PAYKAREH
Volume 15 Issue 43 Spring 2026 Pages 74-86

Original Research Article

Analysis of the Visual Patterns of the Hunting Ground Mural on the Entrance of the Qeysariyeh Bazaar in Isfahan Using Panofsky's Iconography Method

Maryam Montazeri[1]; Farnoush Shamili[2]; Rahim Charkhi[3]

1. Master in Persian Painting, Faculty of Visual Arts, Tabriz Islamic Art University, Tabriz, Iran.
2. Corresponding Author, Associate Professor, Department of Theoretical Studies of Visual Arts, Faculty of Visual Arts, Tabriz Islamic Art University, Tabriz, Iran.
E-mail: f.shamili@tabriziau.ac.ir
3. Assistant Professor, Department of Painting, Faculty of Visual Arts, Tabriz Islamic Art University, Tabriz, Iran.

Received: 27 July 2024 Revised: 6 March 2026 Accepted: 22 May 2026

Abstract

Introduction: The collection of murals at the entrance to the Qeysariyeh Bazaar, consisting of three fronts (eastern, western, and northern) with three distinct themes, is the first and oldest example of Safavid-era murals painted in an urban space and accessible to the general public. These murals, painted on the entrance of one of the most important gateways of Naqsh-e Jahan Square and at the point of entry and exit for both foreign and domestic merchants, shopkeepers, and the general public, emphasize the significance of this work and the necessity of interpreting its meaning. The reason for the depiction of the royal hunting ground of Shah Abbas on the western facade of this entrance is the main question of the article, and the primary objective of this study is to uncover the symbolic functions of the visual elements of this work through an iconographic approach at two levels: description and analysis.

Research Method: This is a qualitative study conducted using library resources and field observations. In this study, within the descriptive-analytical method, a process of understanding is provided that is based on form and leads to the extraction of meaning. Additionally, the analysis of the work has been conducted using Panofsky's iconological approach. The examination of the work has been conducted in two stages: pre-iconographic description and iconographic analysis, with the sampling being case-based and the specific subject being the mural of the royal hunting ground.

Findings: This mural, alongside two other scenes depicting the king's feast and his war and victory over the Uzbek army, has been illustrated. The study of the mural's location, the analysis of its visual components, linear drawing, and its iconography showed that the hunting ground in this mural cannot merely represent royal entertainment.

Conclusion: The placement of this mural on the bazaar gate, in terms of its position, significance, and status, reflects the political and persuasive function of art during the Safavid period and conveys an important message from the Safavid king. The aforementioned mural depicts the power, bravery, justice, and victory of Shah Abbas Safavid in confronting evil forces and enemies, conveying a message of fighting wickedness, taking decisive, swift action, and ultimately the king's everlasting victory.

Keywords

Mural, Hunting Ground, Entrance of the Qeysariyeh Bazaar, Iconography, Safavid

How to cite this article: Montazeri, M, Shamili, F, & Charkhi, R. (2026). Analysis of the Visual Patterns of the Hunting Ground Mural on the Entrance of the Qeysariyeh Bazaar in Isfahan Using Panofsky's Iconography Method. *Paykareh*, 15(43), 56-71.
DOI: https://doi.org/10.22055/pyk.2026.20648

©2026 by the Authours.This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0 license)
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0

Introduction and Problem Definition

The art of painting during the Safavid period, unlike in the past, was not merely in the service of book design and the illustration of literary texts. During this period, Persian painting moved beyond the limited realm of manuscript illustration, showcasing new functions. One of the most important aspects of this art was wall painting, executed not only in palaces but also in urban spaces. Illustration, previously accessible only to a select group, now came into the general public's view and became a mass medium for conveying concepts. One of the prominent examples of this art is the triptych murals at the entrance to the Qeysariyeh Bazaar in Isfahan, located in the economic and social center of the Safavid capital and serving as a hub for various social classes and both domestic and foreign merchants. This research, while adopting an appropriate approach, seeks to analyze one of the lesser-known works in the history of Iranian mural painting. Iconography, based on the analysis of symbols within historical and cultural contexts, provides a way to understand and interpret the work. The aim of this research is to uncover the meaning of the narrative icon on the western facade of the Qeysariyeh Bazaar entrance using Panofsky's iconographic approach. The expressive and visual aspects of the mural in question, with its hunting-ground theme, have been repeatedly represented in earlier manuscripts. These dominant elements, while also serving as obstacles to clear interpretation of the work's meanings, have created challenges in reading the text under review. Therefore, in this research, the authors have attempted to consider the hunting ground mural of Shah Abbas I not merely as a decorative or illustrative work, but as an influential medium, aiming to uncover the content of the message conveyed by the piece and to process its meaning.

Research Method

The present research is qualitative and employs a descriptive-analytical method. The research process has been carried out in two main stages, including pre-iconographic description and iconographic analysis. In the analysis stage, the symbols used in the work were compared and matched with their foundational references within the historical and cultural context of the work, in order to derive meanings arising from the symbols through this approach. The data has been collected through library and field sources by visiting the site, observing, and taking photographs and other documentation. The sampling was a case study and specifically focused on the mural on the western facade of Qeysariyeh Bazaar.

Research Background

Regarding the hunting ground mural in question, an important work is the article by «Chavoshi Najafabadi and Mojabi» (2019) titled «A Study of the Clothing of Figures in the Wall Paintings of the Qeysariyeh Bazaar in Isfahan». In this article, the authors have studied the clothing of men and women in battle and hunting grounds, categorizing them into Persian and European styles, based on two murals depicting hunting and battle from the collection at the entrance to the Qeysariyeh Bazaar. They have pointed out the similarity in clothing between the battle and hunting grounds, and the multitude and variety of colors in these two murals, by describing and categorizing the clothing of the individuals depicted; additionally, the differences and diversity in the appearance of European clothing have been highlighted in this research. «Mirzaamini and Shahparvari» (2013), in their article titled «Studying the Nature and Origin of the Hunting Motif on Safavid Carpets», examined hunting in Safavid carpets as a luxury item. The authors emphasize the kings' motivation

to display power and the mythological and mystical aspects of hunting in their conclusion. Some researchers have employed iconographic and iconological approaches in their scholarly works to analyze examples in the field of art. Among them, one can refer to the article titled «Iconological Analysis of Buyid Dynasty Ceremonial Coins Based on the Theory of Erwin Panofsky» by «Ahmadi Payam and Dadvar» (2022), the article titled «Analysis of Visual and Conceptual Patterns of the Azadeh's Death in Ancient Persia, Sassanid, and Seljuk Periods Based on the Panofsky's Iconology Approach» by «Namazalizadeh and Mousavilar» (2018), and the article titled «Iconolographic Study of Sultan Muhammad Naqash's Painting called 'Masti Lahouti and Nasuti'» by «Taheri Qomi» (2021). In the field of the present research, which focuses on the iconographic study of the mural on the western side of the Qeysariyeh Bazaar entrance, no such research has been conducted. Given that studies of the mural have been limited so far, the present research, which focuses on the two layers of meaning in the mural's iconography, can be regarded as an innovative study.

Theoretical Foundations

Iconography: One of the most important methods of studying art, especially in art history, is the approach of «iconography». Iconography is one tool for interpreting images and understanding the meaning of an artwork. By studying the history and culture of each period, the reading and decoding of images becomes possible. This approach retrieves and interprets the concepts embedded in the artwork. In this method, the influence of political and philosophical beliefs, as well as the goals and inclinations of patrons and artists, is considered separately. Panofsky has presented this method as a straightforward approach for a deep understanding of the artwork (Abdi, 2011, 27). The study of artworks using the iconological method is conducted in two stages: pre-iconographic description and iconographic analysis. 1. The first level of pre-iconographic description: a very preliminary form of formal analysis, «the level of the primitive or natural subject» (Adams, 2022, 53). It provides an understanding of events expressed through form in various historical contexts. Being aware of the history of style makes it easier to identify subjects, events, and objects expressed in various forms across different contexts. In fact, the pre-iconographic description is a kind of formal analysis (Abdi, 2011, 49-50). 2. The second level of iconographic analysis: Familiarity with the specific theme or content is acquired through literary sources, and specific concepts in images, stories, and parables in artistic motifs emerge in the primary subject (Adams, 2022, 55). In iconographic analysis, the correct identification of motifs is crucial. The secondary subject or subject combinations that convey concepts and themes lead us to the root of literary knowledge. For a correct iconographic analysis, familiarity with the thematic and intellectual background through literary sources is necessary; however, it will not guarantee its accuracy (Adams, 2022, 55-56). 3. The third level of iconographic interpretation (iconology): It seeks to identify the symbolic values of the artwork. Panofsky called this stage «iconological interpretation», and, in the deep sense of the word, it encompasses the work's intrinsic or substantive meaning. The interpretation of the two previous stages, namely description and iconographic analysis, is the ultimate goal of studying a work of art. At this stage, the researcher, to control the study, examines the intrinsic meaning of the artwork in relation to other credible documents related to the history of human civilization, including political documents, literature, poetry, religion, philosophy, social developments and trends, and the psychological characteristics of the period and country (Adams, 2022, 62). Considering the

research topic, two levels of pre-iconographic description and iconographic analysis are used in the reading of the image, with the level of iconological interpretation omitted.

The Mural on the Entrance of the Qeysariyeh Bazaar: With the transfer of the capital to Isfahan, which was already a significant cultural center, remarkable transformations occurred in the political, philosophical, social, and artistic fields. Isfahan became the center of science, knowledge, and art, and it became known as the era of Iran's flourishing (Javani, 2006, 21-22). Shah Abbas was interested in arts that had practical applications in urban planning, architecture, pottery, textiles, and so on. Thus, miniature painting, separated from literary tradition, gained independence, and painting and design became closer to and more accessible in urban spaces. The art of mural painting, like many other arts, experienced remarkable growth and flourishing during the Safavid period. One of the famous wall paintings from this period is the mural at the entrance to the Qeysariyeh Bazaar. On the northern side of Naqsh-e Jahan Square, the entrance to the Qeysariyeh Bazaar is situated at a distance from the other elements of the square. Upon entering the square from Qeysariyeh Bazaar, Ali Qapu, Shah Mosque, and Sheik Lotfollah Mosque appear in the distance as a backdrop. Entering from Qeysariyeh Bazaar offers glimpses of the square's beauty as the viewer takes in the scene. At the entrance to the market, three significant paintings are depicted. The painting on the western side depicts a hunting ground. This painting, along with the painting on the northern side, is drawn in the Iranian style with delicate brushwork comparable to that of Reza Abbasi. The painting, measuring approximately 21.5×20.4 m, is executed using the non-physical tempera technique. The subject is the hunting ground of Shah Abbas I, depicting the young king's face (Aslani, 1997, 219). This painting appears somewhat faded due to exposure to air and sunlight. In examining this painting alongside those on the northern and eastern fronts, we observe less color fading. Gilding with the technique of layering and applying gold leaf in the decorations of clothes, hats and turbans, drums, weapons, etc., has been used, but now many parts have fallen off, and the remaining parts have turned into a dark and dull layer due to various interactions (Aslani, 1997, 227-229).

Hunting: Throughout history, numerous murals have been discovered in various regions. The first murals were created to dominate hunting. Primarily, the murals depict themes of hunting and warfare. Throughout history, different styles have been evident in Iran's murals; however, the main themes and forms have been preserved. Murals in different periods represent various movements of that time (Sharifzadeh, 2002, 13). Hunting is a phenomenon that humans have been forced to become familiar with from the very beginning in order to secure their livelihood. Hunting and shooting have been among Iranians' interests from ancient times to the modern era. Iranians use two terms to refer to the act of hunting and related concepts: hunting and nakhjir. «Nakhjir or nakhchir is used to mean wild goat. The semantic shift of this word from the general concept of hunting to the specific meaning of mountain goat is similar to the semantic shift of the Persian word «shekar» (hunting)» (Dehkhoda, 1998, 14350). Hunting can be observed in the wall paintings and ritual ceremonies of Iran from the past to the present. Hunting has been present and persistent since the earliest Paleolithic wall paintings, throughout the formation of various cultures. In the Achaemenid period, hunting scenes can appear in the bas-reliefs of Persepolis and the porticoes of the Apadana Palace. Hunting has a long-standing place in Iranian culture and traditions (Khalaj Amirhosseini, 2010, 48). Hunting has been a desirable and prominent pastime and an activity associated with the king and the Iranian aristocracy. The king must demonstrate and prove his power through hunting and valor. Hunting is the best training and preparation for war, and the king is not only the leader of

war but also the leader of the hunt. Hunting is considered a sign of toughness and resilience. The struggle with wild animals has been a symbol of victory, courage, and human intelligence, as well as the defeat of violence (Ghadernejad Hamamian & Aghaei, 2022, 70). The designs of the hunting ground narrate the struggle of the liberated human against the evils of the self, which manifest in animal form; likewise, the scenes of the hunting ground symbolize humanity's movement toward God. The bow and arrow symbolize human precision and keen insight, aiming to overcome evils and impurities by targeting and shooting arrows with one's own hands. The hunting scene reflects the king's power and the battle against evil forces (Khalaj Amirhosseini, 2010, 50). The mural of the hunting ground at the entrance to the Qeysariyeh Bazaar is also a prominent example of these works, depicting the king's struggle against evil and impurity.

Description of the Pre-Iconography of the Entrance to the Qeysariyeh Bazaar, Western Side

The hunting-ground scene, the mentioned mural, is the focus of this research (Fig 1). In this mural, the high mountains, trees, bushes, and hills are responsible for the composition of the image. The flight of birds is depicted in the sky. The raptor has caught the crane by the falcon and is carrying it away (Fig 2). The trees are depicted in the upper part and background. The courtiers, with bows and arrows, swords, and guns, hunt deer, elk, mountain goats, rabbits, leopards, and foxes, while hunting dogs chase them. Deer and antelope are depicted in greater numbers.



Fig 1. The painting of the western side of the entrance to the Qeysariyeh Bazaar in Isfahan, «Shah Abbas's Hunting Ground».Source: Authors.



Fig 2. Part of the painting on the western side of the entrance to the Qeysariyeh Bazaar in Isfahan, «Crane and Falcon». Source: Authors.

In the upper left of the painting, two people are spearing a wild boar and driving it (Fig 3). People are hunting a wild goat with a rifle (Fig 4). In the middle left section, two horsemen are shooting at a leopard (Fig 5).



Fig 3. Part of the mural on the western side of the entrance to the Qeysariyeh Bazaar in Isfahan, «Driving Away the Boar». Source: Authors.



Fig 4. Part of the painting on the western side of the entrance to the Qeysariyeh Bazaar in Isfahan, «Hunting a Mountain Goat with a Rifle». Source: Authors.



Fig 5. Part of the painting on the western side of the entrance to the Qeysariyeh Bazaar in Isfahan, «Shooting at a Leopard». Source: Authors.

Shah Abbas is depicted riding a horse in the lower right corner of the image; unlike most battle or hunting scenes, he is not engaged in direct combat with an animal, and he holds a hunting falcon in his hand. In this painting, the king is depicted with a youthful face. The king is wearing a simple outfit with a red vest. Another rider next to Shah Abbas is also holding a game in his hand (Fig 6). Above the king's head, a fox has jumped onto a horse's back, and the rider, holding the fox's head, intends to kill it (Fig 7). In the lower left, a person is holding a mountain goat and is in the process of slaughtering it (Fig 8). In the lower section of the painting, a window has been installed in the middle, which has caused part of the painting to be destroyed.





Fig 6. Part of the painting on the western side of the entrance to the Qeysariyeh Bazaar in Isfahan, «Shah Abbas and the Falcon». Source: Authors.





Fig 7. Part of the painting on the western side of the entrance to the Qeysariyeh Bazaar in Isfahan, «Fox Attack». Source: Authors.





Fig 8. Part of the painting on the western side of the entrance to the Qeysariyeh Bazaar in Isfahan, «Beheading a Goat». Source: Authors.

Analysis of the Iconography of the Western Facade of the Qeysariyeh Bazaar

Hunting was considered one of the important pastimes and entertainments of Shah Abbas. He would engage in small hunts during his travels. He also organized several big hunts every year and spent several days hunting. He was very skilled in shooting, and his arrows rarely missed. Among the hunts that the king enjoyed, hunting boars and birds was included. Bird hunting was conducted with falcons. Every year, provincial governors or envoys from foreign countries sent numerous hunting falcons to the king (Falsafi, 2012, 388). The king was very fond of his hunting falcons. In 1001 A.H., when he was traveling from Isfahan to Qazvin, the king's falcon named «Bazlavand» died near the city of Natanz. The king ordered a tower to be built on the mountain in its memory, which is known as the Tomb of Bazlavand (Falsafi, 2012, 392). «Chardin» writes in his travelogue: In Iran, hunting with guns and falcons is allowed. Anyone can go hunting at any time of the day with any means. The nobles and governors of the provinces are hunting with the falcons they received as gifts from the king in the nearby settlements. They keep the bird in their hand or beside them all day and speak of its beauty and cunning in hunting. Iranians have astonishing skills

in training birds. They even train crows and keep them in special places for hunting birds (Chardin, 1995, 752). «Jumali Karri» writes: «Hunting among the Iranians has an interesting ceremony, mostly done on horseback and with the help of falcons, and therefore it is not a pastime of the aristocracy and is not widespread. A significant income for the people of Isfahan comes from training and selling hunting falcons» (Ravandi, 1990, 201). In this painting (Fig 6), Shah Abbas is depicted hunting with a falcon, one of his favorite activities. The falcon is a symbol of the sun and masculine energy. The falcon, like the powerful and high-flying eagle, symbolizes the freedom of the spirit (Mitford, 2009, 68). The falcon is not merely a hunting tool but a symbol of dominance, intelligence, authority, sovereignty, and control over natural forces. The presence of the falcon on the king's hand, an animal that can only be tamed by the king, signifies a legitimate and wise rule. Shah Abbas is not depicted attacking the animal or being defeated by it. The king stands at the edge of the painting, symbolizing authority through mental and spiritual dominance. He does not need to prove his power through violence; rather, he embodies order and control with his presence. In the painting (Fig 6), Shah Abbas is depicted in accordance with the characteristics described in historical documents. Shah Abbas was short in stature. His face and chin were completely shaved, and his mustache, which pointed downwards, had a religious aspect. The king's face appeared deep olive and somewhat thin. This greenness was due to constant sun exposure, because he spent long periods under the sun without paying attention to the heat. He had sharp and bright eyes. His nose was long and aquiline, and his eyebrows were black. The king's physique was slender yet muscular, perfectly proportionate to his short stature. His walking, speaking, looking, and in general all his gestures and movements were quick and passionate, and he could hardly calm down (Della Valle, 2002, 180-182). Shah Abbas usually wore simple clothes made from the fabric that poor villagers wore. It was mostly green, red, or black. Although he had wealth and possessions everywhere, he wore a cotton-stitched garment. As Herbert said, «It seems he wanted to tell us that his character and greatness are more tied to his admirable qualities and wise policies than to the world and jewels and pearls...» (Falsafi, 2012, 159). Shah Abbas, in winter, wore a tight-fitting half-coat made of simple broadcloth or worthless fabrics over his robe, which was fastened under the throat with silk balls instead of buttons (Ravandi, 1990, 95). He would tie a leather belt or a colored shawl around his waist over the robe or tunic and place a dagger under the belt or shawl at his waist. At that time, it was customary to tie two shawls around the waist; one was a floral silk or very fine brocade that was longer than the second shawl, and the other was a shorter, single-colored silk or wool fabric. The nobles and commanders would even tie up to three shawls on top of each other (Falsafi, 2012, 160). The king's trousers were mostly made of plain or striped cloth, in various colors, especially purple. He wore shoes made of leather or timaj with a pointed, turned-up toe, simple socks with gold embroidery made of wool or silk, whose shafts were short and wide in the style of the time (Ravandi, 1990, 95). The king had also made a special hat for himself that bore no resemblance to the Qizilbash crown; this hat is seen in most of the portraits painted of him (Falsafi, 2012, 160). His ordinary turban was a white cloth with a red fabric that had silver-white lines (Ravandi, 1990, 95). The king's physical features, in harmony with historical descriptions, emphasize his human and popular aspects and display a blend of royal humility and piety alongside regal authority and grandeur. Here, the hunt has historical and political significance. The type of hunting is depicted as a historical and realistic document; the king is illustrated in a red outfit and a red half-body with a white turban wrapped in a red cloth. The courtiers said about the color of the king's clothing that when he wore black, he was thoughtful and preoccupied; if he wore white, green, or yellow,

he was happy and lively; but if he wore red, all the nobles trembled, and without discussion, someone would be executed that day (Ravandi, 1990, 95). This illustration is depicted alongside the illustration of Shah Abbas's war with the Uzbeks. It is highly likely that the artist intends to reflect the events of 1007 A.H. After the death of Abdullah Khan Uzbek, Shah Abbas sent the army to Khorasan and went to Mazandaran himself. After a few days of wandering and hunting, he moved from Astrabad toward Bastam. In this campaign, Shah Abbas easily moved toward Mashhad with his army and entered Mashhad without bloodshed following the death of Abd al-Mu'min Khan (Falsafi, 1996, 1445). The red color of the king's clothing, on one hand, symbolizes his passion, power, and excitement, and on the other hand, it reminds one of days of wrath or war, indicating the bloodshed and the king's battles with the Uzbeks. Shah Abbas would go to Gilan, Mazandaran, Golestan, and Khorasan for hunting deer, and to the outskirts of Isfahan and Kashan for bird hunting. One of the king's special hunting grounds was the Miankaleh Peninsula in Gorgan. During the hunt, the peasants and army would block the dry paths for the wild animals (Falsafi, 2012, 387-388). Before the king went to the hunting grounds, by his command, several thousand men were prepared to drive and herd the hunting animals. The special royal decree regarding the royal hunt was communicated to the governors, and each governor was required to compel all the people in his province to drive the animals, with no one exempted from this task. The poor peasants were occupied for a month driving and gathering the hunting animals, until finally, many were driven from the surrounding hunting grounds and brought to the plain. The area of the plain was approximately one square league, and the peasants from various provinces were assigned to follow the animals in seven circular lines. If an animal managed to escape from the herd, those responsible for driving the herd were severely punished. On a designated day, the king would go hunting with a group of close associates and attendants, killing many animals, branding some as servants, and then releasing them. In these hunts, the poor peasants tasked with driving the game suffered greatly and sometimes perished in the cold, snow, and rain (Ibid, 385-386). Hunting animals according to «Dela Valle»: «Shah Abbas had chosen a meadow for hunting animals in the region of Mazandaran, which was completely surrounded by mountains and hills. The king had designated this place for hunting to drive wild animals from all the surrounding valleys and mountains to it. Because in the East, the peasants perform the work of hunting dogs, in order to prevent the animals from escaping the hunting ground, he ordered that from one mountain to another in the middle of the valley, high fences made of tree branches be constructed, which a horseman cannot reach the top of. Additionally, around the slopes of the mountains surrounding this plain, rope traps have been set up, tied to tall stakes, so that no animal can jump over them. Certainly, many people spent a long time constructing these. In this way, the animals driven by these men, due to the narrowness of the valley and their noise and shouting, head toward this plain, and since the rope traps prevent their progress, they become trapped there. I know that three hundred camel loads of rope were sent from Farahabad, Mazandaran, for this purpose. The king is supposed to hunt in this plain with a sword and bow, or as was traditionally done, capture some of the hunting animals alive, pierce their ears with an earring inscribed with his name and a special mark, and then set them free; it has often happened that hunters have captured animals that had earrings from the women of Shah Abbas and Shah Ismail Safavid, and so on. They had earrings so that the women of the harem could also enjoy watching the hunt, and a special place was built for them» (Ravandi, 1990, 50-51). As Pietro della Valle noted in his travelogue (Fig 1), the upper part is surrounded by mountains, hills, and the hunting ground's trees. In Fig 3, people are seen driving animals. The courtiers who are hunting with guns, bows, and arrows all

realistically refer to Shah Abbas's hunting grounds. On the other hand, hunting animals also had religious significance, and victory over harmful creatures was not possible without religious-ritualistic endorsements. In the field of semiotics, animals, due to their various forms, movements, and relationships with humans, have been assigned different symbols. The dog symbolizes loyalty and companionship. It is a guardian and a caretaker (Hall, 2001, 52). «Chardin» says about this: Iranians considered the dog to be an impure and unclean animal; however, a number of dogs are kept for hunting in the reeds and marshes (Chardin, 1995, 757). In the painting, the dogs chase animals or bite them. The crane is a symbol of goodness and a messenger of the gods and happiness. The crane symbolizes longevity, high status, and immortality. On this side, the flight of the crane in the sky and the hunting by the falcon are observed. The reign of Shah Abbas was a messenger of the gods and had a long and eternal life. The hunting falcon symbolizes the sun and masculine energy. The falcon, like the powerful and high-flying eagle, symbolizes the freedom of the spirit (Mitford, 2009, 68). The falcon is a symbol of Shah Abbas and his reign, which was powerful and brought happiness. The wild goat is considered a symbol of human fertility and the god of fertility (Hall, 2001, 35). Hunting wild goats during the Safavid period was done with a gun (Chardin, 1995, 757). As seen in Fig. 4, individuals are aiming their guns at the mountain goats. The rabbit symbolizes fertility and lust, while the deer symbolizes longevity and wealth (Hall, 2001, 46 & 20). Rabbits and deer are abundantly seen in the artwork, indicating a stable and prosperous government. The leopard is a symbol of pride. The leopard is a predatory animal and a symbol of the royal and warrior class. The leopard is a symbol of skill and power. «Daniel the Prophet» saw in a dream four great beasts emerging from the sea that were opposing each other. One of them was like a leopard. Interpreters have considered this image as a symbol of the region of Persia (Chavalier & Gheerbrant, 2005, 365). In Fig 5, the leopard is depicted with power, pride, and poise, symbolizing the strong rule of Shah Abbas. The fox is always guilty, always righteous, independent but self-satisfied, active, destructive, worried, and cunning, nimble and agile. The fox reflects the inner contradictions of human nature (Chavalier & Gheerbrant, 2005, 265). In Fig 7, as is characteristic of the fox, it has cunningly jumped on the horse from behind, but the individuals have been defeated by the fox from several directions. This collection of symbols, when placed together, reflects the image of divine order and earthly justice of the Safavid king; the king, like a knowledgeable, powerful, and steadfast hunter, controls the forces of good and evil.

Conclusion

The iconographic method for interpreting the painting helped us achieve the goal we set for the artwork. In this method, the reading of the image is done with consideration of the historical background, symbols, and so on. It was carried out in two stages: description and analysis. The iconographic analysis of the mural at the western entrance to the Qeysariyeh Bazaar in Isfahan, based on Erwin Panofsky's method, showed that the present work is not merely a hunting scene but a symbolic expression of the power, justice, and political legitimacy of Shah Abbas. Hunting for kings symbolizes confronting evil. The king demonstrates his victory by showcasing his confrontation with wild animals; the hunting scene of Shah Abbas can be seen as a symbolic image of disciplined power, justice, and triumph over chaos. Hunting here is a metaphor for confronting the forces of evil and chaos, as the king, by mastering the hunting animal, represents his control over nature, society, and enemies. Accordingly, hunting is depicted as a ritual and a metaphor for the struggle

between good and evil, in which the king, as a divine and just ruler, establishes order, security, and justice by mastering nature and animal forces. The use of natural elements, animals, and symbolic colors in Safavid art reflects the fusion of mystical thought, politics, and power. The red color of the king's robe symbolizes his bravery, authority, and, at times, his quest for vengeance, while the presence of birds and animals serves as a metaphor for the connection between heaven and earth and the balance between spiritual and material forces in Safavid rule. The image of Shah Abbas holding a falcon is a metaphor for legitimate rule, just governance, and the victory of good forces over evil in Safavid political discourse. Thus, the work plays both the role of an artistic document and a visual statement of power, in a connection between historical reality and symbolic meanings. The placement of this mural on the entrance of the Qeysariyeh Bazaar, the economic and social center of the Safavid capital, indicates the promotional and social role of art. This place was a hub for the movement of various social classes and for domestic and foreign merchants, and the mural was designed to convey the king's authority, speed, and decisiveness in overcoming obstacles, as well as the perpetual victories of his government in the public eye. The placement of this painting on the entrance of the Qeysariyeh Bazaar, a busy place and center of domestic and foreign trade, gives it a promotional and ideological function; meaning that the image of the king was created not only to decorate the building but also to display the security and authority of the Safavid government in front of the eyes of the people and merchants. Placing this painting next to the mural of Shah Abbas's victory over the Uzbeks underscores the artwork's propagandistic purpose and amplifies the king's power and his victory over evil. Shah Abbas ruled over Iran for about forty years. He nurtured and developed the country in social and financial matters, agriculture, politics, and military affairs. He established Iran's commercial position on the world stage. He established security in the country. He established knowledge and justice among the people. He quelled the internal turmoil. He curtailed the Ottomans in the west and the Uzbeks in the east. He emphasized agriculture and trade. The depiction of the era's events in large, visible dimensions for passersby, especially domestic and foreign merchants, had political reasons. These images reveal the victory, power, and success of Shah Abbas and his reign. As a result, the painting of Shah Abbas's hunting ground is a visual manifestation of the ideals of the Safavid rule; the artist, through symbolic language and historical narrative, presents an image of a powerful, just, and divine king who considers combating evil and establishing order and justice as his political and spiritual mission. Thus, this work is not only a reflection of the history and culture of the Safavid era but also a prominent example of the ideological function of art in the service of politics and religious legitimacy.

Author Contributions

This article is derived from the master's thesis of the first author in the field of Iranian painting, titled «Miniature Painting Based on the Iconographic Study of the Mural Paintings on the Entrance of the Qeysariyeh Bazaar in Isfahan», under the supervision of the second and third authors at the Islamic Art University of Tabriz.

Acknowledgment

This research has no acknowledgments.

Conflict of Interest

The author (s) declare that there are no potential conflicts of interest related to this research, in writing, and publication of this article

Research Funding

The author (s) did not receive any financial support for conducting the research, writing up, and publication of this article.

References

- Abdi, N. (2011). *Introduction to iconology*. Tehran: Sokhan Publishing. **[In Persian]**
- Adams, L. (2022). *Methodologies of art*. Nazar Publishing. **[In Persian]**
- Ahmadi Payam, R. & Dadvar, A. Gh. (2022). Iconological analysis of Buyid dynasty ceremonial coins based on the theory of Erwin Panofsky. *Negareh*, (61), 163-177. doi: 10.22070/NEGAREH.2021.5461.2501 **[In Persian]**
- Aslani, H. (1997). Proceedings of the Second Annual Conference on the Conservation and Restoration of Historical-Cultural Objects and Architectural Ornaments: «*Documentation and Pathology Study of the Painted Murals of the Qeysariyeh Portal in Isfahan*». Cultural Heritage Organization of the Country. **[In Persian]**
- Chardin, Ch. (1995). *The travelogue of Sir John Chardin* (I. Yaghmaei, Trans.). Tous Publications. **[In Persian]**
- Chavalier, J. & Gheerbrant, A. (2009). *The dictionary of symbols* (S. Fazayeli, Trans.). Jeyhoon Publications. **[In Persian]**
- Chavoshi Najafabadi, F. & Mojabi, S. A. (2019). A study on the clothing of figures in the wall paintings of the Qeysariyeh Bazaar in Isfahan. *Paykareh*, 8(17), 25-39. doi: pyk.2019.15325/10.22055 **[In Persian]**
- Dehkhoda, A. A. (1998). *Dehkhoda dictionary.* Tehran University Press. **[In Persian]**
- Dela Valle, P. (2002). *The Travelogue of Pietro della Valle* (Sh. al-Din Shafa, Trans.). Elmi va Farhangi Publications. **[In Persian]**
- Falsafi, N. (1996). *The life of Shah Abbas I* (Vols. 4 & 5). Elmi Publications. **[In Persian]**
- Falsafi, N. (2012). *The life of Shah Abbas I*. Negah Publications. **[In Persian]**
- Ghadernejad Hamamian, M. & Aghaei, A. (2022). Comparative iconography of the Mithras hunting concept in the Dura-Europos mural and the relief of the hunter king in Taq-e Bostan. *Iranian Studies*, 12(2), 61-78. doi:10.22059/JIS.2022.340039.1097 **[In Persian]**
- Hall, J. (2001). *Illustrated dictionary of symbols in Eastern and Western art* (R. Behzadi, Trans.). Farhang-e Moaser. **[In Persian]**
- Javani, A. (2006). *The foundations of the Isfahan school of painting*. Publications of the Academy of Arts of the Islamic Republic of Iran. **[In Persian]**
- Khalaj Amirhosseini, M. (2010). *The hidden symbols in the art of miniature painting.* Abaan Book Publishing. **[In Persian]**
- Mitford, M.B. (2009). *Illustrated book of signs and symbols.* Tehran: Kalhor Publications. **[In Persian]**
- Mirzaamini, S. M. M. & Shahparvari, M. R. (2013). Studying the nature and origin of hunting (shekar) motif on Safavid carpets. *Goljaam*, 9(24), 97-124. doi:20.1001.1.20082738.1392.9.24.5.1 **[In Persian]**
- Namazalizadeh, S. & Mousavilar, A. (2018). Analysis of the visual and conceptual patterns of Azadeh's death in Ancient Persia, Sassanid and Seljuk period based on Panofsky's Iconology approach. *Negareh*, 13(48), 72-85. doi:10.22070/negareh.2019.884 **[In Persian]**
- Ravandi, M. (1990). *Social history of Iran* (Vol. 7). Negah Publications. **[In Persian]**
- Sharifzadeh, S. A. M. (2002). *Mural painting in Iran.* Publications of the Cooperative Fund Institute. **[In Persian]**

- Taheri Qomi, M. (2021). An iconographic study of Sultan Mohammad Naqash's painting called «masti lahouti and Nasuti». *JIC* (2), 106-117. doi:10.52547/jic.4.2.107 **[In Persian]**