

Original Research Article

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Iranian Painting, A Government Multi-Purpose Media (Case Study: Safavid Period Garden Painting)*

Abstract

Problem Definition: As a multifaceted medium, garden paintings have included the social structure and power relations of the Safavids. The scientific challenge of the current research is to identify the ideology of the Safavid government in the hidden textual layers of garden paintings, the components related to symbolism, and Iranian culture in the heart of the Safavid society. In the present research, the following questions are addressed: What components and symbolic elements are the social relations of the Safavid period narrated in the text of garden paintings? How is the ideology and attitude of Safavid artists illustrated in garden paintings?

Objective: This research seeks to investigate and understand the relationship between the texts of paintings related to the theme of the Iranian garden in the scope of the socio-cultural structures of the Safavid period.

Research Method: The current study is qualitative research using a descriptive-analytical method. The data collection is conducted through a library-based method.

Results: Interactions and social and religious relations have been carried out through symbolic cultural domination to advance the goals and legitimize the Safavid ideology. In the textual layers of garden paintings, painters have addressed the cultural and religious components representing relationships, national customs, court banquets, and Shia religion. Political and social events are represented in the form of mythological and religious narratives in the text of the paintings. The art of multi-purpose and moving illustration in paintings has become a powerful and focused medium at the service of the organized system of the Safavid court, and this artistic field has made the superior position of the king and the structure of the social classes of the Safavid government in the form of dynamic and animated images. Diversity in the design structure of gardens and collective spaces is one of the most significant achievements of artists in expressing the attitude, art, and knowledge of Safavid gardening. These paintings have paid attention to the awareness and precision of court painters in expressing identity components and conveying effective messages to their audiences.

Keywords

Safavid Painting, Garden Paintings, Power, Media, Culture

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Introduction

One of the main topics in Iranian painting is dealing with the creative ways of visual art and social-political structures mentioned in the Safavid society. In addition to innovation in design, this symbolic art indirectly recognizes the ideology and culture of each society. The role of the functions of Safavid period gardens in this visual art has been critical. The gardens are seen in an imaginary and dreamlike way in the paintings. This illustration relates to believing in an ideal world and a symbolic real-world view. In general, the Iranian garden is depicted as an ideal place for the king and the royal family, although these images have always had multiple meanings. The image of the garden is one of the essential iconographic subjects in Iranian-Islamic painting. A garden is an artificial space consisting of all kinds of trees, flowers, plants, small and large pools and ponds, water streams, mansions and palaces with luxurious and magnificent decorations. Sometimes it seems that they are "just" garden pictures with gardeners. In the paintings of the Safavid period, in addition to the role and function of the landscape, the presence of human agents and their activities in the gardens have been the focus of attention. The role of social actors in representing ideology and court policies creates several symbolic media components. The present research's problem is identifying hidden ideologies and symbols related to Iranian identity and culture. The visual art of the Safavid period, like news media, has led to identifying some levels, social situations, interactions, and text production processes in the spaces of royal gardens. Therefore, it is necessary to carry out a more comprehensive study and reading of the text of garden paintings so that in addition to studying the attitudes of the Safavid kings in using garden icons as one of the signs of power, the role of artists in creating multifaceted images and their impact on the audience are discussed. In this regard, this research seeks to answer these two questions: What components and symbolic elements are the social relations of the Safavid period narrated in the text of garden paintings? How is the ideology and attitude of Safavid artists illustrated in garden paintings?

Research Method

The research method is descriptive and analytical, and the study is of a qualitative research type. The data has been collected using library resources, and the tool is historical image samples, articles, and authoritative scientific sites. The study samples of Safavid period garden paintings are twelve paintings with social, cultural, historical, and identity themes in historical exemplars that have been purposefully selected, studied, and analyzed.

Research Background

Extensive research projects have been done in the area of Iranian gardens and symbolism in Safavid gardens. "Rezai Panah and Shokati Moqarab" (2016), in an article entitled "Analyzing the Representation Quality of the Royalty Position in the Discourse of Safavid Era Travelogues," stated that how the cultural dominance, the superior and symbolic position of the king concerning the upper and lower classes of the society are represented inside and outside the court. "Alami" (2011), in an article entitled "Symbolism in the Iranian Garden (Sense of Nature in the Safavid Royal Gardens)", has discussed the structure of the Iranian garden, the implicit concept of the world's image centered on Chaharbagh, and the relationship between nature and the Safavid royal gardens. "Mansouri and Heydarnataj" (2011), in an article entitled "Chaharbagh: Investigating the Origin of the Chaharbagh Theory as a Model of Iranian Gardening Art", stated that the influence of the meaning of heaven on Iranian garden geometry and Zoroastrian religious teachings have been used in Iranian gardening architecture. "Kafshchian Moghadam and Yahaghi" (2011), in an article

entitled "Examining Symbolic Elements in Iranian Painting," suggested that the contexts of the emergence of symbols, symbolism in painting, geometric and natural symbols, and the influence of foreign cultures are provided to the audience in the form of abstract images and written literature. "Tousi and Emamifar" (2011), in an article entitled "Symbology and Semiotics of Iranian Gardens' Elements According to Elements of Fin Garden of Kashan," stated that knowing the various structures of the Iranian garden, semiotics, and also the relationship between the structure of the garden and the textual layers have been created in the form of primary and secondary elements in the gardens and these elements have become the main structure in the Iranian garden. Most of these studies have examined the Iranian garden's signs, symbols, and systematic structures. The results obtained from them may be effective in advancing this research. However, in none of the conducted studies, media components that can be transferred with multifaceted concepts have been investigated in the garden paintings of the Safavid period.

The formal description of garden paintings of the Safavid period

The creation of pictorial works such as Safavid paintings belongs to the 9th to 12th century A.H. With the beginning of this historical period, social, religious, political, artistic, and cultural developments have taken place in Iran (Monavari, 2018, p. 72). Safavid painters have tried to convey the realities to their audience and readers, considering the multi-purpose visual network of the government, landscape design methods, intellectual and cultural views, as well as social dimensions and the complexities of the political world. The painting of Iranian gardens is one of these pictorial works by Safavid artists to express the valuable position of Iranian art and society. These garden paintings have two natural and social spaces. The natural space has dealt with the structure of traditional gardening and landscaping and its integration with pristine nature. However, the social space has depicted scenes of narratives and semi-narratives, realities, and political-military, socio-cultural, and religious interactions and relationships. These works aim to introduce and identify the ideology and attitude of the Safavid rulers through the language of images and writing. The ideological positions of the Safavids in Iranian art and painting reflect the themes of works in this pictorial domain. This art has been used as a directional and powerful medium in presenting knowledge, the art of gardening, and authentic Iranian identity, along with political and social developments. **Figure 1** includes a sample of the garden paintings of the Safavid period. In this painting, the interior view of the Iranian garden and the use of gardening art are mentioned while the people in the painting discuss and talk with each other. The motif of the Safavid Shah is depicted in the center of the garden, while leaning on his throne. In this image, the king has a fixed identity. The role of other people has been variable according to their position and social rank. In this painting, the court artist, in addition to addressing the main functions of the Iranian garden in representing components such as naturalism, habitat, and production areas, has tried to recount socio-political, identity, and national relationships in the form of multifaceted and symbolic media language. In **Figure 2**, the spaces separated from each other in the text of the garden painting "Sultan of Syria, Malik Saleh" and other garden paintings of the Safavid period are discussed in linear form.



Figure 1. The Sultan of Syria, Malik Saleh, sitting on a throne in his garden and talking to two mystics. Saadi's Bustan, 9th century AH.
Source: Gharipour, 2013, p. 46.

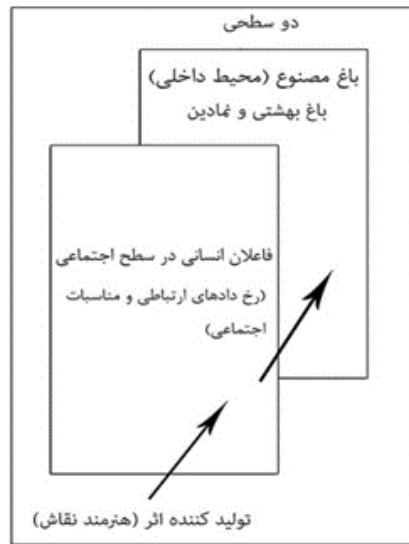


Figure 2. Two-level essence of the text of garden paintings. Source: Authors.

Symbols related to power in the garden paintings of the Safavid period

The main theme in garden paintings is dealing with narratives and semi-narratives that act as governmental media and express the basic needs of the Safavid kings in a symbolic and hidden way. Gardens are one of the most significant achievements of gardeners in the Safavid period, which, in addition to the splendor of the court, were considered a collective place for holding special national and political events. The social atmosphere in the texts of the works welcomes the king, governors of provinces, armies, and ambassadors of neighboring and European countries. Figures 3 & 4 refer to the artificial space of the Iranian garden and the gatherings of human actors, which is a sign of social distancing in the structure of the court system and the less essential strata of the Safavid society. Political interactions and relationships, narratives of the Safavid kings' conquests, Iranian and national myths, ritual and religious narratives, and relationships have expressed the messages and the role of ideological functions of the Safavids in expressing their thoughts. These valued components are represented in the art of Iranian painting as national or private media. The motif of the king in these garden paintings refers to the verticality of the central power structure and the rotating view of the king towards the human agents in the inner and outer environment of the gardens. The first layer in the garden paintings is focused on the palace's interior, the throne, symbolic animal and plant motifs, the decorations of the paintings, and the central pond. This place is depicted as an alcove and a superior position in the paintings, surrounded by evergreen cypress and plantain trees.

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Figures 3. Sermon on Zal with Manouchehr and Qaran”, Shahnameh of Shah Tahmasbi, 9th century AH (central building, the place of the king and the presence of human agents inside the building). Source: Rajabi, Esmaili, Aghaei and Esbati, 2013, p. 108.



Figures 4. The story of Balqis with Suleyman, 9th century AH, Haft-Awrang of Jami (Iranian garden view, interior and exterior architecture, position of human agents). Source: Gharipour, 2013, p. 49.

"Abdi Beyk Navidi Shirazi" in Doha Al-Azhar describes the royal gardens and the constituent elements of these magnificent places, including trees, flowers, ponds, and mansions. In his poems, the ponds in the garden are likened to the Kawsar pond, and the tall flourishing trees stand out next to beautiful flowers in gardens that are an allegory of heaven (Abdi Beyk, 1974, p. 42). The images related to the historical version of the Shahnameh of Shah Tahmasbi depict the political, military, and social events in the form of narratives and mythological stories in the gardens. This illustration shows the authority of the Safavid army in creating security and stabilizing the central government. National and military issues, political structures, and ancient symbolic signs have directly dealt with the king's power and influence in expressing the ideology and military structure of the army. These components were one of the most critical functions of the Safavid kings in the formation of their newly established government, which are discussed in Figures. 5 & 6.

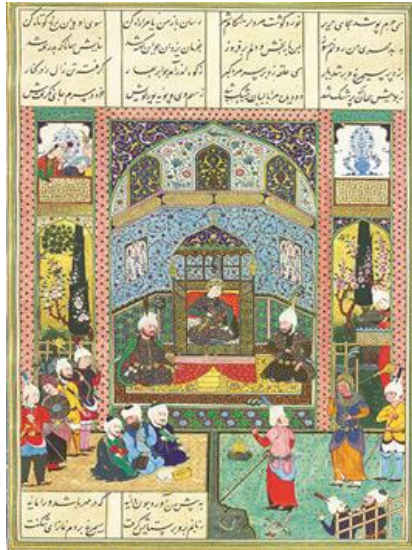


Figure 5. Sermon on Zal with Manouchehr and Qaran, Shahnameh of Shah Tahmasbi, 9th century A.H. Source: [Rajabi et al., 2013, p. 108.](#)



Figure 6. Sermon on handing over Feridoun and the royal throne to Manouchehr, Shahnameh of Shah Tahmasbi. Source: [Rajabi et al., 2013, p. 88.](#)

The role of image language in creating the basis of identity raises one of the most important modern theoretical debates about the issue of identity ([Ahmadi, 2011, p. 49](#)). The way of arranging power and paying attention to collective issues in the gardens has been done by using some identity and ancient symbolic components such as immortality, power, order and harmony, unity, wisdom, and acuity of the king towards country and military issues. Among the other functions of the Safavid royal gardens, which are mentioned in the garden paintings, is establishing a systematic structure of central power, security, and national unity. The gardens space in Shahnameh paintings of Shah Tahmasabi includes two formal and informal areas. Formally, the garden acts as a space for the king to discuss political, military, and advisory issues, but informally, it has become a commendable resting place for the soldiers to enjoy, relax, and refresh their strength to enter the battlefield. Using indirect strategies, Safavid artists have created images of mythical heroes such as Zal and Fereydoun and warriors responsible for protecting the people and the country. Zal is present throughout the ancient era of Ferdowsi's Shahnameh and was considered the advisor of the kings. He has symbols and signs of wisdom and prudence. Also, in literature, Zal is a symbol of fortuity ([Namvar Motalaq & Kangarani, 2015, pp. 148-149](#)). Fereydoun also has a demigod character in the Avesta, and his nickname is the dragon slayer. In addition, he is a descendant of Jamshid and has charisma, a symbol of illumination, the sun of kings, and justice and authority. One of the symbols associated with Fereydoun is a mace with a bull's head made of iron. Iron is always a symbol of dominance, stability, and fighting in battle ([Namvar Motalaq & Kangarani, 2015, pp. 228-232](#)). These mythical symbols and signs in the gardens have addressed the Iranian identity and ancient values and ideas. Court institutions have used garden paintings as a powerful and meaningful medium to express Iranian ideology, complex politics, culture, art, and architecture in the image frame. The use of mythical persons in the position of the king or equal to him in expressing security and country measures, power, and domination over the enemies has been very effective.

Safavid artists, sometimes directly or indirectly, illustrated the king's superior position over other social classes. These artists have presented the king as a mythical hero and the ruler of the people. In some poems about political cultures before and after Islam, the position and status of the king was praised. In Abdi Beyk's royal praise poems, the king is interpreted as "the shadow of God", which is the same translation as "Al-Sultan Zal Allah" (Abdi Beyk, 1974, pp. 45-46). In expressing their views and messages, producers and artists of visual works approached from the position of power and used indirect signs with a media and news aspect. Taking advantage of some mythological and identity themes as well as signs related to power in the social context of the Safavid government has led to the formation of marginal and hidden discourses and functions of the Safavids in the images. The text of some wall paintings (graffiti)¹ in the gardens of the Safavid period, like the garden paintings, has expressed the ideology of the Safavid rulers and the role of Iranian culture and identity with the language of images. Figures 7 & 8 in the wall paintings are devoted to two sessions from the banquets of the Safavid kings. The rank of human agents, the performance of traditional ceremonies (music and dance), and Iranian customs and culture have been beautifully reflected. The collective space in the images refers to a social and historical event in Shahi Gardens, which has depicted cultural and political interactions and relationships through news media, lasting and effective for a specific audience.



Figure 7. Wall painting of Chehelsotoun Garden, Isfahan, Safavid period, reception hall of Shah Abbas I. Source: Ayatollahi, 2015, p. 76.



Figure 8. Wall painting of Chehelsotoun Garden, Isfahan, Shah Tahmaseb Reception Hall. Source: Ayatollahi, 2015, p. 76.

In Figures 9 & 10 of *Khamsa* of Nizami, a wider space of the Iranian garden can be observed. Narratives and half-narratives of social culture, the tradition of authentic Iranian gardening, the functions of gardening and garden design, Safavid customs in court gatherings, costumes of social classes, men's and women's decorations and ornaments, the verticality of power, the position of the king and human agents are the topics that these visual works have covered. According to their views and ideology, the producers of the works have tried to introduce and reflect the ethnic and national culture to their audience. Garden paintings as a multifaceted media, in addition to the multiple functions of gardens in habitats, water supply network divisions, and types of vegetation, have created a spiritual and collective space to inspire, inform, and influence the audience. Another component of these paintings deals with the symbolic concepts in the Iranian garden. The first layer refers to the cultural and artistic components, and in the middle layer, symbols with themes of immortality, heaven, and justice are used. The presence of trees such as cypress and plantain in the garden and birds such as hawks indirectly represent the role of Iranian power and identity in the paintings. The cypress tree symbolizes immortality, survivability, and endurance and has a powerful mythological aspect among trees (Zomorodi, 2008, p. 162). Also, the role of the hawk in ancient Iranian culture is a symbol of acuity. Iranians

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considered it the "storm god" and a symbol of power. The symbolic meanings of this magnificent bird refer to vision, reflection, justice, wisdom, and silence (Shirvani, 2020, p. 31). These paintings refer to gardens that are the source of all good virtues, including justice, mysticism, ability, and stability. The presence of the motif of this bird and cypress trees in the paintings leads us to events that require the category of power, human wisdom, and resistance to problems in society. With his power and keen eye, the king is working to establish justice in society.



Figure 9. Disputation of Medics, Aghamirak, 9th century A.H., Khamsa of Nizami.
Source: Karimov, 2005, p. 48.



Figure 10. Barbad Warbling for Khosrow, Mirza Ali, 950-946 AH, Khamsa of Nizami, British Museum.
Source: Karimov, 2005, p. 138.

In illustrating Figures 11 & 13 of Haft-Awrang of Jami, religious issues have been directly addressed along with social events. In Figure 11, in addition to the presence of people in the royal court, an angel is depicted talking to Suleyman the Prophet (King) and Demon (the stranger) who is gardening. The story in this work of art is very close to the descriptions of Abdi Beyk in Doha Al-Azhar. Figures 12 to 14 have narrated the traditional gardening and art of Safavid and Timurian gardening in the language of images.



Figure 11. The story of Belqis with Suleyman, 9th century AH, Haft-Awrang of Jami.
Source: Gharipour, 2013, p. 49.



Figure 12. Jamshid and Khorshid on the throne, 10th century A.H. Masnavi of Jamshid and Khorshid.
Source: Gharipour, 2013, p. 110.



Figure 13. An urban man and his theft from a village garden, 9th century AH, Haft-Awrang of Jami.
Source: Kevorkian, 1998, p. 122.

By using the position of religious power and entering the belief area, the Safavid artist has proposed the components of religious identity and illustrated scenes from it in the form of narrative stories. In **Figure 12**, angels are depicted next to the gates of gardens as if they are the guardians of the gates of the heavenly gardens. It is also mentioned in the Holy Quran: "We have promised the believers paradise. The garden of joy - the garden of heaven, the garden of the resurrection day, and the garden of the promised paradise - is a place of bliss. As long as the heavens and the earth, whose gates are guarded by angels, remain stable" (Al-Imran, 133). It is also stated in another verse: "In heaven, there will be streams of flowing water, streams of fresh milk, and streams of pure wine and honey, and there, life will be an eternal feast" (Mohammad, 15). In their paintings, the Safavids and Timurids dealt with the art and knowledge of gardening and garden designing, derived from the concepts of heaven in the Quran (See **Figures 11 to 14**). During the Safavid period, religion was considered the unifying factor of the national identity of Iranians, and on this basis, people's sense of commitment and attraction to religious identity was more than their commitment to power identity (Athari & Dastgheyb, 2014, pp. 87-83); Therefore, narrations from divine books and religious hadiths are directly used by the audience in reading the text. According to religion, the producers of court artworks try to make their ideology look positive and functional and benefit from it in order to reach their supreme goals (Agha Golzadeh & Taremi, 2016, p. 407). Creating a religious identity was one of the key strategies of the Safavid rulers in the power area. In reading the paintings "The Story of Belqis with Soleyman" and "Jamshid and Khorshid on the Throne", philosophical views and religious beliefs such as heaven and dominion over the devil can be observed. Also, the closed environment of the gardens has been discussed in the paintings. This holy place is surrounded by the majesty of the Lord and is nothing but the inner aspect of creation. Heaven is surrounded by walls. As a propaganda medium, garden paintings have dealt with how to present the message in a completely obvious way through religious components in the structure of Iranian gardens. The space of these gardens has been dreamy and sacred. Ponds, water streams, fruit trees, and palaces with geometrical, Arabesque, and Khatai decorations add to the beauty of the architecture and space of the gardens. Garden paintings have narrated scenes of cultural and social relations as well as the way of gardening realistically and artistically. In these paintings, artificial nature has considered most aspects of agriculture and gardening. These works have served as visual guides to create awareness and promote agriculture and garden designing art. Under the direct supervision of the king, the court organizations built these gardens. The artists of the royal painting gallery have used these paintings as an effective and understandable medium to address the agricultural, naturalistic, and social discourses on the one hand and on the other hand to reflect the class distance between the upper and lower layers of society using the high fence of the gardens, which has a protest look in it. In the paintings with religious content, the lower strata of society are seen behind the walls of the garden and trying to enter a safe place while the inner space of the gardens welcomes the aristocratic classes, organizations, and entities related to the court.

Influential factors in the formation of visual media

On the one hand, visual media can act as a channel for transmitting government information to the audience's thoughts, and on the other hand, they can play a role as observers of the government's decisions and actions. For this reason, those in power, in order to achieve their goals, try to control the media and use them optimally (Davis, 2016, p. 9). Media is one of the practical elements that can reflect social, cultural, and artistic issues and events at micro

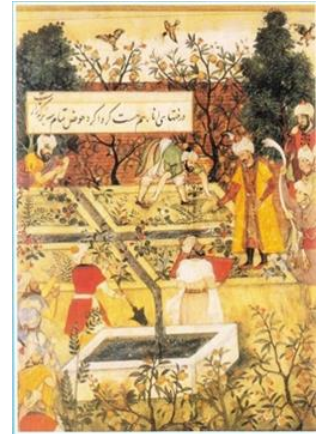


Figure 14. Bagh-e Vafa, Baburnameh. Mongolian painting, 10th century A.H. London, Victoria Albert Museum. Source: Petruccioli, 2013, p. 333.

and macro levels. The text of garden paintings is one of the most important media that represents the level of awareness, influence, power, and dominance of the government in creating national unity and the prosperity of Iranian art, industry, and architecture. The religious, cultural, symbolic, and mythological components contain the knowledge and many influential discourses that in the textual layers of the paintings, through indirect expression, in addition to the traditional gardening style, ancient identity, dealing with interactions and power relations at the institutional and social level, cultural and symbolic patterns. They made it through cultural and artistic mastery and used it as a communication and collective tool. Religious, cultural, symbolic, and mythological components include knowledge and many influential discourses. In addition to the traditional garden style, ancient identity, dealing with the interactions and power relations at the organizational and social level, these discourses of the textual layers of the paintings indirectly illustrated cultural and symbolic patterns through the dominance of culture and art and used it as a communicative and collective tool. This type of cultural dominance has appeared in visual and symbolic images. In the Safavid period, the king is a central position and a symbol of power, an influential person familiar with state affairs, culture, and religion. "In the political reflection of Iranshahri, the king is of a superior race and separate from everyone else" and has the hidden and magical power of monarchy (Bahar, 2012, pp. 465-466). The production and creation of artistic and industrial works were also under the control and influence of the king and princes. Also, most of the paintings were produced in the royal library (Sadeghpour, Mohammadzadeh & Qeydari, 2020, p. 57) in order to create more effectiveness and influence the audience. In Table 1, the components of power and their effects on the audience are expressed using visual media.

Table 1. The influence and effectiveness of the components of power in the illustration of garden paintings of the Safavid period. Source: Authors.

Influential components	Performance or effectiveness of power components
The position of the king in the context of society	King's self-centered performance / unimodal and imperative identity
Mutual solidarity between the king and the group of social actors	Creating political, religious, national, and cultural functions in garden paintings.
Civil society in the independent Safavid government	System-oriented (systemic) socialization
Group gatherings in paintings	Organization of monarchy (court), organization of library (painting house), organization of religious places (schools and houses), military organization
Taking advantage of actual nature / artificial nature in urban space	Iranian garden (Ferdos), spiritual and sacred space, a superior position

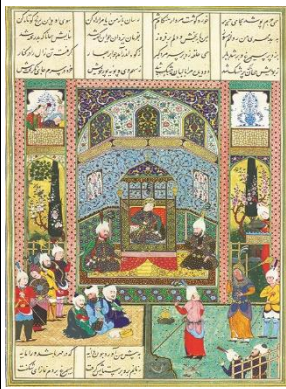
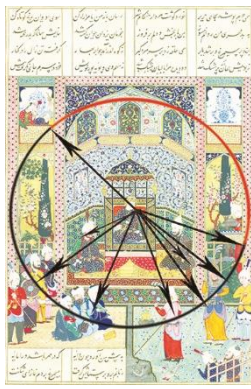


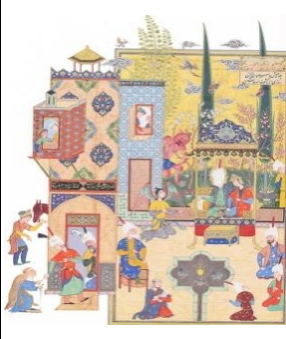
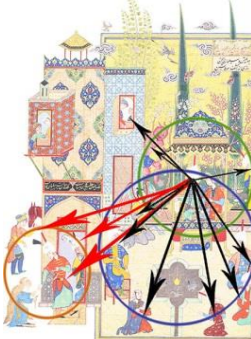
Accordingly, through multi-purpose media that reinforce the ideological load of textual layers in garden paintings, influential factors in the power area introduce identity and religious values to the audience and influence them in the form of socio-cultural functions. These media types have been designed and implemented purposefully to eventually become an effective stimulus to respond to the audience(s).

Findings

The text of the paintings shows the ideology, collective space, and nature of the Iranian garden in the Safavid era. The turning of human agents according to the rank and social

context is a reflection of the dominant beliefs and culture of the Safavid government, which are represented in Iranian painting as an exclusive and governmental media, with the language of images and writing. **Table 2** includes the visual reading of text layers.

Table 2. Visual reading of the textual layers of the Safavid garden paintings. Source: Authors.

Painting	Turning of Human Agents	Descriptions
		<p>Dominant ideology: Narrative, social events (political and mythological), centralism, symbolism (King / existing signs of nature), power, and domination. Symbols of power: cypress, king, God's great name.</p> <p>The appearance of the image: war tools (bow and arrow, mace, sword, and dagger) - the space of the Iranian garden, the duality of the image (image and writing), landscape, collective and military activities.</p> <p>Implied meaning of the image: multifunctionality of gardens.</p>
		<p>Dominant ideology: landscaping, social and cultural events, identification, symbolization, and national and ethnic cultural representation. Symbols of power: cypress and plantain, king, hawk.</p> <p>The appearance of the image: social interactions - Iranian garden space, the two-facetedness of the image, landscaping, collective activities.</p> <p>The implicit meaning of the image: the multifunctionality of the garden, the two-part nature of the image layers.</p>
		<p>Dominant ideology: religious storytelling/narrative, symbolism, and identity. Symbols of power: cypress and plantain, king, angel, and demon.</p> <p>The appearance of the image: social interactions - the space of the Iranian garden, the two-facetedness of the painting, landscaping, collective activities, and dealing with religious and cultural issues.</p> <p>The implicit meaning of the image: multifunctionality of the garden, two parts of the layers, creation of negative and positive space.</p>

Traditional Iranian gardens are one of the most important achievements of the Safavids, which played a central role in introducing architecture, power, and the flourishing of Iranian art and culture. By using the signs and themes formed in the text of garden paintings, the Safavids have symbolically and propagandistically tried to represent the growth of their government structure and ideology in order to pave their way toward social development and modernity. The main role of visual and written language in garden paintings is to deal with popular beliefs, ancient beliefs, native and ethnic traditions, Iranian art and craft,

Iranian identity, naturalism, and cultural and social values of the Safavids, which has become a different attitude from reading pictures and has turned it into a type of visual network media in this era. In this medium, a network of signs, main and marginal discourses, and ultimately religious, political, identity, cultural, artistic, and cultural domination are merged to create a new visual art form that conveys messages and codes (See Table 3).

Table 3. Themes and signs represented in the text of garden paintings of the Safavid period. Source: Authors.

Garden Paintings
Religious identity: (religious narratives - religious gatherings) / cultural identity: (ancient and religious ceremonies and rituals)
Political and military components: (narratives and political and national events) / signs of power - centralism: (the presence of the king as the head of power and also overseeing all government affairs and other classes in society), perfectionism, ownership - individual domination and verticalism.
Symbolic themes: (King), Iranian garden (Paradise garden), cypress and plantain trees (survivability and immortality), pond (Kowsar pool), mythological themes: (Shahnameh epic stories and narratives) / Chaharbaghi (archetype), hawk (acuity and justice)/religious (holy place/heaven).
Naturalism-landscape/network: visual variety in the landscape, multi-functional (expressing the functions formed in the Iranian garden which is reflected through paintings), custom (private customer)
Signs of traditionalism: (return to ancient values and traditions) / nationalism: (national unity and union)
Themes: literary, epic, image-writing, court, and national media

Conclusion

The Safavid garden paintings are one of the most effective achievements in presenting visual and symbolic messages, which can reach the ideology and policies of the Safavid rulers by scrutinizing the textual layers of these works. According to the wishes and needs of the Safavid kings and their beliefs and perceptions of the society, painters painted Iranian gardens and used them as a propaganda medium. This research has been done to investigate the media role of the garden in achieving the ideological goals and governmental legitimacy of the Safavid government. The cultural and identity processes and components in the area of visual art have been a retelling of the thought forms of the rulers and a deep and artistic look at the realities and policies of the court, which is the intersection of power and hidden signs of time, place, politics, and society in this historical period. In the images of garden paintings, some developments in the design of gardens and the social structure of the Safavids in the period from the 9th to the 11th centuries AH can be observed. In their works, the artists have addressed themes such as order and establishment of social justice, religion, and the government's authority in the textual layers of garden paintings. The content of garden paintings in the Shahnameh of Shah Tahamasbi is related to identity values and the growth of military and martial forces. The Safavids used symbolic elements, mythology, and religion to achieve political stability, national unity, centralism, nationalism, and finally, to legitimize their government. In these works, the main focus is on the position of the king and the use of one-dimensional space, and the enlargement of the inner space of the palace. After the Shahnameh of Shah Tahamasbi, in Khamsa of Nizami, and Haft-Awrang of Jami and other garden paintings, with the spread of socio-cultural views, the images leave the rigid and military state and give their place to cultural gatherings and religious as well as ethnic relations in the gardens. The apparent language of garden paintings also goes out of the direct mode and indirectly deals with the functions of the

government. Likewise, codes and symbolism in religion, culture, and Iranian national values are presented in the narrative language in social and natural spaces. In *Khamsa* of Nizami, the emphasis on the open space of gardens and the creation of two-dimensional and sometimes three-dimensional spaces in the images is the main structure of traditional gardening and the art of garden design; However, in *Haft-Awrang* of Jami's garden paintings, two different space creations can be seen, in which two negative and positive spaces are discussed: the outer space without background, which is a reflection of the negative space, and the positive space, which has two layers (primary and lower), which can be seen as two connected frames, telling the narrative in the garden in an animated way. The painter passes through the outer space or the white frame, enters the mansion's entrance, and then enters the inner space of the garden. The role of human agents, the way of space creation, and religious and landscape identity components are beautifully represented in these paintings and cover the themes of identity and religion. The garden paintings of the Safavid period have changed from a simple visual medium that tells the news and communication events of the Safavid society to a multi-purpose, moving, powerful, and transferable visual medium. This media has revealed various themes, discourses, and textual layers in the Safavid social structures. Dominant themes in garden paintings refer to the concept of media power and symbolic cultural dominance. These works have presented society's mobility and structured dynamics in the form of visual media. In these paintings, the space is out of a completely uniform state and is divided into two internal and external levels. These levels have been able to display various social systems and contexts from the point of view of text producers. The internal gatherings of the gardens refer to the people who formed the main foundations of the government and were placed at the head of government affairs; gatherings outside or outside the environment of the gardens show the lower strata of the society who are not allowed to enter the interior of the garden and are longing to reach this safe and sacred environment. In these paintings, these people are placed in a negative space and marginalized. The Safavid artist refers to both main aspects in garden paintings: firstly, a powerful and coded message in response to the king's goals, and secondly, addressing the social space of the lower classes. Safavid art combines realistic, traditional, symbolic, and protest art.

Appendix

1. Both visual arts are illustrated by painters with the same style, structure, and composition. The art of wall painting (graffiti) is performed on the wall in a larger area, but painting on paper is performed in a smaller area.

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