 1969, p. 104.

⁷ Savory, p. 24.

⁸ Ibid, p. 46.

⁹ "Narrative of the Most Noble Vincento D. Allesandri", *Narrative of Italian Travels in Persia in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Century*, Hakluyt Society, ed. C.H. Grey, Series 1, No. 49, London, 1873, p. 223.

¹⁰ *Tadhkirat*, pp. 111-12; 119.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 18.

¹² Savory, pp. 78-90.

- 13 Related in *Tadhkirat*, p. 16.
- 14 *Tadhkirat*, pp. 12-13, the term 'godhead' is used by Minorsky.
- 15 Where the Prophet threatens the enemies of 'Ali.
- 16 'Abbasi is used here to refer specifically to the policies of social reform and diplomatic relations instituted by Shah 'Abbas I.
- 17 Savory, p. 76.
- 18 See al-Tabataba'i, chapter on Imamology.
- 19 Grabar, "Dome of the Rock", p. 53; *Formation*, p. 63.
- 20 Page, pp. 31-32, only the first six verses of sura XLVIII are used.
- 21 Grabar, "The Inscriptions of the Madrasah - Mausoleum of Qaytbay", *Near Eastern Numismatics, Iconography, Epigraphy and History*, D. K. Kouymjian, ed., American University of Beirut, Lebanon 1974, p. 468. Hereafter, *Near Eastern Numismatics*. Examples of the iconographic use of Qur'anic citations may be found in Dodd and Khairallah, *The Image of The Word*, American University of Beirut, Lebanon, 1981, especially vol. I.
- 22 See Hunarfar, pp. 401-15. The *hadith* inscribed in the Shaykh Lutfallah Mosque speak mostly of the attributes and virtues of the Muslim, and these again are in the spirit of prayers, e.g. pp. 407-408.
- 23 The philosophical view on writing is discussed in F. Rosenthal, *Four Essays on Art and Literature in Islam*, E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1971, pp. 50-62.
- 24 Muhammadan Light is used here to mean the 'Light from Muhammad' as discussed under the inscriptions of the West Dome.
- 25 Monshi, vol. II, pp. 955-56. This prayer was offered after Shah 'Abbas constituted all his personal estates into *waqf* for the Fourteen Immaculate Ones.

²⁶ Browne, vol. IV, p. 111. Browne uses 'Muhammadans' to mean Muslims. The story of Solomon's death appears in the Qur'an, XXXIV: 14.

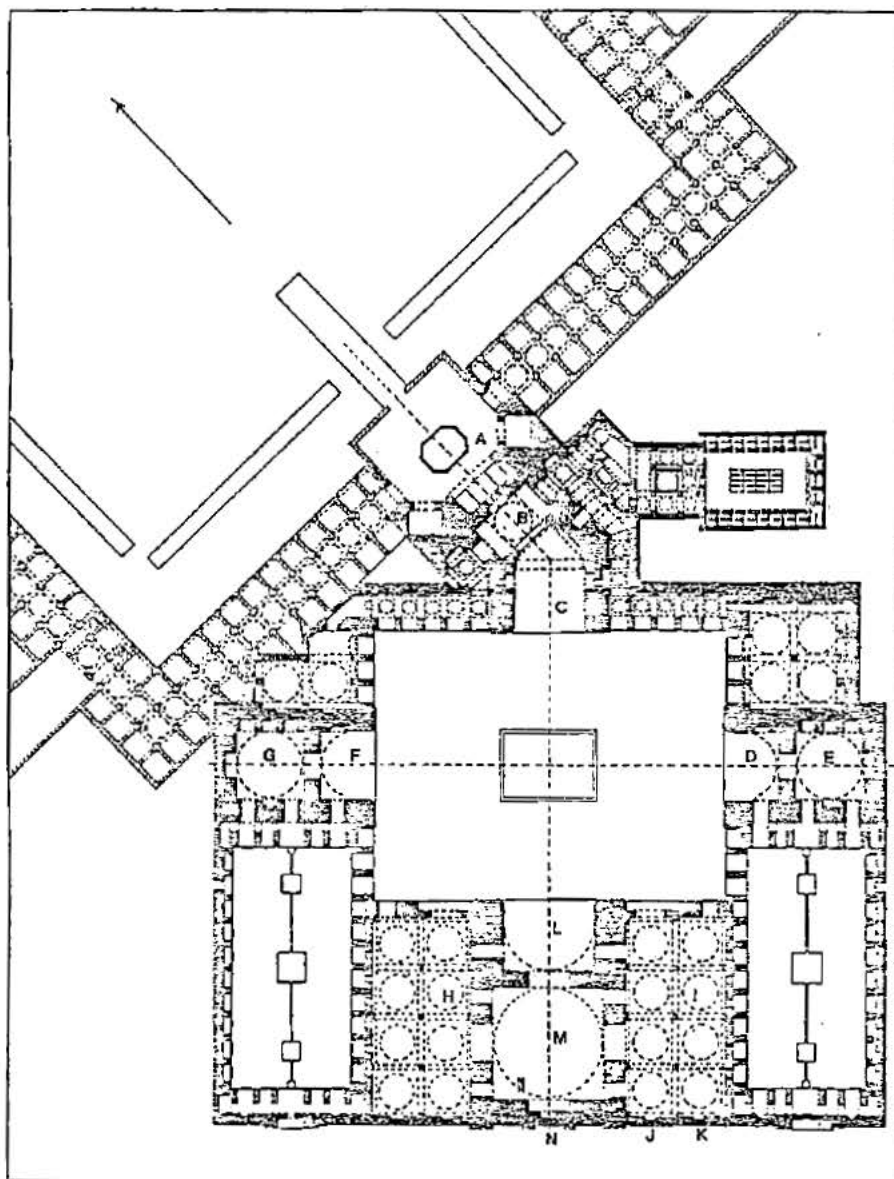


Fig. 1. The Royal Mosque. Ground plan.

- A-Portal.
- B-Vestibule.
- C-North Eyvan.
- D-East Eyvan.
- E-East Domè Chamber.
- F-West Eyvan.
- G-West Dome Chamber.
- H-West Prayer Hall.
- I-East Prayer Hall.
- J-West Mihrab.
- K-East Mihrab.
- L-South Eyvan.
- M-South Dome Chamber.
- N-Sanctuary Mihrab.
- O-Court.

(Pope, *Survey*, vol. III,
p. 1187, fig. 419)

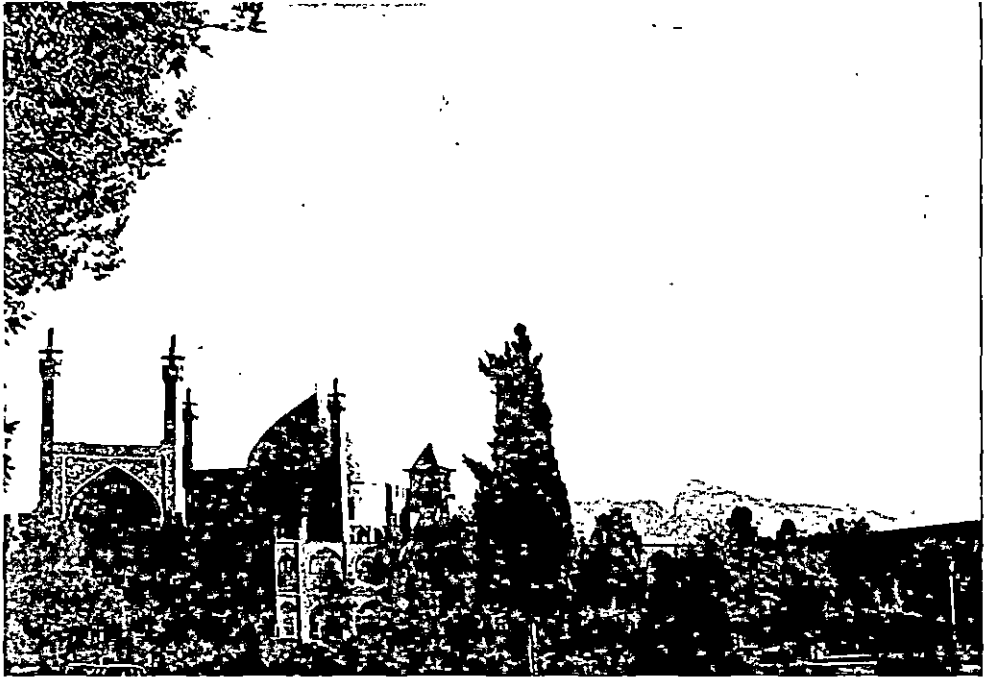


Fig. 2. The Royal Mosque. View from north-west.

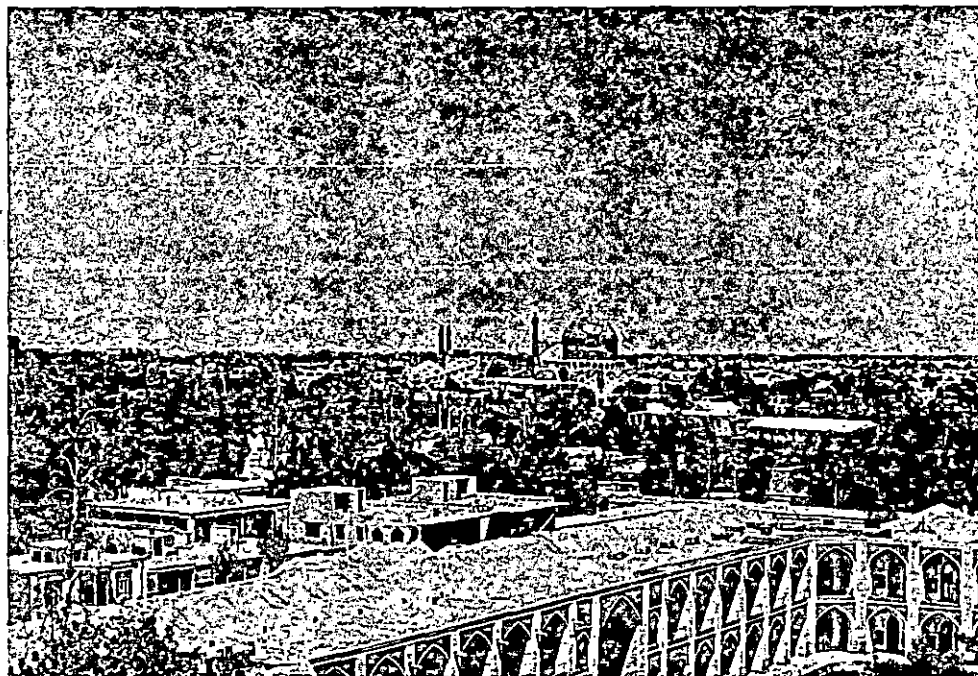


Fig. 3. The Royal Mosque. Distant view with the Shaykh Lutfallah Mosque to the left.

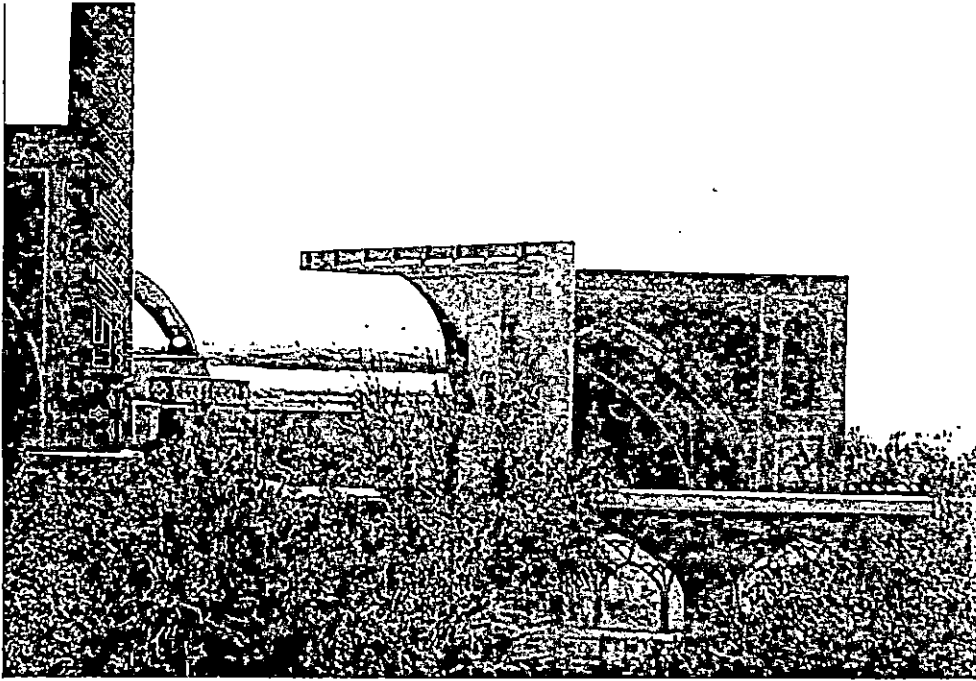


Fig. 4. The Royal Mosque. Entrance vestibule.

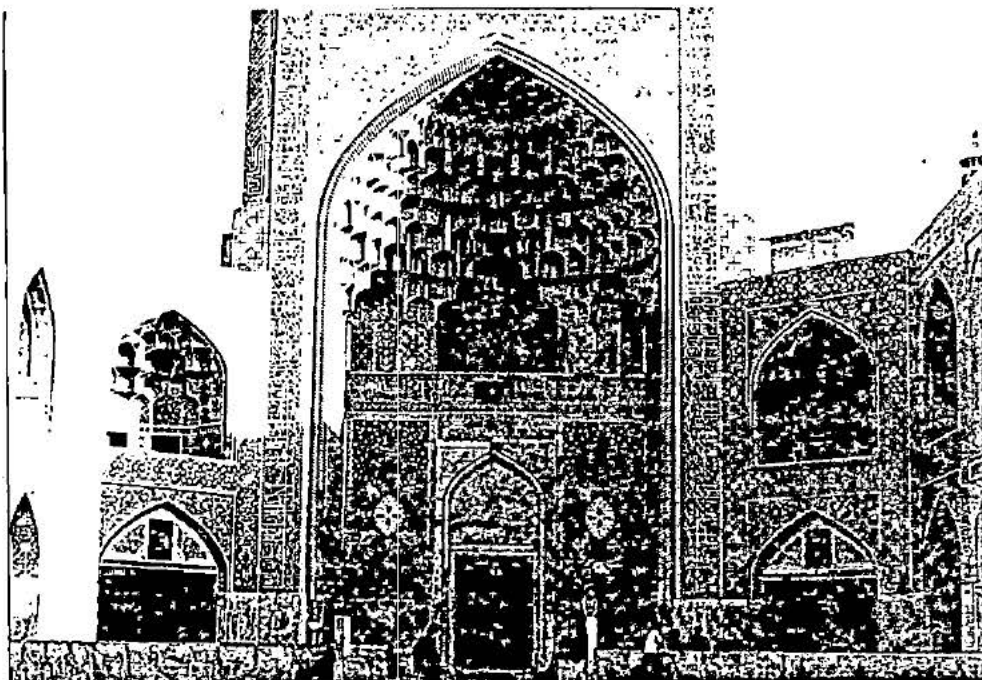


Fig. 5. The Royal Mosque Portal. Historical-secular inscriptions.

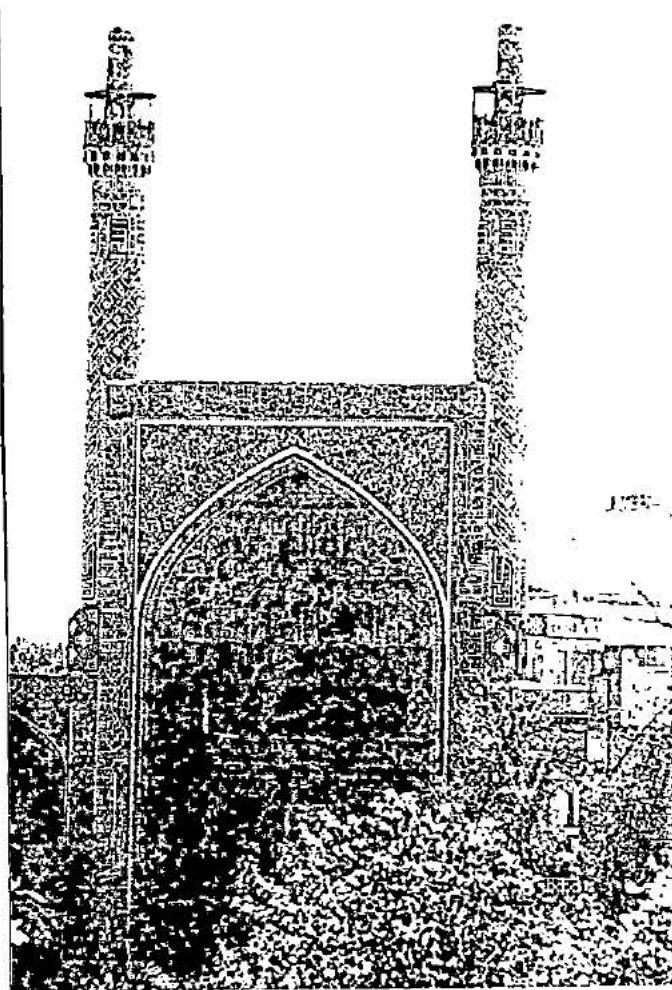


Fig. 6. The Royal Mosque. Portal and Portal Minars. Historical-secular; religious-iconic epigraphs.

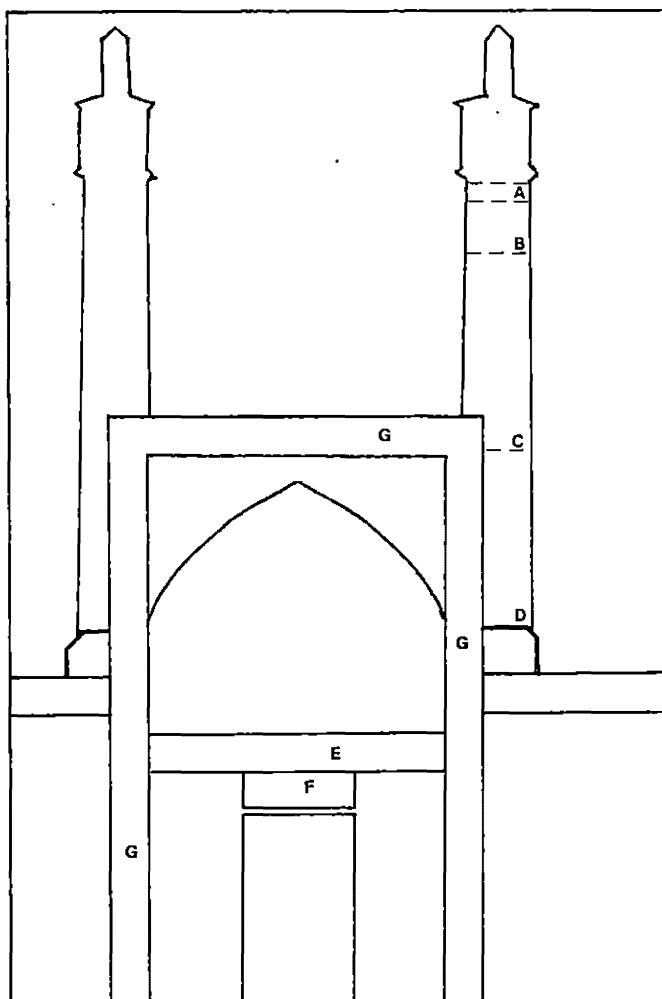


Fig. 7. The Royal Mosque. Diagram of the portal and portal minars.
 A-XXXIII:56 and XVII:111.
 B-Allah.
 C-Akbar and *Shahada*.
 D-Sura CXII.
 E-Historical-secular epigraph: donor and recipient of *thawab*.
 F-Historical-secular epigraph: supervisor and architect.
 G-Religious-iconic epigraph: IX:108 and *hadith*.

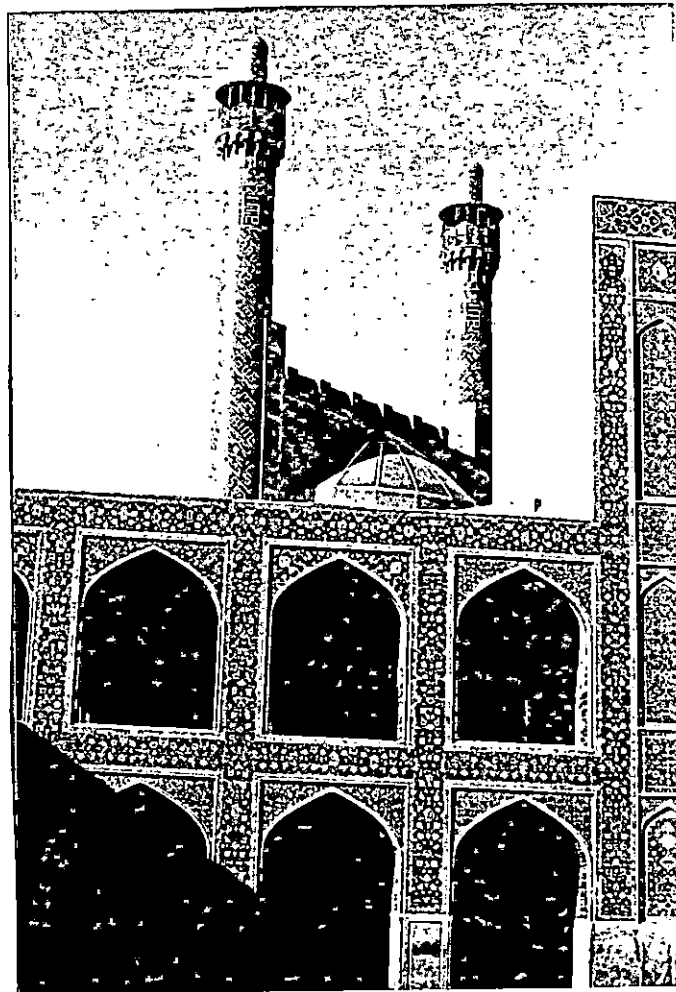


Fig. 8. The Royal Mosque. Portal Minars.
Back view.

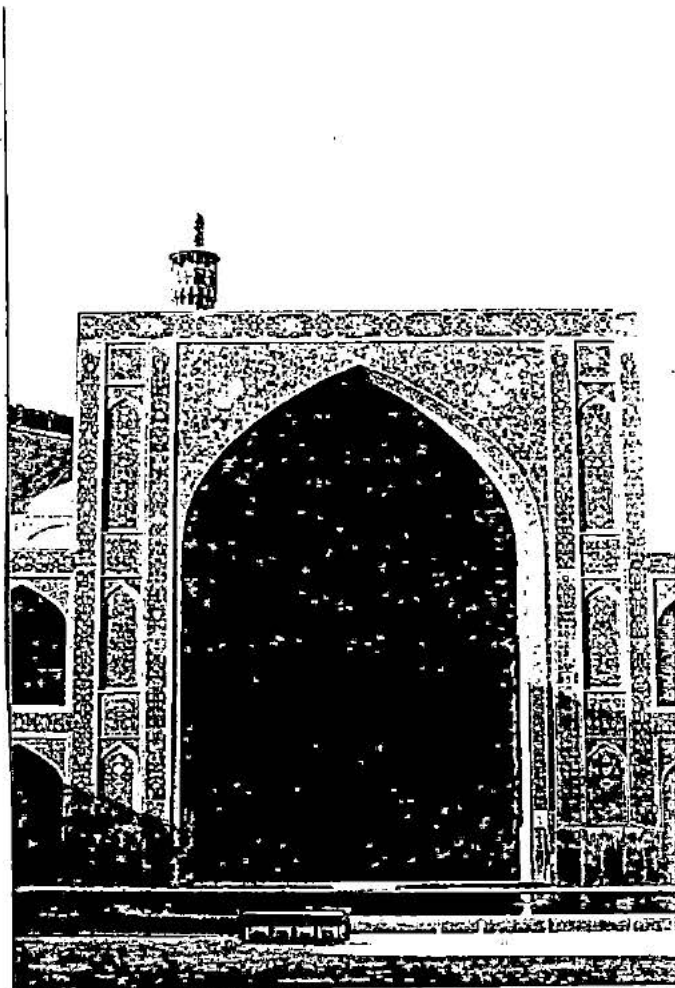


Fig. 9. The Royal Mosque. North Eyvan.
Epigraph: Sura LXXVI.

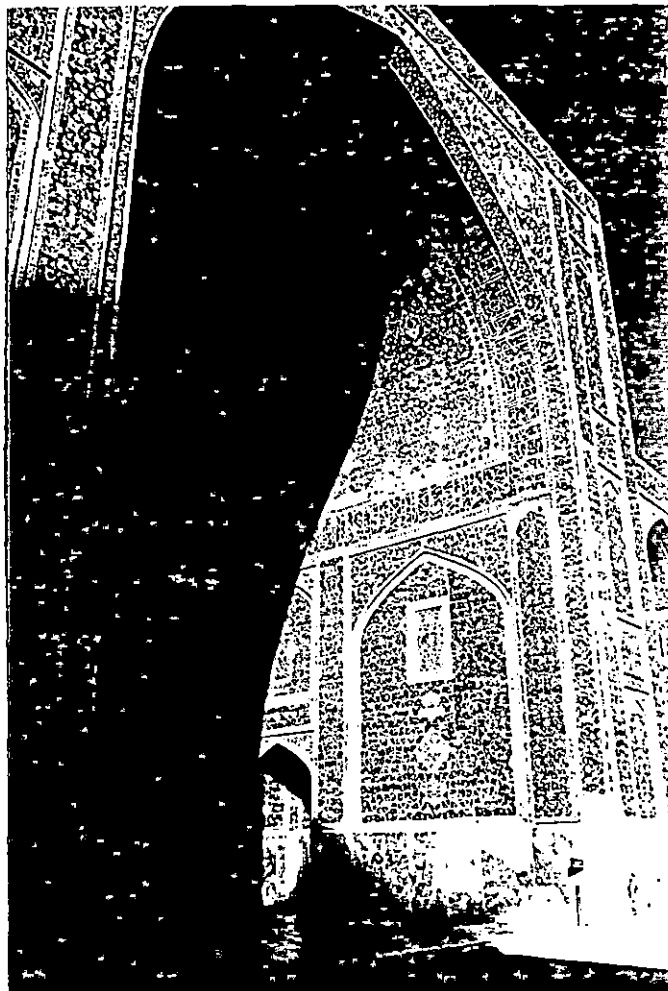


Fig. 10. The Royal Mosque. North Eyvan .
Side view.

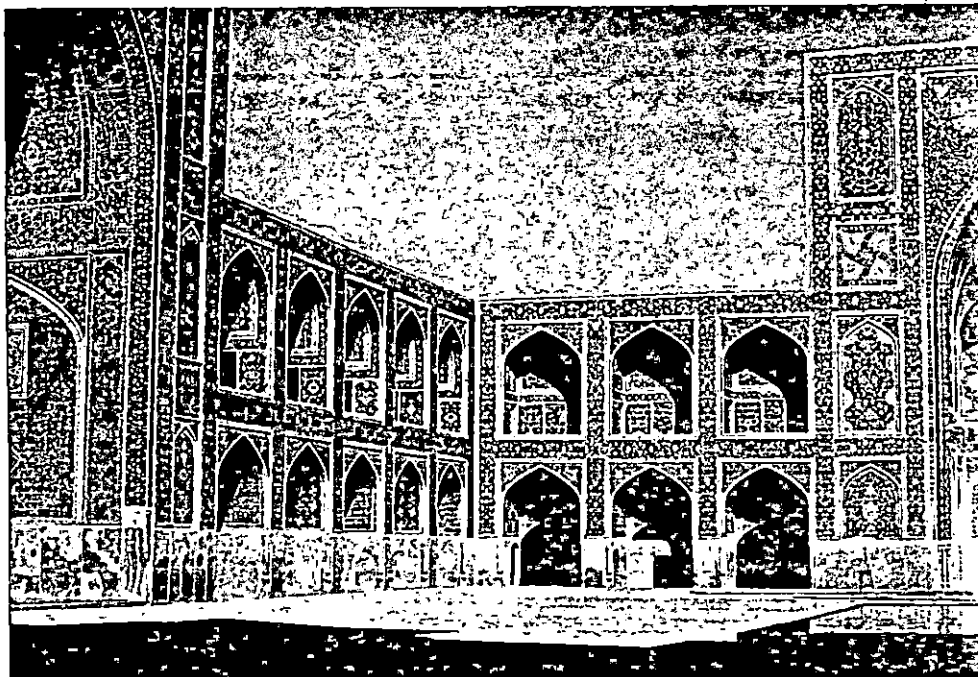


Fig. 11. The Royal Mosque. North-east corner of court.

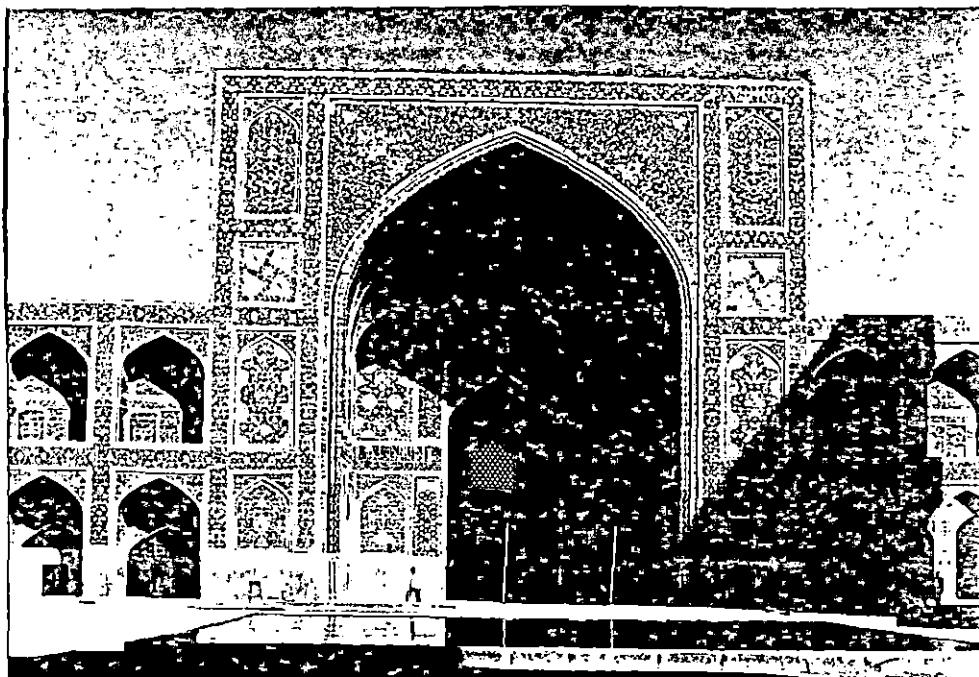


Fig. 12. The Royal Mosque. East Eyvan.

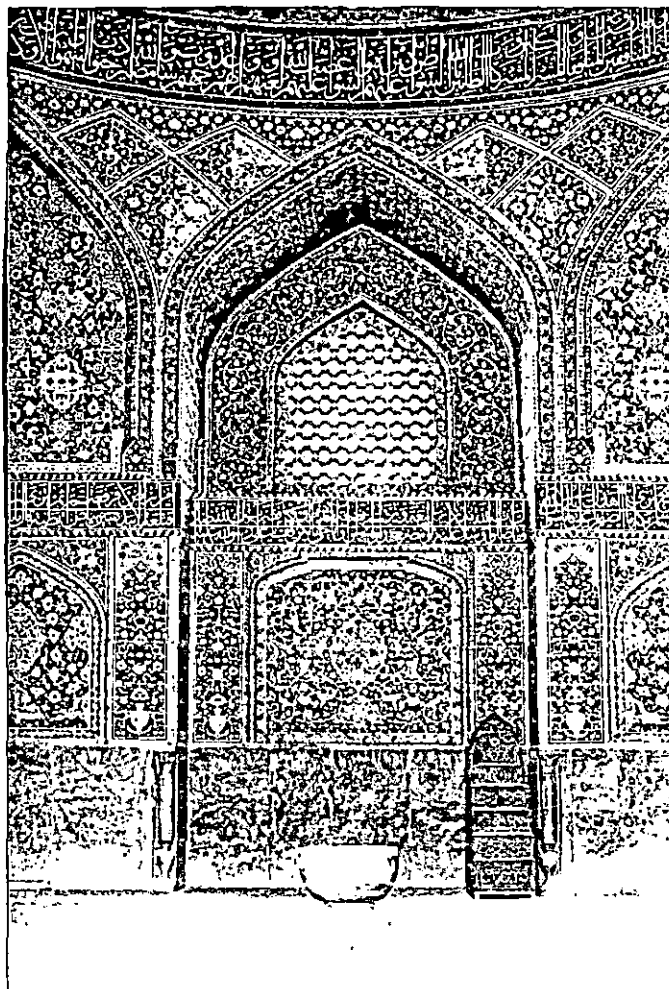


Fig. 13. The Royal Mosque. East dome Chamber.

Drum Epigraph: *Sura XLVIII.*

Side Epigraphs: *Hadith.*

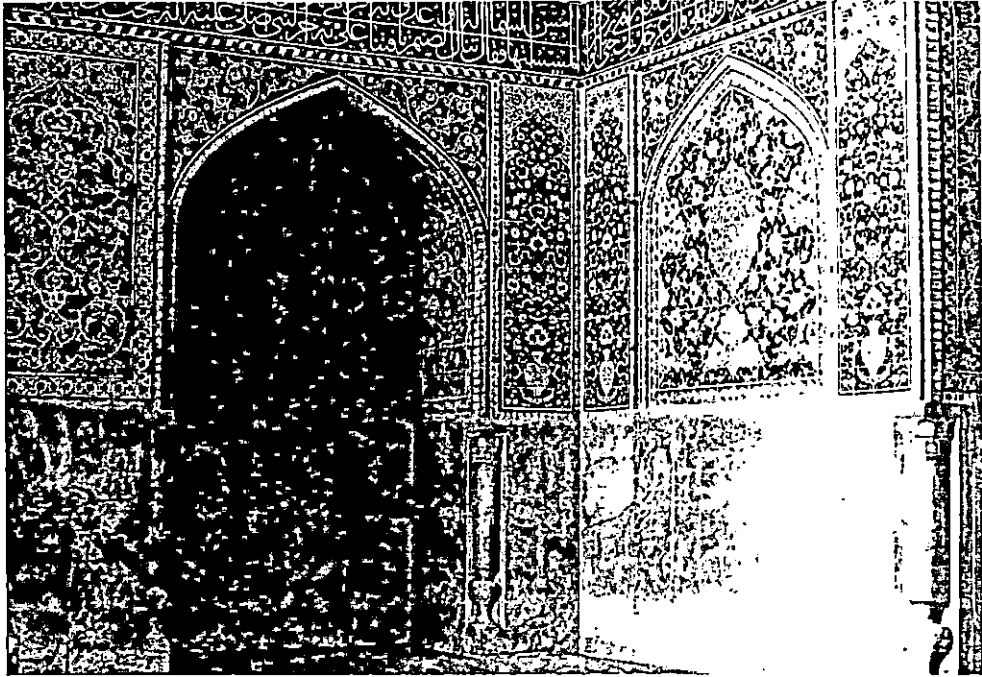


Fig. 14. The Royal Mosque. East Dome Chamber. Sides under
Dome - detail.

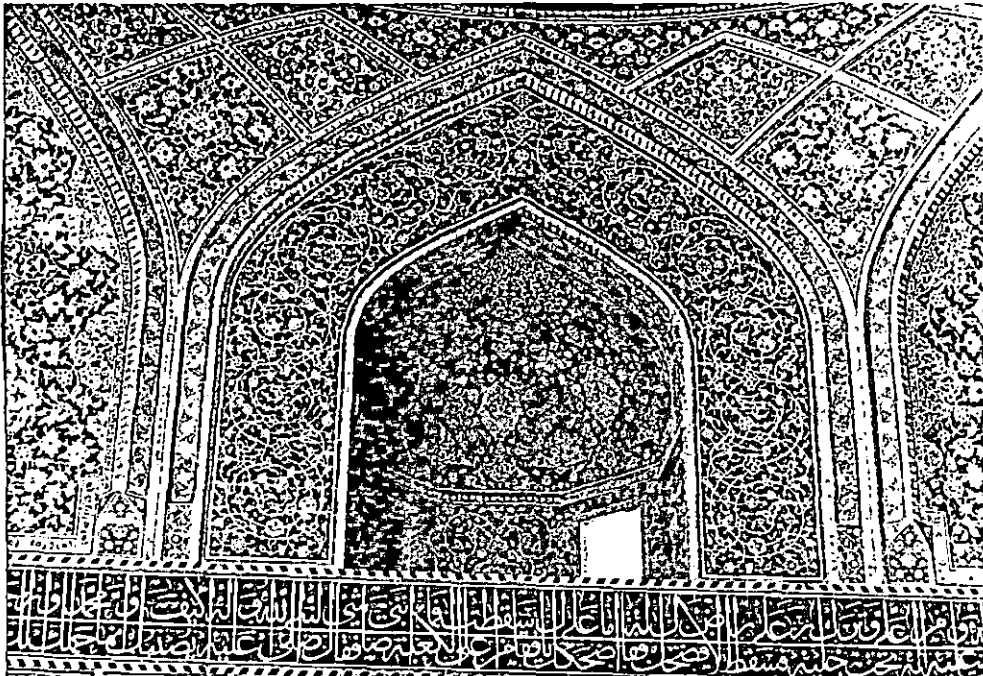


Fig. 15. The Royal Mosque. East Dome Chamber. Sides under dome - detail.

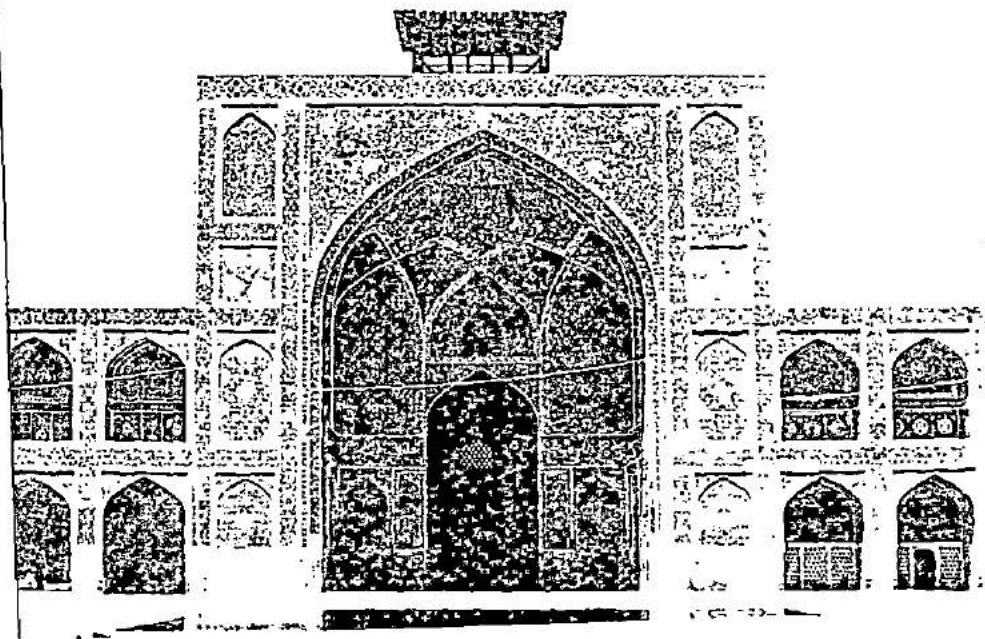


Fig. 16. The Royal Mosque. West Eyvan with *Goldasteh*.

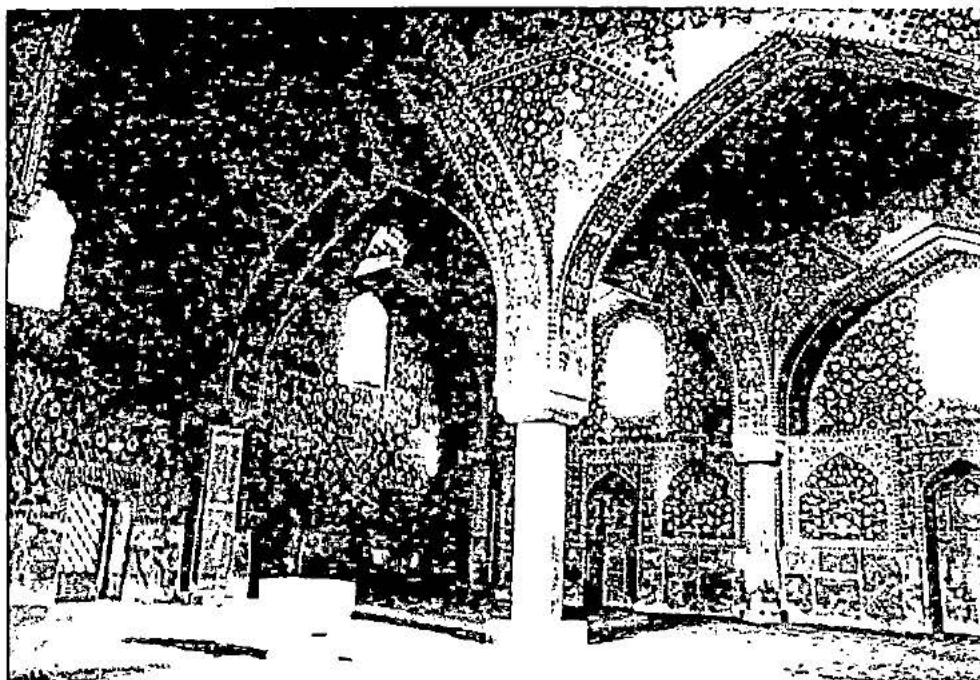


Fig. 17. The Royal Mosque. Pillared Prayer Hall east of the Sanctuary.

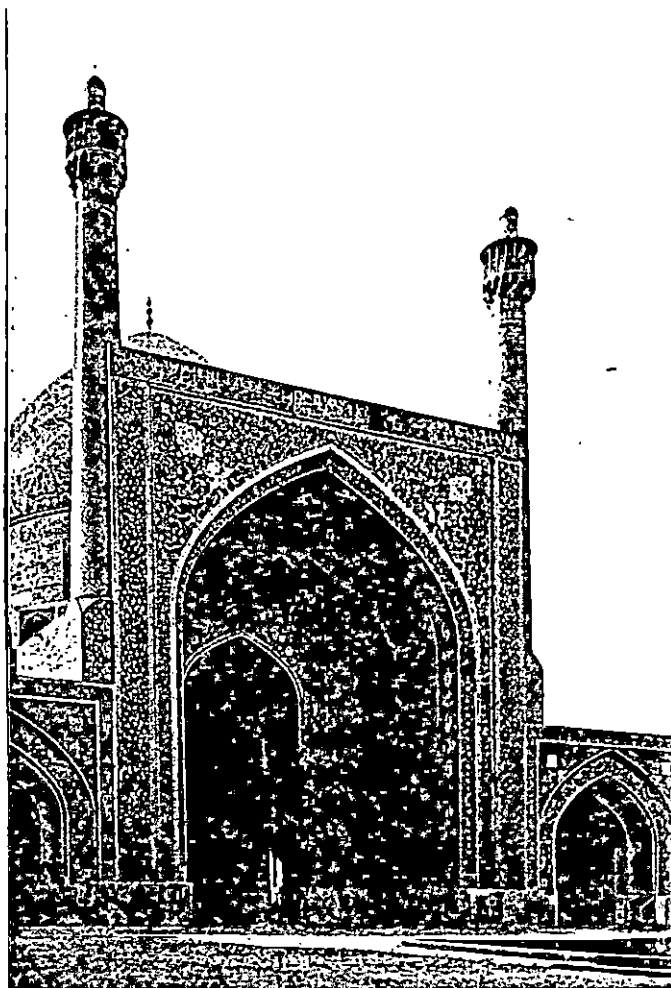


Fig. 18. The Royal Mosque. Sanctuary
Portal and Minars.

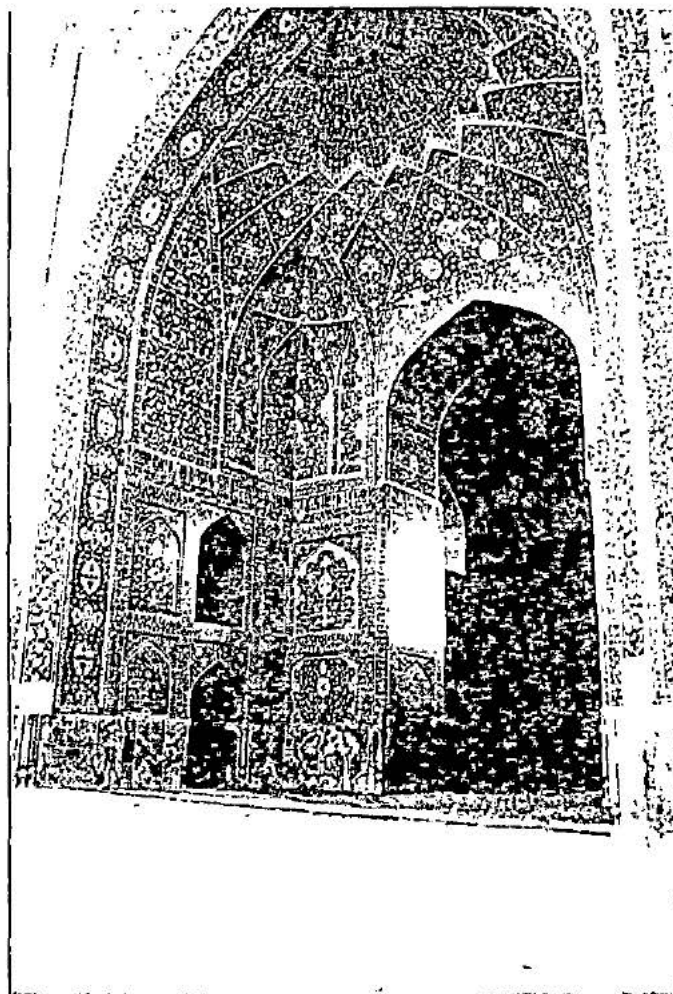


Fig. 19. The Royal Mosque. South Eyvan.

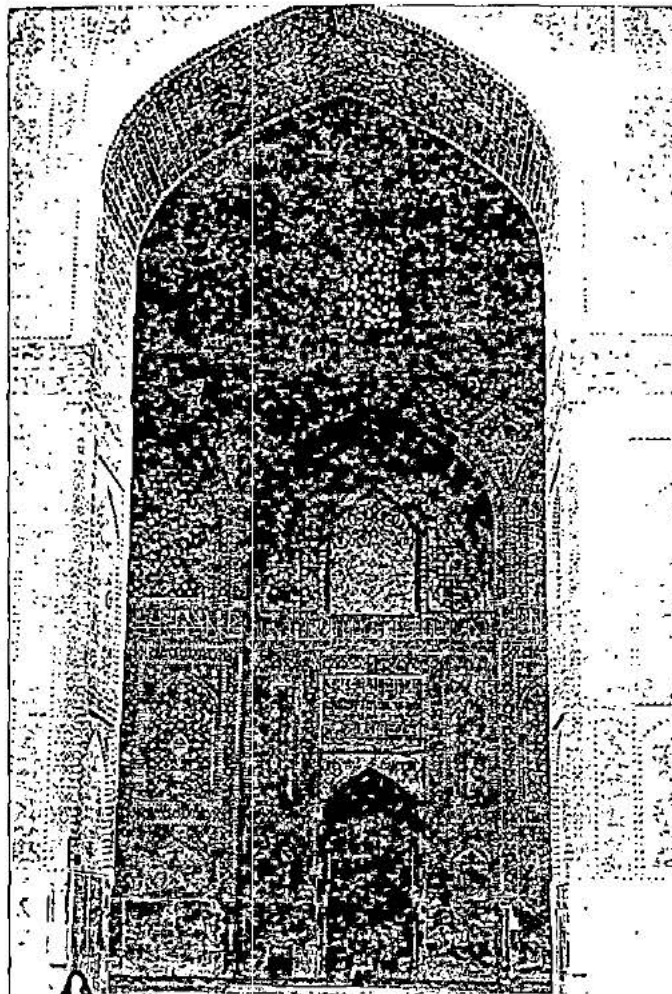


Fig. 20. The Royal Mosque. View of the Sanctuary from the South Eyvan.

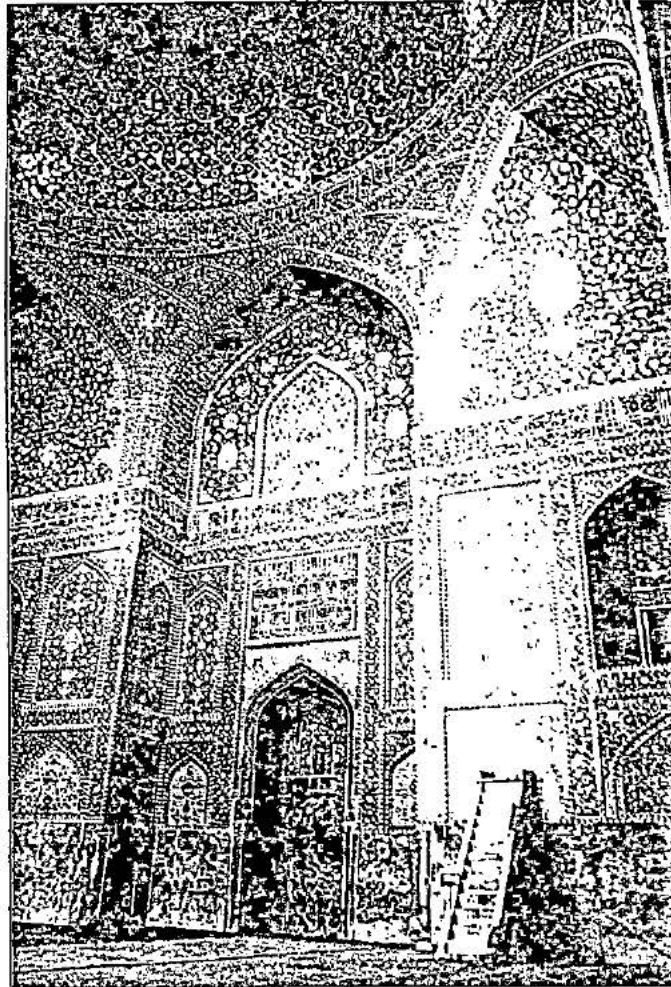


Fig. 21. The Royal Mosque. Sanctuary.
Drum Epigraph: *Hadith an-Najm*.
Side Epigraphs: *Hadith*.
Mihrab Epigraph: *Hadith*.

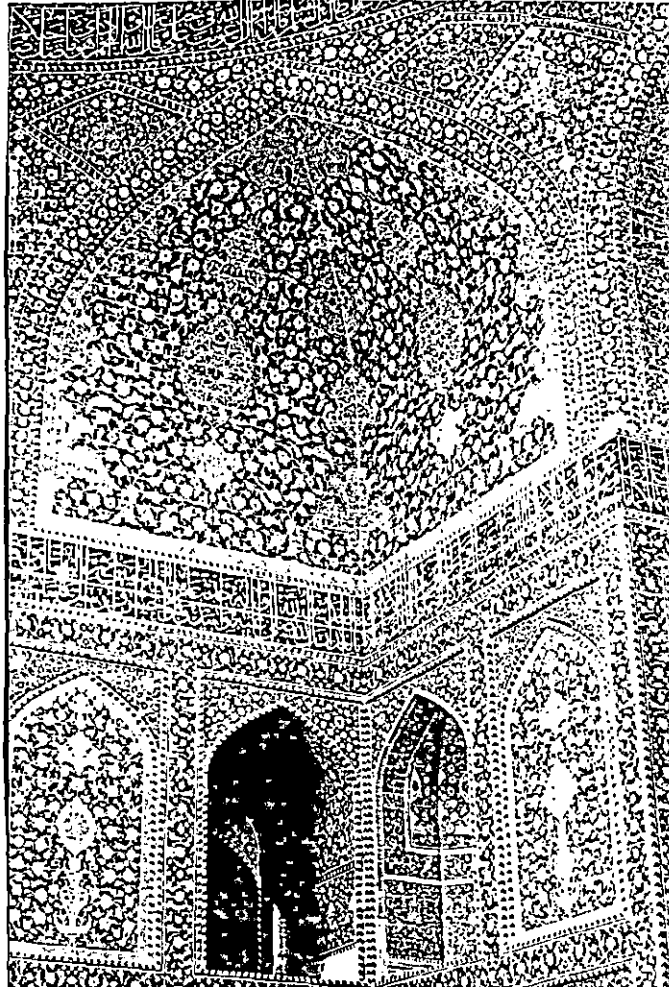


Fig. 22. The Royal Mosque. Sanctuary. Side under dome- detail.

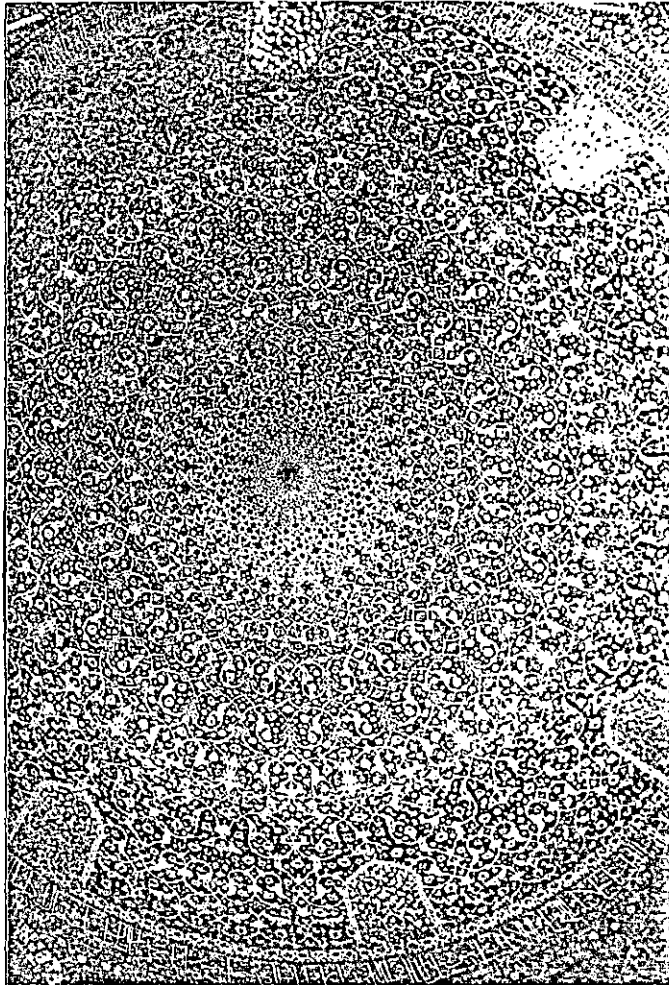


Fig. 23. The Royal Mosque. Interior of south dome.

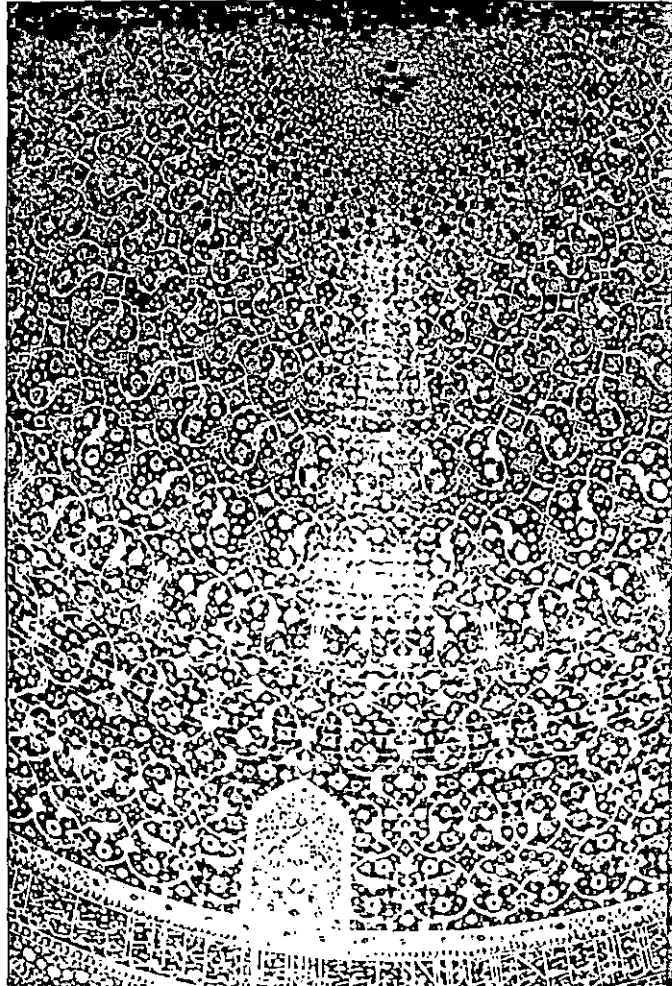


Fig. 24. The Royal Mosque. Interior of south dome- detail.

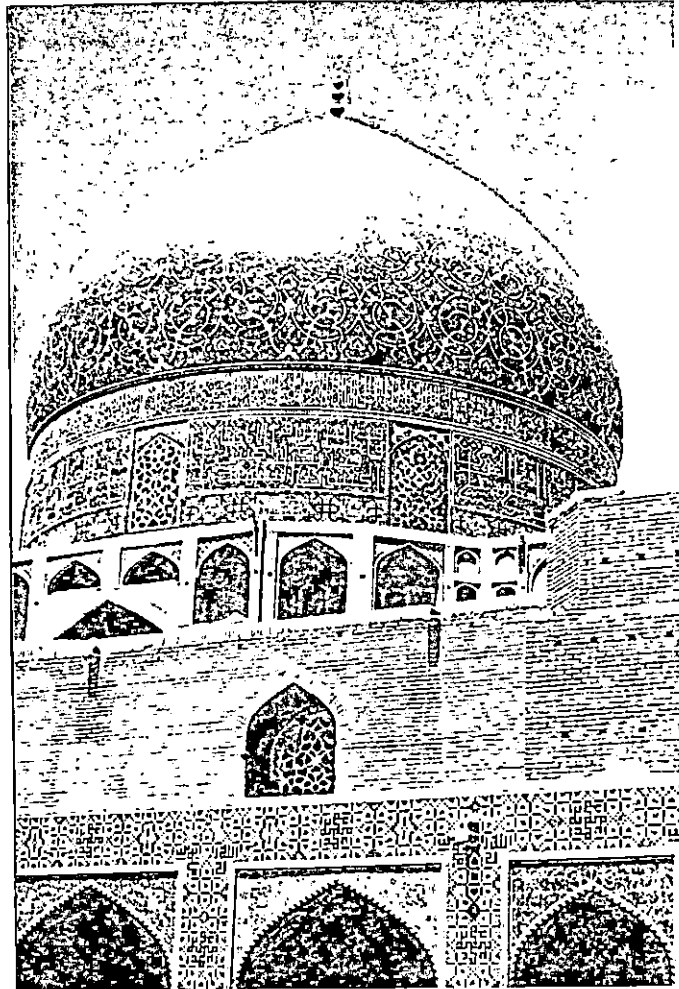


Fig. 25. The Royal Mosque. Exterior of south dome.

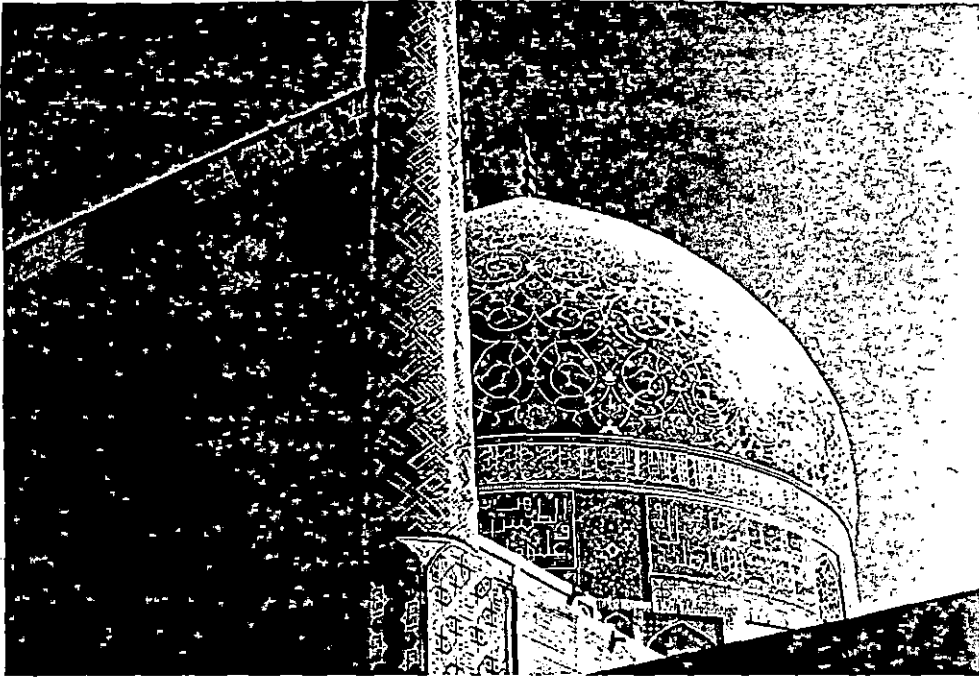


Fig. 26. The Royal Mosque. Exterior of south dome with sanctuary portal.

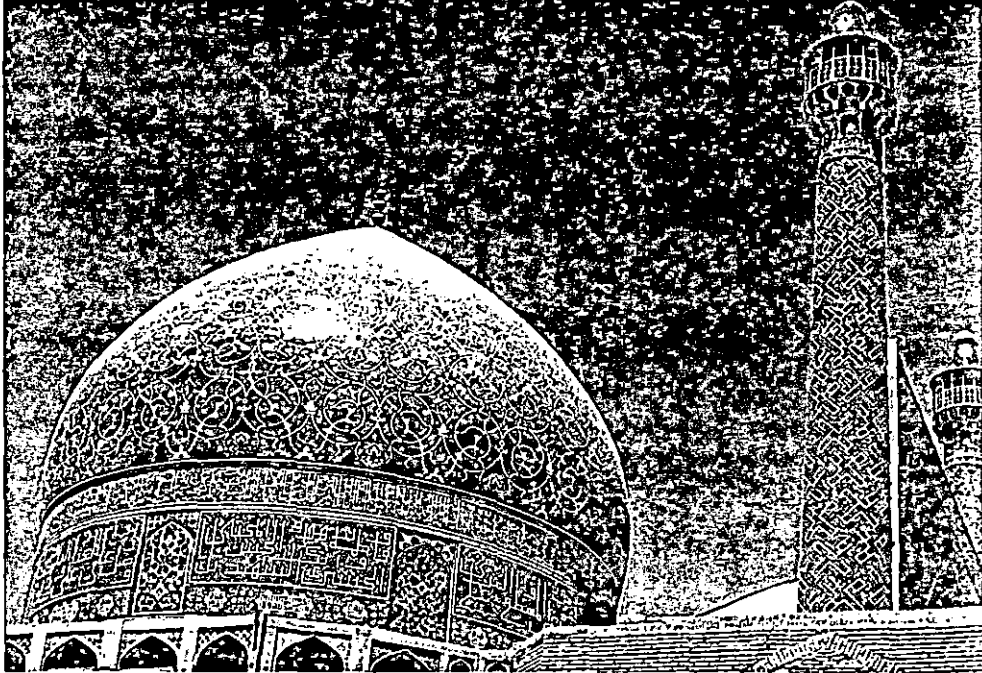


Fig. 27. The Royal Mosque. Exterior of south dome with sanctuary minars.

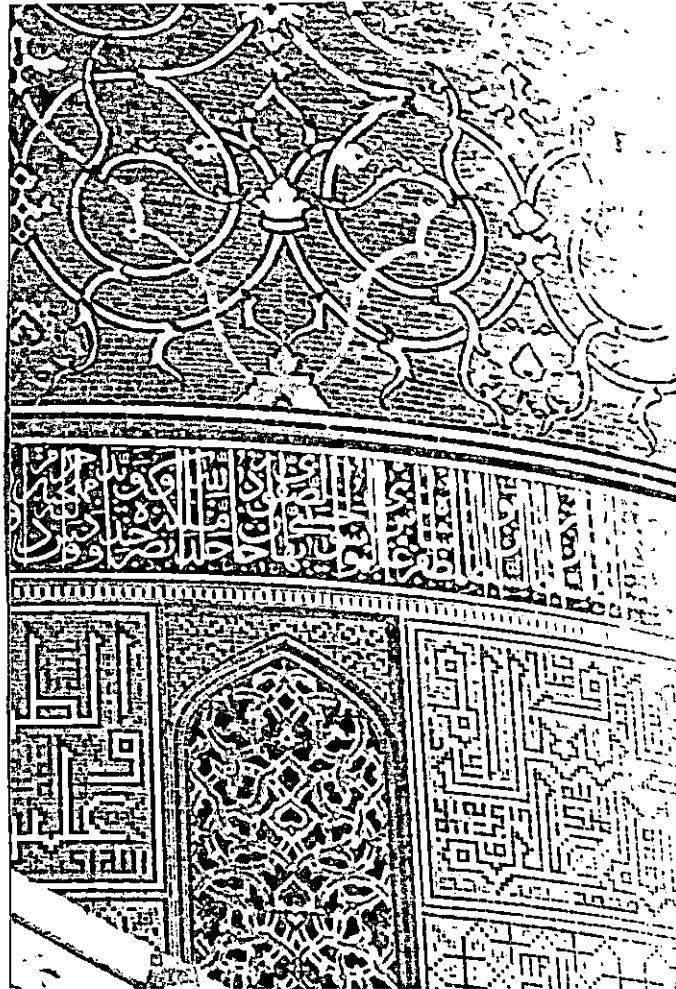


Fig. 28. The Royal Mosque. Exterior of south dome- detail. Name and titles of Shah 'Abbas in yellow.

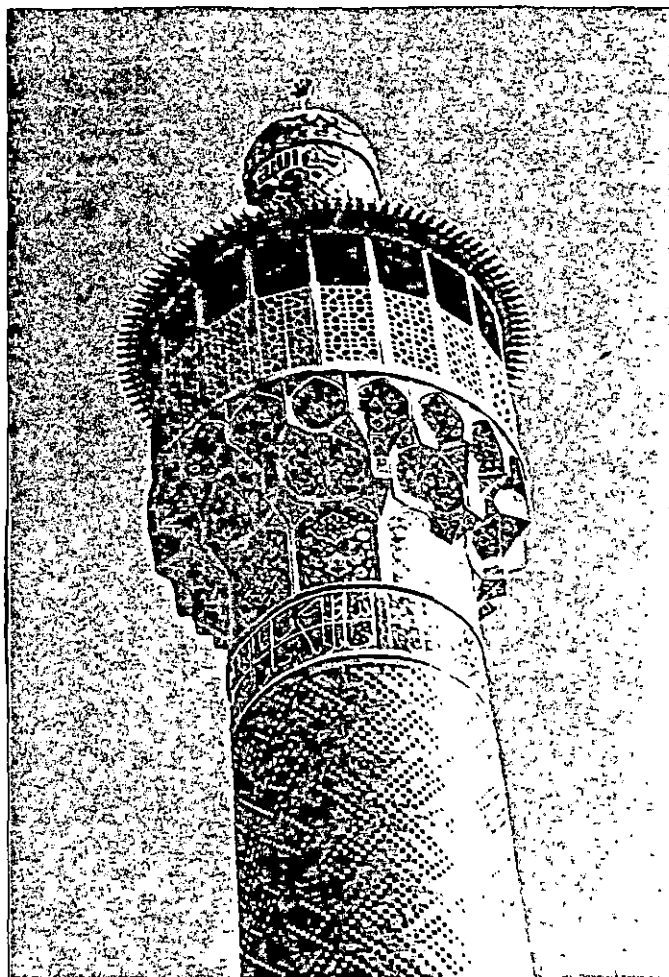


Fig. 29. The Royal Mosque. Sanctuary minar-detail. Names of Muhammad and 'Ali in *kufic*.

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VITA

Surname: KHOURY Given Names: Nuha Naim N.

Place of Birth: Amman, Jordan Date of Birth: May 4, 1959

Educational Institutions Attended, with Dates of Entering and Leaving:

BEIRUT UNIVERSITY COLLEGE 1977 to 1980

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT 1980 to 1981

UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA, B.C. 1981 to 1983

Degrees, Diplomas, Etc., Awarded with Dates and Names of Institutions:

B.A. (Distinction) 1980 Beirut University College

Honors and Awards:

Flora Hamilton Burns Graduate Fellowship, 1982

University of Victoria Fellowship, 1981-1983

Publications:

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