

Original Research Article

Marzieh Esmaeili<sup>1</sup>

Alireza Sheikhi<sup>2</sup>

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بازشناسی کتیبه‌ها و تزیینات جامه‌های فتح صفوی محفوظ در موزه‌های ایران

## **Recognition of Inscriptions and Decorations of Safavid Talisman Shirts Preserved in Iranian Museums\***

### **Abstract**

**Problem Definition:** Safavid Talisman shirts are a particular type of ritual clothing, the most prominent feature of which is the extensive use of inscriptions and calligraphy. In addition to the script, all kinds of decorative and symbolic motifs, astronomical signs, and Talisman tables are also used in this shirt. These clothes, as their name implies, were often worn during the war and under armor, and the purpose might be a kind of amulet to achieve conquest and victory on the battlefield.

**Objective:** The purpose of this article is a visual and content analysis of the elements used in the Safavid Talisman shirts to clarify the relationship between the concepts of inscriptions and motifs and to understand the influencing factors on the shirts, taking into account the political, social and cultural conditions of the Safavid period. This study addresses two questions, "What are the features of the Safavid Talisman shirts in terms of visual structure and content, and what inscriptions, motifs, and symbols are used in them?"

**Research Method:** The research method is analytical-historical, and the materials have been collected in library and field studies. The statistical and study community also includes three examples of Talisman shirts from the Safavid period, which are preserved in local and national museums.

**Results:** By examining the samples in the museums of Iran, it was found that the content of the inscriptions and motifs used in the shirts are related to each other, and the themes of the holy texts, symbols, and signs used in them somehow express victory, overcoming enemies, and protection against all kinds of challenging conditions. The political, social, and cultural conditions governing the Safavid period and factors such as religion, superstition, and archaism are among the most critical factors influencing the existing samples. Accordingly, in addition to using calligraphy as the dominant decoration, the use of ancient symbols is also the most important common feature of these artworks.

### **Keywords**

Safavid Art, Talisman Shirts, Inscriptions, Motif

1. Department of Handicrafts, Faculty of Applied Arts, University of Art, Tehran, Iran.

2. Corresponding author, Department of Handicrafts, Faculty of Applied Arts, University of Art, Tehran, Iran.

Email: [a.sheikhi@art.ac.ir](mailto:a.sheikhi@art.ac.ir)

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### **Introduction**

Talisman shirts preserved documents of Iran's historical beliefs, especially from the Safavid period. The art of calligraphy, which has always been the most important and widely used art of Muslims in different periods, is the most prominent characteristic of these clothes. These shirts, as their name implies, were often worn during the war and under armor, the purpose of which was to produce a kind of body protection and a means to achieve conquest and victory on the battlefield. The owners of these shirts believe that the meanings of the shapes and inscriptions used on the clothes protect them from evil forces and bring victory. Their other use has been to ward off evil eyes. Their production is not only limited to Iran, and in addition to the Safavid samples, three different types, including the Ottoman, Mongolian (Gurkani), and West African styles, were produced in the Islamic world simultaneously as the Iranian samples. The appearance features of the clothes, their designs, and decorations, as well as the content of the inscriptions, signs, and motifs, are different according to the type and region of their production. The samples produced in Iran, under the influence of the political, social, and cultural conditions governing the Safavid era, have unique characteristics, and these characteristics are an essential distinction between the Safavid samples and other Ottoman, Gurkan, and West African samples. Accordingly, the Safavid Talisman shirts, in addition to being recognized and examined in terms of visual and content structure characteristics, can also be studied and analyzed from the perspective of influential political, social, and cultural factors common in the Safavid period. The current research seeks to answer these questions: "what are the artistic and conceptual characteristics of the Safavid Talisman shirts in terms of visual structure and content?" and "What are the similarities and differences between the Safavid Talisman shirts and other samples produced in the Islamic world?" Despite the numerous studies in clothing and textiles of the Safavid period, less attention has been paid to the Talisman shirts of this period and related opinions and beliefs. Also, the available information about the Talisman shirts only includes providing a general picture of the garments compared to other works produced in Iran. As a result, the turning point of the current research is to examine the visual and content characteristics of the elements used in the Safavid Talisman shirts in the museums of Iran, considering the political, social, and cultural conditions that prevailed during the Safavid era.

### **Research Method**

The current research is analytical-historical in nature and method, and data collection is in the form of library and field studies. Sampling is done purposefully or qualitatively, and the statistical and research population includes three samples of Talisman shirts from the Safavid period (from the 10th century AH to the 12th century AH) which are kept in local museums, identified according to the database of museums and conducted field studies. In presenting the research findings, firstly, the types of Talisman shirts available in the Islamic world and Iran are introduced; Then, the Safavid Talisman shirts preserved in local museums are examined separately in terms of inscriptions, motifs, and content.

### **Research Background**

A few research projects have been conducted so far regarding the Safavid Talisman shirts, and most of them are only dedicated to introducing and presenting a general picture of the shirts. Studies related to this article can be divided into three groups; the first group is associated explicitly with investigating Safavid Talisman shirts. "Roohfar" (2001), in the article entitled "Nad Ali Shirt or Talisman shirt," has studied the Talisman shirts preserved

in the National Museum of Iran in terms of fabric, manufacturing stages, and the way of applying decorations on the shirts. "Soleimani" (2012) introduced two samples of Safavid Talisman shirts in the article entitled "Two newly found battle shirts: A memory of the Safavid era". The second group is research studies on Occult Sciences and its manifestation in industries and works of art. "Vedai" (2014), in her dissertation entitled "Investigating amulets and Talismans motifs from the Safavid period to the end of the Qajar period", examines the motifs of amulets from the Safavid period to the end of the Qajar period. In this research, Talisman shirts are introduced as a sample of charms related to the group of fabrics and clothes. But there is no description of this category of clothes. "Maddison Smith and" (1997), in the book "Scientific Instruments: The Eleventh Volume of the Twelve-Volume Selection of Islamic Art Collection,<sup>1</sup>" investigated the types of scientific instruments in the Islamic world and objects containing Talismans and related to occultism in the Islamic world. The third group is connected to Islamic textiles and war tools, a small part of which is dedicated to introducing Talisman shirts. In the book entitled "Looking at Textile Weaving in the Islamic Era," and in a part of the chapter related to Safavid era textiles, "Roohfar" (2012) introduced the Qalamkar (calico) fabrics. "Alexander" (1992), in the book entitled "Tools of War: The twelfth volume of the twelve-volume selection of the Islamic Art Collection,<sup>2</sup>" examines the tools of war in the Islamic world, such as types of armor, helmets, and swords, and a part of the book is also dedicated to the introduction of Talisman shirts. Although in the available research projects, the content is related to the introduction of Talisman shirts, the available information only contains a general picture of the shirts along with other works produced in Iran. The turning point of this study is investigating the visual and content characteristics of the elements used in the Safavid Talisman shirts and analyzing the formation of these shirts.

### Types of Talisman shirts in the Islamic world

Islamic Talisman shirts have four distinct types, including Ottoman, Safavid, Mongolian, and West African styles, and all date back to the 15th century and after" (Maddison & Smith, 1997, p. 117). The shirts' appearance, designs, and decorations, as well as the content of the inscriptions and sacred compositions used in them, are different according to the type of shirts. The oldest and most available samples of Talisman shirts belong to the Ottoman group. "The Topkapi Palace in Istanbul preserves many of these shirts, known as Tilsim gomlek" (Atil, 1987, p. 196). In exceptional cases, the name of the Ottoman sultan or prince is also written on them (Rogers & Ward, 1991, p. 175). But their most salient feature and distinction from other types is the use of multiple colors, especially red, blue, and gold, as well as the intensive use of dense magical or talismanic squares (See Figures. 1 & 2).



**Figures 1 & 2.** Ottoman Talisman Shirts. Preserved in Topqapi Museum (Atil, 1987, p. 196) and (Rogers & Ward, 1991, p. 175).



The second group belonged to the Gurkans of India and were prepared in the 16th AD/10<sup>th</sup> AH and 17<sup>th</sup> AD/11<sup>th</sup> AH centuries. "All Mongolian Talisman shirts consist of only three

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pieces of fabric. Their body and sleeves are square cut, and they are connected at the shoulder". (Source: <https://museum.gwu.edu/search/talismanic%2Bshirt>) All parts of this shirt are covered with 114 verses of the Qur'an along with 99 names of God and the words of Shahadateyn<sup>3</sup> (Maddison & Smith, 1997, p. 117) (See Figure 3).



**Figure 3.** Gurkani Talisman shirt.  
Preserved in the Metropolitan Museum.  
Source: <https://metmuseum.org>.



**Figures 4 & 5.** Talisman undershirts,  
belonging to West Africa.  
Source: <https://filslisibles.blogspot.com>.

A third type is some underwear, including men's pants and undershirts made in Senegal and a kind of sleeveless blouse made in Nigeria. In this model of the Talismanic shirts, divine prayers, the names of the Sunni caliphs, the names of the angels, and the 99 names of Allah, all in the form of Abjad numbers, along with verses from the Quran with not-so-good handwriting, are depicted, and underpants are also covered with verses from the Quran and various large tables (Maddison & Smith, 1997, p. 117) (See Figures. 4 & 5). The fourth group is Iranian Talisman shirts, whose production began in the Safavid period and continued until the Qajar era. The frequency of this type of shirt is less than the Ottoman samples and more than that of the Mongol and West Africa. Most examples are from the Safavid period, and others are from the Zand and Qajar eras. Iranian Talisman shirts have a square cut and shape and are often in the form of short shirts above the knee (tunic). All over this shirt, a selection of Qur'anic verses, God's names, prayers related to the Shia religion and the names of the twelve Imams, tables of numbers, Talismans, and several geometrical, plant, animal, and sometimes astronomical motifs have been drawn using Qalamkar (calico) method.

### Available samples of Safavid Talisman shirts in foreign museums and collections

According to the research carried out, there are seven Talisman shirts from the Safavid period, five of which are in the National Museum of Iran, the National Museum of the Qur'an, Literature, and Mysticism in Ahar and the personal collection of Karimzadeh Tabrizi. Two others are preserved in the collection of Nasser Khalili. In the following, the Safavid Talisman shirts were first kept in foreign collections, and then local samples were examined.

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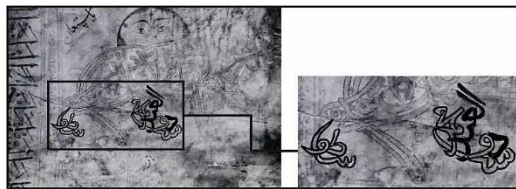
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**Figure 6.** The Talisman shirt of Shah Ismail I, by Dost Mohammad Heravi. Preserved in the collection of Karimzadeh, Tabrizi. Source: Karimzadeh Tabrizi, 1991, p. 1559.



**Figure 7.** Dost Mohammad Heravi's signature at the foot of the lion motif. In order to make the artist's signature clear, the sides of the name have been delineated and the words can be easily read.

Source: Karimzadeh Tabrizi, 1991, p. 1370.

The oldest sample of the Iranian Talisman shirt is preserved in the collection of Karimzadeh Tabrizi. This shirt belonged to Shah Ismail and is one of the few samples signed by its creator "Dost Mohammad Haravi" (See Figure 6). In the background of the shirt, all kinds of calligraphy, Talismans, and protective verses, as well as the lion and the sun motifs, are drawn between regular geometric divisions, and its inscriptions include Al-Fatah Surah, God's names, Muhammad, Ali, Fatima, Hassan, and Hussain, and Nad Ali's prayer. On the back of the shirt, which has remained more intact than the front, two symmetrical motifs of the lion and the sun can be seen (See Figure 7). The Talisman shirt preserved in the treasury of the National Museum of Iran is made of cotton with dimensions of 69.5×79 cm, and its decorations are square, rectangular, and lozenge motifs along with Arabesque and Tangerine designs inside of which there are verses from the Qur'an written in Sols Jali (great) and Qobar calligraphy using black, red, and green inks. On this shirt, on both sides of the chest, inside a rectangular frame, the phrase "بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم" is written in Sols Jali calligraphy, and the back of the shirt also includes a relatively large Tangerine. According to the information from the National Museum of Iran, this shirt belongs to the 10th century AH. However, based on the type of cutting and stitching, such as the collar model, band embroidery, cotton embroidery used around the collar and side slits and two sleeves, and motifs and decorations, it seems to belong to the late Safavid period (See Figure 8). Nasser Khalili's collection contains two samples of Safavid Talisman shirts. The first sample is made of cotton with dimensions of 145×76 cm, including two large and small square pieces, and has short sleeves. The entire surface of the shirt is covered with Talisman tables and squares. Among these tables, there are inscriptions written in the Tawqi calligraphy, which contain Al-Fatah Surah, Ayah al-Kursi, Ayah Al-Nur (verse 35 of Noor Surah), al-Fatah and verse 26 of Al-Imran Surah, the names of Allah, Ya-Ali Prayers, and the names and attributes of the twelve Imams (Alexander, 1992, p. 78) (See Figure 9). The second shirt, made of cotton with 95×138.5 cm, consists of two pieces of sizeable square cloth, four small square pieces, and two triangular pieces, and contains short sleeves. This sample also includes dense tables and Talisman squares. Its inscriptions are written in Raqa' and Nashq calligraphies, including all Al-Fatah Surah, verse 13 of Al-Saf Surah, "نصر من الله"



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" وفتح قريب" (Nasr Manallah va Fatah Qarib), verses 26 and 27 of Al-Imran Surah, verse 58 of Al-Yas Surah, Name of Allah, names of five Imams, and Shia prayers (Maddison & Smith, 1997, p. 119) (See Figure 10).



**Figure 8.** Safavid Talisman shirt preserved in the treasury of the National Museum of Iran. Source: National Museum of Iran, archive.



**Figure 9.** Safavid Talisman shirt preserved in Nasser Khalili collection. Source: Alexander, 1992, p. 78.



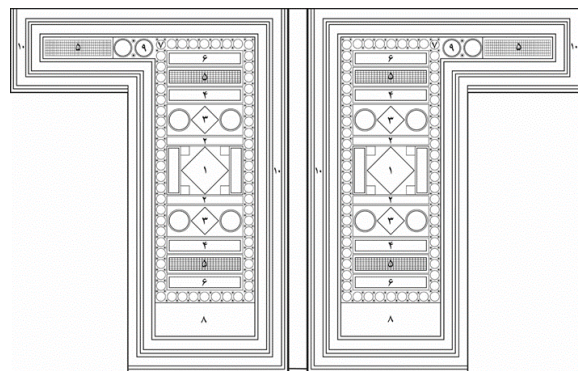
**Figure 10.** Safavid Talisman shirt preserved in Nasser Khalili collection. Source: Maddison & Smith, 1997, p. 120.

### Investigating the Safavid Talisman shirts preserved in Iranian museums

**1. The Talisman shirt preserved in the National Museum of Iran:** This shirt belongs to the 11th century AH, which, based on its inscription, belongs to Shah Abbas the Great. Its fabric is made of finely woven canvas, and the overall dimensions of the shirt are 88 x 82 cm. It is designed as an open-front shirt without adding any straps or buttons to close and connect the front parts. All around the shirt in the front part, there are seven narrow and wide margins (See Figure 11), and the entire surface of the shirt includes tabulations and geometric decorations with inscriptions (See Table 1). In addition to these decorations, this shirt contains six Talismans on the sleeves and the upper and lower parts. The overall composition of the shirt's decorations is symmetrical (See Table 2). Surahs of Al-Fatah, Anam, Zakharf, Al-Kafrun, Ikhlas, Falaq, and Nas, verses from Yusuf Surah, Jathiyah, Baqarah, as well as Names of Allah, Joshan Kabir prayer, and several other prayers, including the Asma Azam prayer<sup>4</sup> in Kufi Banaei, Sols Jali, Naskh, Qobar Naskh and Iranian Naskh calligraphies written in black, red, green, blue, and gold ink, in different parts of the shirt are inscribed. However, it has been faded and illegible or wholly lost in some areas, such as parts of the shirt's border and the four lozenges on the right and left sides (See Figure 12).



**Figure 11.** Safavid Talisman shirt preserved in the National Museum of Iran. Source: National Museum of Iran, archive.



**Figure 12.** Line drawing of Talisman shirt preserved in the National Museum of Iran (front part). Source: Authors.

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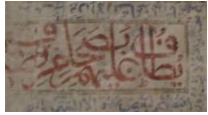




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On the left sleeve, inside two circular frames, the phrase “هو الحفيظ، اللهم بارك هذه القميص الفتح” للسلطان معظم المكرم، الذي جعله مالك الرقاب اشرف الامم ابدته بالعدل و الكرم والبس بلباس يا ذاالعرش اعني للسلطان الصفوى الموسوى العباس الحسينى” is inscribed in Naskh calligraphy. Due to the incorrect placement and inappropriate location of this shirt in the museum, as well as the lack of cooperation of the museum officials in photographing and preparing a picture of the back of the cloth, there is no image of this part of the shirt, and the type of decorations and the content of its inscriptions are unclear.

**Table 1.** Talisman Shirts Inscriptions Preserved in the National Museum of Iran. Source: Authors.

Placement of Inscription on Shirt		Inscription Style	Script Color	Background Color	Calligraphy Size and Width	Figures
1	Right & Left	Koufi Banaee, Naskh	Gold, Red, Black	Pale Goldenrod	Qobar	
2		Sols	Gold		Jali	
3	Right & Left (Up & Down)	Naskh	Black		Qobar	
4		Sols, Iranian Naskh	Blue, Red		Jali	
5	Sleeve (Right & Left)	Naskh	Black, Red		-	
	Body (Right & Left)		Gold, Red, Black			
6	Right & Left (up)	Sols, Iranian Naskh	Blue, Red		Jali	
	Right & Left (down)	Sols, Naskh	Blue, Gold			





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Placement of Inscription on Shirt		Inscription Style	Script Color	Background Color	Calligraphy Size and Width	Figures
7	Right & Left	Naskh	Black		Qobar	
8		Sols	Gold		Jali	
9		Naskh			-	
10	Sols, Iranian Naskh	Blue, Gold, Black, Red, Green	Jali			

**Table 2.** Motifs in Talisman Shirts Preserved in the National Museum of Iran. Source: Authors.

Placement of Motifs on the Shirt	Motif Type	Motif Color	Background Color	Figures
1	Geometrical (Lozenge)	Lined in Red	Pale Goldenrod	
3	Geometrical (Lozenge & Circle) And faded Arabesque patterns in the background of the frame	Lined in Red & Black		
7	Geometrical (Consecutive circles, Empty & Filled)	Lined in Red & Blue and Gold spots in smaller circles		
9		Lined in Red and Blue & Blue spots in smaller circles		

**2. Talisman Shirt preserved in the National Quran Museum:** This shirt belongs to the Safavid era, is made of linen and has 64×89 cm dimensions. The shirt's front part is designed as a closed form, with a simple round collar and a hem (slit) to the central area of the shirt to allow the head to pass more quickly. The sleeves of the dress are short, and two gussets are sewn in the armpit area and where the sleeve joins the shirt. The most damage occurred in the armpits, gussets, and sleeves, and most of the table numbers in these areas were lost due to moisture (See Figure 13).



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Figure 13. Safavid Talisman Shirts Preserved in the National Quran Museum (front & back).

Source: National Quran Museum, archive.

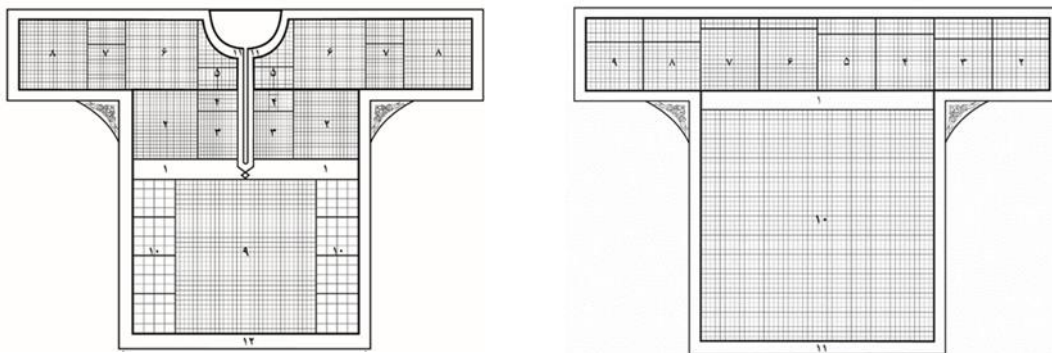

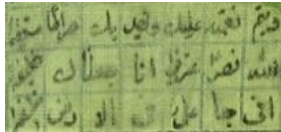


Figure 14. Line drawing of Talisman Shirts Preserved in National Quran Museum. (front & back). Drawing:

Source: Authors.

The extensive use of Talisman squares is the essential characteristic and distinguishing feature of the Talisman shirt preserved in the National Museum of the Qur'an. Each of these squares contains numbers, letters, names of Allah, or verses from the Quran, all written in black ink (See Tables 3 & 4). The size of the inscriptions on this shirt is smaller than other samples. Surahs of Nasr and Falaq and verses from Surahs of Fatah, Noor, Baqarah, Yusuf, Hashr, Ghafar, Isra, and some names of Allah are written in black, red, green, and azure inks. However, the motifs of the shirts are not limited to the scripts, and the gussets are sewn in the area where the sleeve is connected to the dress and contain plant and Arabesque motifs (See Table 5).

Table 3. Inscriptions on the front of Talisman Shirts Preserved in the National Qur'an Museum. Source: Authors.



Placement of Inscription on Shirt		Inscription Style	Script Color	Background Color	Figures
1		Tawqi	Red	Blue	
5	Right & Left	Tawqi	Black	White	

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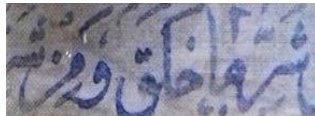
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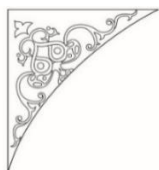
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Placement of Inscription on Shirt	Inscription Style	Script Color	Background Color	Figures
11	Tawqi	Green		
12		Azure		

**Table 4.** Inscriptions on the back of Talisman Shirt Preserved in the National Quran Museum. Source: Authors.

Placement of Inscription on the Shirt	Inscription Style	Script Color	Background Color	Figures
1	Tawqi	Red	White	
11		Azure		

**Table 5.** Motifs of Talisman Shirt Preserved in the National Quran Museum. Source: Authors.

Placement of Motif on the shirt	Motif Type	Motif Color	Figure	Analysis
Gussets	Decorative (Arabesque & Khatai Motifs)	Red, Green, Azure		

**3. Talisman Shirt preserved in the Ahar Museum of Literature and Mysticism:** This shirt, belonging to the Safavid period, has overall dimensions of 72×84 cm and is the only sample that uses silk in its fabric in addition to cotton. The shirt's front part is designed as a closed form, with a simple round collar and hem (slit) to the center of the dress for easy passage of the head. All around the collar and hem of the shirt, bands are embroidered, and two small straps are established to close the collar. The damage to this shirt mainly occurred in the armpit area, and the inscriptions in this part were lost due to the humidity in this area. In addition, the fibers of parts of the collar border in the front and the embroidery area and the spaces between the octagons on the back of the shirt have been lost and torn (See Figure 15).

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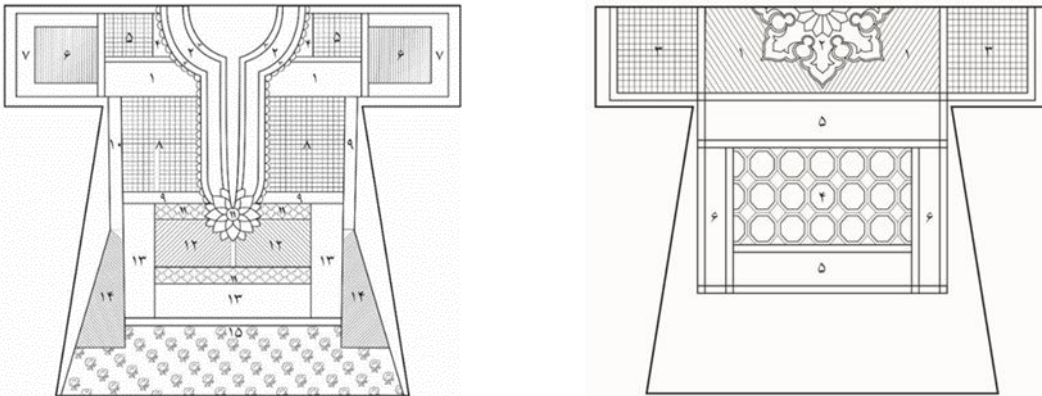
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**Figure 15.** Safavid Talisman Shirt Preserved in Ahar Museum of Literature and Irfan. (back & front).  
Source: Ahar Museum of Literature and Irfan, archive.

The decorations of the Talisman Shirt preserved in the Ahar Museum of Literature and Mysticism are inscriptions written by Sols Jali, Naskh, Tawqi mixed with Roqeh, Nashkh Qobar, which are written in black, red, and green colors and their contents are Surahs Nasr, Al-Fatiha, Ikhlās, Falaq, Nas, Qadr, and verses are from Surahs Fatah, Yas, Kahf, Baqarah, Aal Imran, Qalam, Araaf, Hashr, Dua Joshan Kabir, Nad Ali, and Ya Allah prayer (See Tables 6 & 7). In addition to these inscriptions, on the surface of this shirt, Talismanic squares, all kinds of geometric motifs, overlapping tangerines and embroidery, lotus flower, flower, and sprig (See Table 8) are worked in different parts of the shirt (See Figure 16).



**Figure 16.** Analysis of Talisman Shirt Preserved in the Ahar Museum of Literature and Irfan (front & back).  
Drawing: Authors.

**Table 6.** Characteristics of the inscriptions used on the front of the Talisman Shirt Preserved in the Ahar Museum of Literature and Mysticism. Source: Authors.








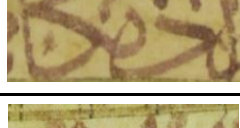

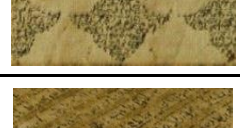
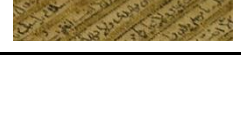
Placement of Inscription on the Shirt		Inscription Style	Script Color	Background Color	Calligraphy Size and Width	Figures
1	Right & Left	Sols	White (Negative Space)	Black	Jali	

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Placement of Inscription on the Shirt	Inscription Style	Script Color	Background Color	Calligraphy Size and Width	Figures	
2		Gold	Pale Goldenrod			
3	Tawqi mixed with Roqeh	Red & Black		-		
4	Right & Left	Naskh		Red & Black	Qobar	
5		Naskh		Black, Red	-	
6				Black	Qobar	
7		Sols		Red	Jali	
8		Naskh		Black, Red	Jali	
9		Sols		Red		
10	Jali					
11	Naskh	Black		Qobar		
12	Naskh			Qobar		



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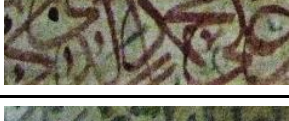

Recognition of Inscriptions and Decorations of Safavid Talisman Shirts Preserved in Iranian Museums

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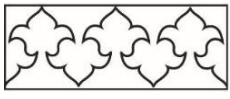


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Placement of Inscription on the Shirt	Inscription Style	Script Color	Background Color	Calligraphy Size and Width	Figures
13	Sols	White (Negative Space)	Black	Jali	
14	Naskh	Black		Qobar	

**Table 7.** Inscriptions on the back of Talisman Shirt Preserved in the Ahar Museum of Literature and Mysticism. Source: Authors.

Placement of Inscription on Shirt	Inscription Style	Script Color	Background Color	Calligraphy Size and Width	Figures
1	Naskh	Black	Pale Goldenrod	Qobar	
3				Qobar	
4	Naskh	Qobar			
5	Sols	Red		Jali	
6		Black			

**Table 8.** Motifs of Talisman Shirt Preserved in Ahar Museum of Literature and Mysticism. Source: Authors.

Placement of Motif on the Shirt	Motif Type	Motif Color	Figure	Analysis
11	Decorative	Black White		
12	Symbolic	Gold Red Dark Green		



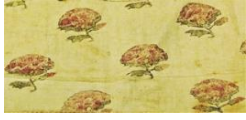


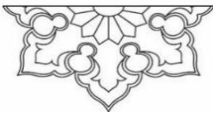
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Placement of Motif on the Shirt		Motif Type	Motif Color	Figure	Analysis
16		Decorative	Red Green		
2	Back	Decorative	Gold Dark Green		

With the formation of the Safavid dynasty and the emergence of fundamental fluctuations in political, social, and cultural conditions, extensive changes occurred in all the elements of society, the starting point of which was the rule of Shah Ismail and the legitimacy of the Shia religion. Religious beliefs, a renewed approach to old ideas, and firm adherence to traditions and rituals are considered the most important political, social, and cultural characteristics of the Safavid period. The role of the government was very effective in this dynasty's continuation, and all of these had a major implication in the Safavid Talisman shirts. The political, social, and cultural factors influencing the Safavid Talisman shirts include the legitimization of the Shia religion, the legitimacy of the government, superstition, belief in ancient views, and archaism, each of which in some way affected the structure, content, and decorations of the Talisman shirts of this era.

### The legitimacy of the Shia religion

When the Safavids came to power, Twelve Imami Shiite was chosen as the legitimate religion of the country, and "its declaration in the year 907/1501 AD as a formal religion in the newly established Safavid government was the most important action of Shah Ismail" (Savory, 1993, p. 26). The legitimization of the Shia religion played a crucial role in consolidating the political system and the Safavid government and could establish Iran's national and political unity on a strong foundation. As a result, Shia religious beliefs directly influenced the existing religious conditions, sciences, literature, and art of this era. Although the influence of Shia religion in early Safavid art cannot be precisely determined, gradually, more objects were decorated with the names of Shia Imams, and the passion for Shah Ismail's religious poems was manifested to some extent in the paintings of Sultan Muhammad, the great artist of the Tabriz school" (Kenby, 2010, p. 12). Iranian and Shia artists tried to reflect Shia thoughts, beliefs, and devotion to the family of the Prophet (PBUH) and the Holy Imams (PBUH), especially Ali Ibn Abi Talib, in addition to topics such as Quranic verses, divine names, hadiths, and holy and prophetic traditions in their works of art (Afrough, 2013, pp. 25-26). In this period, it became common to decorate silk and gold fabrics with inscriptions written in Sols, Naskh, Nastaliq, etc. These designs were mostly graves coverings or curtains in holy places, and their content was Quranic verses, prayers, hadiths, and sometimes the name of the weaver (Talebpour, 2012, pp. 137-138). In addition, Talisman shirts are the most apparent samples showing the influence of the Shia religion and beliefs on the textiles and clothing of this period. All over this clothing, in addition to a selection of verses from the Holy Qur'an, names of Allah, tables of Talismans and all kinds of geometric and plant designs, all kinds of prayers related to the Shia religion, and the names of the twelve Imams and charms attributed to the Shia Imams are inscribed. In fact, "the most important feature and the difference between the Safavid Talisman shirts

and other types is the content of the inscriptions, which illustrates Shia beliefs" (Alexander, 1992, p. 21).

### **Superstitious beliefs**

By establishing Twelve Imami Shiite as the legitimate religion of the country, religion played a decisive role in the policy of the Safavid government and, as a result, all the society's principles. As a result, many values became religious, and along with these developments, some false beliefs also spread. This amount of attention to the Shia religion, which became more intense at the end of the Safavid period, had a significant impact on all areas, including Iranian culture and art, and caused a profound revolution in the beliefs, values, norms, and worldviews in the Safavid era society. "Religious beliefs in the Safavid period were mixed with superstitions so that it was impossible for common people to distinguish between superstitions and true beliefs. Among these, one of the most important factors in the spread of superstitions in religion was the king and courtiers" (Sotoudefar, Jadidi, & Qolizadeh, 2018, p. 153). The spread of these extreme beliefs in the Safavid period highlighted the role of astronomy, astrology, all kinds of occultism, and the production of related works, including astrolabes, all sorts of charms, amulets in the form of seals, ornaments, textiles, metal containers, pottery, etc. The Safavid Talisman shirts are among the works related to occultism and popular thoughts and ideas at that time. In addition to the Qur'anic texts, which are the essential characteristics of the shirts, all kinds of charms, astronomical signs, tables, and Talismanic squares represent the beliefs of the owners of these clothes. As mentioned, the extreme belief in astrology, astronomy, the days of Saad (Sedge) and Nahs (Sinister), and Talisman and magic influenced different parts of the society, from the court to the ordinary people in the street. As a result, it was difficult to produce these shirts for the kings and great people of the society due to their belief in the protective properties of the inscriptions, motifs, and Talismans on the shirts, during the war and other situations. Although the belief in Quranic texts, prayers, and symbolic motifs on shirts cannot be considered superstitions, the cultural conditions governing the society of the Safavid era, especially the extreme turning to all kinds of occultism, amulets, talismans, tools and means of divination, might have a significant effect on the formation and spread of Talisman shirts among the kings and high-ranking people of the Safavid society.

### **Legitimizing the government and archaism**

By formalizing the Shia religion and attributing a genealogy to Imam Musa Kazem (PBUH), the Safavid government tried to legitimize its government and make it accepted by the people. "It seemed that at the very beginning of the formation of the government, this legend emerged that the twenty-first generation of Safi al-Din reaches back to Imam Musa Kazim (PBUH). The Safavids later used these legends to justify their political claims" (Ravandi, 1980, p. 378). In addition, the power of the Safavid kings was based on three specific foundations: The first was the divine right of the Iranian kings to enjoy the Divine Grace. This ancient theory was used in all its former glory and reappeared in the new form of ظل الله في الارض. The second was the claim of Mahdi's representative on earth. The third was the position of the Safavid kings as the perfect mentor of the followers of Sufi Tariqat (principle) (Savory, 1993, p. 3). These shirts were most likely prepared for the king. As a result, the use of the names of Shia Imams and various prayers and amulets attributed to Imams is a sign of the kings' belief and prejudice, as well as the formality and consolidation of their rule. The symbols taken from ancient beliefs represent the national identity of

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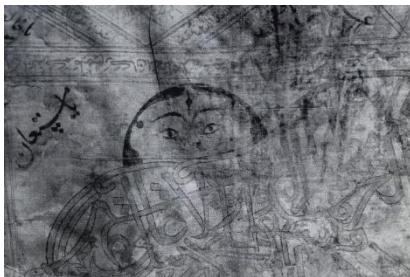
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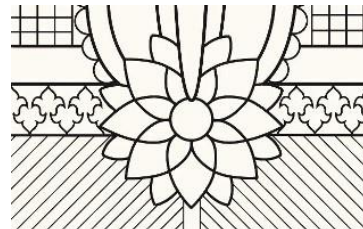
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Iranians, which is coordinated with those of the Islamic era, especially the Shia beliefs. A prominent sample of this is the Lion and the Sun on Talisman shirts from the personal collection of Karimzadeh Tabrizi (See Figure 16). As people of the ancient East believed, the lion has always been a symbol of monarchy, bravery, and royalty, and a sign of courage, and in works of art, it stands next to kings, and its statue sits on the graves of brave men. The head of goddesses rests on his shoulder, and the throne of kings rests on his paw" (Taheri, 2011, p. 91). This animal has a direct connection with Mithraism and "is the fourth stage of the initiation stages of Mithraism" (Abdollahi, 2002, p. 550). The lion is a manifestation of Mithras. "The sun is considered a sign of authority and royalty in Iran, and it appears from all traditions that the sun is the embodiment of God, and the lion is a sign of power and authority, and both of them were somehow related to kings. Also, among the flags embodied in the Shahnameh, the Sun and the Lion were the special symbols of those who were superior to others in terms of rank and position" (Yahaghi, 1990, p. 280). The particular interest of Iranians towards Hazrat Ali (PBUH) is expressed in the "Lion of God". In addition, "lions were the symbolic guardians of shrines, palaces, and tombs, and it was thought that their predatory nature would ward off harmful influences" (Hall, 2005, p. 61). It can be said that the existence of various Talismans in the shape of a lion's body, which contains Quranic surahs, prayers, and Talisman squares, also indicates the belief in the protective features of this animal. Apart from the Lion and the Sun, the lotus motif on the Talisman shirt of the Ahar Museum of Literature and Mysticism also contains meanings related to royal power (See Figure 17). "The lotus, as various religions believe, has been associated with the creation of gods, prophets, and saviors" (Mansouri Zafar, 2010, p. 239), and is a symbol of spiritual blossoming. Its roots are in the mud, and the flowers grow under the sun and skylight (See Figure 18).



**Figure 17.** Lion and Sun motif used in Talisman shirt preserved in the personal collection of Karimzadeh Tabrizi. Source: Karimzadeh Tabrizi, 1991, p. 1560.



**Figure 18.** A lotus on the Talisman shirt preserved in the Ahar Museum of Literature and Mysticism and its line drawing. Drawing. Source: Authors.

The Lotus is the manifestation of all enlightenments of creation, fertility, rebirth, revival, and immortality and is also considered the perfection of beauty. This flower symbolizes light in Iran (Cooper, 2000, p. 371). "Since it opens at dawn and closes at dusk, it is similar to the sun, which is the divine source of life" (Hall, 2005, p. 309). Also, "in Iran and India, its multi-leaved florets are considered the symbol of the Swastika, the symbol of the sun" (Farghdan & Hoshidar, 2010, p. 49). During the Safavid era, the Lotus was used as a symbol of power in the realm of the kingdom and became the basis for the flower design of Shah Abbasi (Razavi & Khajeghir, 2013, p. 106). A significant point in examining these symbols is their relationship with the position of the owners of the shirts. Accordingly, the symbols of the Lion, the Sun, and the Lotus on the shirts, based on ancient beliefs and considered a symbol of light and Mithraism, contain meanings related to royalty and kingship.

### Conclusion

Talisman shirts, also known as Islamic Talisman shirts in most foreign sources and research projects, are a particular type of clothing in the Islamic world, attributed to the 15<sup>th</sup> century AD/9<sup>th</sup> century AH and after. The oldest Talisman shirts produced in Iran date back to the Safavid period. The structural and visual features of shirts' decorations include inscriptions and calligraphy, symbolic motifs, charms, and geometric, plant, and animal decorative motifs. The extensive use of inscriptions such as Kufi, Sols, Nashkh, Tawqi, Muhaqqeq, Raoqeh, and Qobar is the most important visual characteristics and standard features among the existing samples. The content of the inscriptions emphasizes certain Verses and Surahs, including verse 13 of Surah Saf, Surah Fatah, Surah Nasr, and prayers such as Joshan Kabir. Since there is no mention of the function and uses of Talisman shirts in treatises and texts related to occultism and even historical texts, and no description and recommendations have been provided about this shirt, the recognition of the use of these shirts can only be done through examining the evidence. It is possible to refer to the contents of the inscriptions and the verses and prayers used in them. Repeating and emphasizing the mentioned Surahs and Verses indicate the particular talismanic aspect of these shirts, and the primary purpose of making them is to use them in war and benefit from the protective properties of the shirt in overcoming enemies. Using other common Surahs and Verses on the shirts, such as verses 51 and 52 of Qalam Surah (Van Yakad), verse 255 of Al-Baqarah Surah (Ayat al-Kursi), and Chahar Qul (Surahs of Kafurun, Ikhlas, Falaq, and Nas), show the range of ritualistic use of this shirt. They had protection and support applications and were used in difficult situations, including during diseases and when faced with various disasters. In addition to emphasizing the power and position of the king, the content of the symbols has meanings related to guardianship and has taken on the aspect of a protective Talisman, which shows the connection between the content of the texts and the symbols used in the shirts. Compared with other Ottoman, Gurkani, and West African types, the most crucial difference is the content of several Talisman shirts' inscriptions and symbolic motifs. In addition to the Surahs, Quranic verses, and Allah's names, which are common to all the Islamic World's Talisman shirts, the names of Shia Imams, prayers, and charms attributed to them have distinguished the Safavid shirts. Also, the use of ancient animal and plant motifs and symbols in the Safavid Talisman shirts shows Iran's special political, social, and cultural conditions.

## Appendix

1. Science, Tools and Magic – (The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art, V.12).
2. The arts of war: Arms and Amour of the 7th to 19th Centuries (The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art – Volume 21).
3. Islamic formula whereby an individual announces his acceptance of Islam
4. يَا اللَّهُ يَا اللَّهَ يَا اللَّهَ وَحَدِّكَ وَحَدِّكَ لَا شَرِيكَ لَكَ أَنْتَ الْمَنَّانُ بَدِيعُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ذُو الْجَلَالِ وَالْإِكْرَامِ وَ ذُو الْأَسْمَاءِ الْعِظَامِ وَ ذُو الْعِزِّ الَّذِي لَا يَرَامُ وَ .  
إِلَهُكُمْ إِلَهٌ وَاحِدٌ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الرَّحْمَنُ الرَّحِيمُ. Source: Majlesi, 1983, V90, p.231.

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