Saints and Sacred Matter

SAINTS AND SACRED MATTER

The Cult of Relics
in Byzantium and Beyond

Edited by

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SHRINES IN THE ISLAMIC WORLD MAY BE VIEWED AS SPATIAL CONSTRUCTS of ideology that are built as monuments to secular, as well as sacred, authority. They are sites of religious practice and social interaction, defined by the particularities of history and geography. While shrines may commemorate an event, they are often built in memory of a holy person, whose charisma lives on in the structures. Like the caskets and reliquaries that hold Christian artifacts, the tombs of holy men and women do not simply contain a body or parts of one, but enshrine esoteric beliefs and the rituals of devotion that gave them meaning. Beyond the function of commemoration, shrines serve as visitation sites for pilgrims and often consist of several ancillary functions, such as kitchens, baths, and inns. The shrine complex may be modest or grandiose, depending on the popularity of the figure buried within. Indeed, shrines and their architecture serve as important resources for understanding the social, political, and economic status of communities of devotion, whether those communities comprise rulers or mendicants.

Charismatic authority defines the manner in which shrines function, namely, as sites for the enactment of rituals of piety and visitation centered on the figure commemorated.[1] The personality of the shaykh or imam is itself an amalgam of fiction and myth, of historical verification and universal tropes, and of a discursive relationship between those who perpetuate and produce this body of evidence and those who participate in its consumption.[2] His authority may be perpetuated through narratives (such as hagiographies) as well as spatial categories (such as *baraka*, or benevolence and grace, which emanate from a body or a location). Thus the grave or tomb of a holy person is perceived to be imbued with his or her spiritual aura. In early modern Iran, mausolea and shrines together were viewed as physical embodiments of the spiritual and imperial authority manifested in the shah and his ancestors.

In general, both Shi'i and Sunni Muslims patronize shrines, but the figures they direct their attention to are different. Sufi mystics and theologians predominate in the Sunni case, and the family members of the Prophet Muhammad are the focus of Shi'i devotion.[3] The practice of Sunni, Shi'i,

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1 A useful definition of charismatic authority may be found in G. L. Scheper, "Charisma," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. L. Jones. 2nd ed. (Detroit, 2005), 3:1543–53.

2 A recent consideration of the relationship between myths and charisma is in R. Falco, *Charisma and Myth* (London, 2010). On Sufism and charismatic authority in the modern context, see P. Werbner and H. Basu, "Embodying Charisma," in *Embodying Charisma: Modernity, Locality, and Performance of Emotion in Sufi Cults* (London, 1998); 3–31.

3 In the formative years of Islam, Shi'ism was a political position taken against the ruling party and the followers of the Prophet's sunna, or social and legal custom. The *shi'at 'Ali*, or the party of 'Ali, supported the succession of Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law,
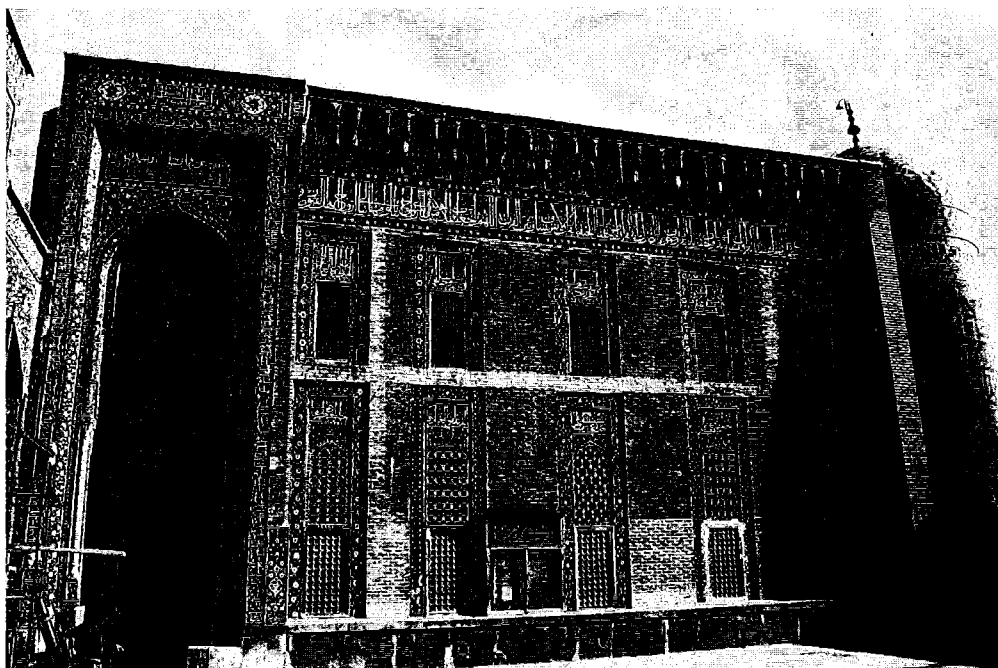
and Sufi beliefs is often mutable and complex. Nonetheless, the solidifying of religious and ideological boundaries marked the Islamic world in the sixteenth century. In the case of Safavid Iran, this was achieved through the rewriting of dynastic history and the patronage of shrines, both Sufi and Shi'i. When Shah Isma'il (d. 1524) sacked Tabriz and declared himself the ruler of Iran in 1501, he also established Shi'i Islam as the religion of his kingdom.[4] Isma'il was the descendant of Shaykh Safi al-din Ishaq, a thirteenth-century mystic whose eponymous order flourished in Ardabil, near the Caspian Sea. Two artifacts served as key memorials of this ancestor. The first was the biography of Shaykh Safi's life, the *Safwat al-safa* (Essence of Purity) of Ibn Bazzaz Ardabili, which was completed at the time of the shaykh's

death, in 1335. It was redacted in the early sixteenth century to demonstrate that Safavid genealogy reached back to Muhammad, through the seventh Shi'i imam, Musa Kazim, thus bestowing on the Safavids the authority of Imamate.[5] The second commemorative artifact was the ancestral shrine in Ardabil, where the tomb of Shaykh Safi was located (fig. 14.1).

This chapter examines the manner in which kingship and divinity were embodied in the person of the shah and represented through texts, objects, and paintings associated with the Safavid dynastic shrine. Analyzed together, these diverse artifacts coalesced in creating an image of charismatic kingship wherein the body of the shah served as a conduit to both imperial and esoteric power, and the shrine as its physical manifestation. The regal and sacral modes of Safavid authority were conflated through the architectural transformation of the dynastic shrine in the sixteenth century, such that the architecture served as a substitute for the shah. Architecture was thus a repository of the sacred body and also

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'Ali. They venerate the descendants of 'Ali and Fatima, the prophet's daughter, who are called the imams. It is believed by the majority of Shi'i that the twelfth imam, al-Mahdi, did not die but went into occultation, to return at the time of resurrection (*al-qiyāma*). For a recent study on charismatic authority in Shi'ism, see L. N. Takim, *The Heirs of the Prophet: Charisma and Religious Authority in Shi'ite Islam* (Albany, 2006).

4 It may be argued that one of the reasons for the Safavids' choice to declare Shi'ism as the religion of their empire was to distinguish themselves from their Ottoman rivals, who were recognized as the rightful caliphs of the Sunni world.

5 Ahmad Kasrawi, as cited in M. Mazzaoui, *Origins of the Safawids* (Wiesbaden, 1972), 47.

the reliquary that embodied the religious and imperial ideals of the Safavid Empire.

The Charismatic Body

Attitudes toward the body distinguish Islamic commemoration, such as a cosmological understanding of the body as conceptualized in theology and literature; the body as a root element in the formulation of legal and ritualistic behavior; and with an emphasis on the corporeality of saintly figures, from Muhammad and his descendants to holy men and women.[6] The distinction between the Christian and Islamic contexts might be most apparent in the manner in which the Prophet of Islam is revered.[7] In the Qur'an, Muhammad is referred to as a simple man, an "unlettered prophet," and his humanity is constantly extolled.[8] Although he is also considered as divinely chosen and presented as an exemplar, he himself is not considered to be divine. This special status is extended to Muhammad's progeny, especially the descendants of his daughter Fatima, who was married to 'Ali, his cousin and son-in-law. Muhammad's actions and motivations were the source of numerous theological debates, dissected for their profane and esoteric implications. In such discussions, special attention is paid to the purity of Muhammad's body, which remained uncorrupted. Indeed, the reverence of the body, in general, remains central to Islamic conceptions of self and the daily rituals of devotion.

A key factor for understanding the manner in which the body is treated is through eschatological issues relating to death and resurrection; the body must be preserved in toto for it to be resurrected in the afterlife. That is to say, if a person died a violent death in which the loss of body parts was involved, he or she would not be able to be resurrected. Thus the dismembered body is anathema in Muslim thought, as it represents an aberration and the impossibility of a tranquil

place in Heaven. This fear of desecration permeated imperial burials from at least the Abbasid era (ninth to eleventh centuries), when caliphs were often buried in their palaces or, if they died on the battlefield, interred secretly in undisclosed graves. For the same reason, the bodily remains of holy figures were not disseminated as relics, although sometimes hair, teeth, and nail clippings, such as those of the Prophet Muhammad that were housed in the Ottoman imperial treasury, would be preserved as historical and talismanic artifacts.[9] Clothing and ritual objects also stood in for corporeal presence, for example Muhammad's sandals or the famous sword, *dhul qadr*, that belonged to 'Ali.

In the Islamic context, the body of the king may manifest several characteristics dependent on historical, religious, and political contingencies. In the early Abbasid Empire, for example, the caliph was secluded, hidden behind curtains and with restricted access to the public. The secrecy surrounding him augmented his sacred destiny as the "Shadow of God on Earth" (*zil Allah*), and his physical presence was revealed only to a select few.[10] Ottoman emperors after the sack of Constantinople in 1453 similarly built upon Byzantine and Islamic precedent, with highly ritualized imperial ceremonial that increasingly isolated the sultan.[11] The Safavid rulers of the early sixteenth century, by contrast, inherited the structures of rule established by Turco-Mongol predecessors such as Timur Lang (Tamerlane in European sources, d. 1404), whose acts of bravery and personal charisma were legendary.[12] For the Timurids, rulership was based on tribal allegiances as well as Islamic codes of authority. Similarly, the Safavids merged Shi'i eschatology with Iranian forms of kingship to bring about a new form of imperial authority, one that simultaneously raised the shah to the level of

6   S. Bashir, "Body," in *Key Themes for the Study of Islam*, ed. J. Elias (Oxford, 2010).

7   For a recent comparative study, see J. E. Peters, *Jesus and Muhammad: Parallel Tracks, Parallel Lives* (New York, 2011); on Jesus's charisma, see P. Piovanelli, "Jesus' Charismatic Authority: On the Historical Applicability of a Sociological Model," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 73, no. 2 (2005): 395–427.

8   Qur'an 7.157, trans. A. Y. Ali.

9   See chap. 4 by Khalek, above.

10   G. Necipoğlu, "An Outline of Shifting Paradigms in the Palatial Architecture of the Pre-Modern Islamic World," *Ars Orientalis* 23 (1993): 3–24, esp. 6.

11   On the imperial ceremonial and its spatial manifestations, see G. Necipoğlu, *Architecture, Ceremonial and Power: The Topkapı Palace in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (New York, 1991).

12   On Timur, see B. Manz, "Tamerlane and the Symbolism of Sovereignty," *Iranian Studies* 21, nos. 1–2 (1988): 105–22.

semidivinity, while keeping him accessible to his tribal followers. In the absence of the shah himself, objects and places associated with him would serve as reminders of his benevolent presence.

For the Shi'i Safavids, the body served as the site of political and religious action.[13] As reported in sixteenth-century chronicles and travelogues, the martyrdom of the third imam, Husayn, in 680 CE, was commemorated throughout Iran.[14] The death of Husayn and his companions in the battlefield of Karbala (present-day Iraq) was a violent affair that nonetheless served to unite the Shi'i community in its yearly remembrance. Husayn's severed head was brought to Damascus to the Umayyad ruler Yezid as a trophy, and until today conflicting accounts report locations of the head's burial, from Cairo to Najaf. The example of Husayn speaks to two important issues concerning the body: the execution marked the trauma of Karbala that demanded commemoration and the multiplicity of shrines dedicated to the head speaks to the lack of resolution in Shi'i theology regarding the role of such "relics." For the early Safavids, the violence and desecration associated with Karbala also served as a cautionary tale that shaped their burial practices.

Historically, the shrines of the Shi'i imams had served as the physical manifestation of an Islamic community that was often marginalized.[15] The shrines were important pilgrimage sites, however, and served as places for the establishment of social, religious, and political allegiances. For the Safavids, who claimed both Sufi and Shi'i genealogy, shrines also marked their dynastic and ideological identity. While the tombs of Shi'i imams and *imamzadeh* ("children of the imams") were given lavish economic and architectural attention, the burial sites of the early shahs were modestly appended to extant shrines. The fear of desecration of the imperial body was so great that their tombs, with the exception of that of Shah Isma'il, who was buried at the Safavid dynastic shrine in Ardabil, were often relocated or their bodies reinterred secretly.[16] Consideration of the role played by architecture in the construction of a sacred topography that was centered on the person of the king thus sheds important light on Safavid attitudes toward kingship and charismatic authority.

Representing Safavid Ideology

The founder of the dynasty, Shah Isma'il, was viewed as the spiritual leader, or *pir*, of the Safaviya Sufi order, a hereditary designation. He had garnered support among his Qizilbash tribal followers through a complex amalgam of Shi'i and Sufi authority, as exemplified by the poetry that he wrote under the penname Khata'i.[17]

> Know for certain that Khata'i is of divine nature, that he is related to Muhammad Mustafa;
> He is issued from Safi, he is the scion of Junayd [and] Haydar,
> . . . .
> His name is Isma'il. Let souls be his sacrifice, for an appeal has come from God . . .
> The Guiding Imam has come! Seize his hand, show him the way.[18]

Messianic movements prevailed during the turn of the sixteenth century, which heralded the millennium according to the Islamic Hijri

13 A recent study takes an anthropological approach to the issue of martyrdom in contemporary Iran. P. Khosrownejad, "Unburied Memories: The Politics of Bodies, and the Material Culture of Sacred Defense Martyrs in Iran," *Visual Anthropology* 25, nos. 1–2 (2012): 1–21.

14 Several examples abound, in both Safavid chronicles and European travelogues. See, for example, J. Calmard, "Shi'i Rituals and Power: The Consolidation of Safavid Shi'ism; Folklore and Popular Religion," in *Safavid Persia: The History and Politics of an Islamic Society*, ed. C. Melville (London and New York, 1996), 139–90.

15 With important exceptions, such as the 10th-c. Buyids of Iran and Fatimids of Egypt.

16 Indeed, lavish tombs were not built until the death of the 6th ruler, Shah Safi, and his burial at the shrine of Fatima Ma'suma in Qum. K. Rizvi, "Gendered Patronage: Women and Benevolence in the early Safavid Empire," in *Women and Self-representation in Islamic Art and Society*, ed. D. F. Ruggles (New York, 2000), 123–55.

17 On the role of the Qizilbash, see K. Babayan, "Sufis, Dervishes and Mullas: The Controversy over Spiritual and Temporal Dominion in Seventeenth-Century Iran," in Melville, *Safavid Persia*, 117–38.

18 Translated in V. Minorsky, "The Poetry of Shāh Ismā'īl," *BSOAS* 10, no. 4 (1942): 1043. See also W. Thackston, "The Diwan of Khata'i: Pictures for the Poetry of the Shah Isma'il I," *Asian Art* 1, no. 4 (1988): 37–63.

calendar.[19] Thus Shah Isma'il's rhetoric was timely and filled with the passions of a charismatic young leader.[20] His heir, Shah Tahmasb, also affected a relationship to Imam 'Ali, but one tempered by the realities of rulership attained. In contrast to his father, Tahmasb tempered messianic power in favor of divinely sanctioned kingship.[21] In his autobiography (*Tazkira*) the shah asserts his love and veneration of 'Ali, calling himself the imam's slave as well as his progeny (*ghulām va aulād*), and attributing his successes to 'Ali's beneficence.[22]

The Safavids stressed their genealogical links to the family of the prophet Muhammad and the *ahl al-bayt* ("people of the house"), namely Muhammad, Fatima, 'Ali, and their sons, Hasan and Husayn.[23] Stories about the lives of the Prophet and his descendants, the Shi'i imams, were disseminated through diverse historical texts and illustrated manuscripts such as *Tarikh al-rusūl wa al-mulūk* ("History of Prophets and Kings") of Tabari (d. 923) and *Rawzat al-safa* ("Garden of Felicity," an anthology of holy figures) of Mirkhwand (d. 1498), both of which were commissioned for the court and housed in shrine collections such as that in Ardabil.[24]

Manuscripts such as these codified Safavid belief and linked it with historically diverse periods and empires in Islamic history. Some were illustrated, giving the narrative visual complexity and immediacy. One text in particular is remarkable for its sophisticated symbolism and clear semantic goals in regard to interpreting Safavid

Shi'ism, the *Tārīkh-i 'aima-i ma'sumīn* (History of the Immaculate Imams) of Ibn Arabshah Veramini. This is a fifteenth-century text, now in the Russian National Library in St. Petersburg, which was recopied and illustrated around 1526, two years after the death of Shah Isma'il.[25] The manuscript is a large codex and consists of seventy-eight chapters and thirty-nine paintings, although some pages have curiously been left blank. Two richly illustrated copies were compiled in the early sixteenth century and kept in the library of Shaykh Safi's shrine, to be read and viewed by patrons of and visitors to the shrine. Although a thorough codicological study of the whole of the manuscripts remains to be done, even a quick survey of the images in the manuscripts shows that they are sophisticated and visually complex. Additionally, a preliminary study of paintings from Dorn 312 reveals important insights regarding early Safavid attitudes toward charismatic authority.

The elevated status of Muhammad's family is shown in a painting that marks an event that took place in 632, after the Prophet's final sermon (fig. 14.2). His entourage stopped at Ghadir Khum, an oasis located between Mecca and Madina. According to Shi'i theologians, it was at Ghadir Khumm that Muhammad's investiture of 'Ali took place, which was a point of great significance to a community founded on partisanship on behalf of the imam. At the edge of a lake the *ahl al-bayt* are gathered beneath a tent, a symbol of the "house." The five figures are surrounded by a fiery halo and the men wear the taj headdress that characterized the early Safavids and their followers. Sixteenth-century viewers of the *History of the Immaculate Imams* would have drawn correlations between the image of Muhammad's family and the emerging dynastic ambitions of the Safavids.

19   See the introduction to A. Amanat and M. Berhardsson, eds., *Imagining the End: Visions of Apocalypse from the Ancient Middle East to Modern America* (London, 2002).

20   Soon after his advent to the throne, the shah made a well-documented pilgrimage to the tomb of Imam 'Ali in 1508. Khwandamir, *Habīb al-Siyār fī akhbār afrad al-bashār* (Tehran, 1334), vols. 3 and 4, trans. W. Thackston, Jr. as *Habibu's Siyar, Tome Three: The Reign of the Mongol and the Turk* (Cambridge, MA, 1994).

21   K. Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs and Messiahs: The Spiritual Landscapes of Early Modern Iran* (Cambridge, MA, 2003), 297.

22   Shah Tahmasb Safavi, *Tazkira-i Shah Tahmasb, ya Biyaz-i maqalat ba ilchiyan, Abd al-Shukur* (Berlin, 1964), 1343.

23   Also called the *panjtan* or "five figures" symbolized by the vertical hand that is popular in Shi'i iconography.

24   The manuscripts from the Ardabil shrine are now part of the Dorn Collection at the Russian National Library, Dorn 264 and Dorn 269 respectively.

25   Ibn Arabshah, *Tārīkh-i 'aima-i ma'sumīn* (1526), Dorn 312. Russian National Library, St. Petersburg. To my knowledge, there are only two illustrated manuscripts of this text (Dorn 313 is the second one), both of which were removed from the ancestral shrine in Ardabil in the 19th century by the Russians and brought to St. Petersburg. A study of the iconography of the *ahl al-bayt* is found in M. V. Fontana, *Iconografia dell'ahl al-bayt: Immagini di arte persiana dal XII al XX secolo* (Naples, 1994). However the author presents a very limited survey which does not include this manuscript or genre of paintings.
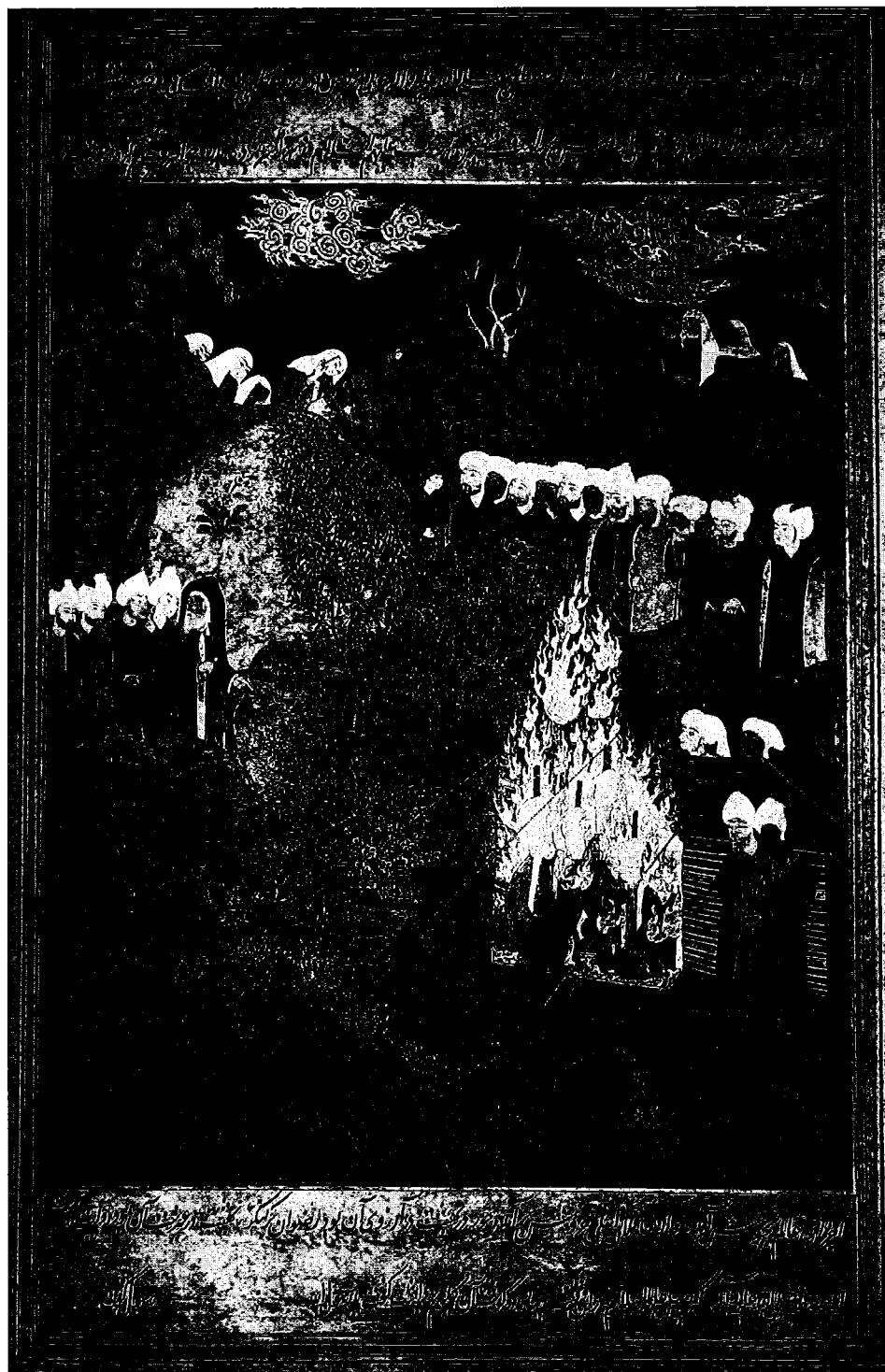
FIG. 14.2 "The *ahl al-bayt* at Ghadir Khum," Ibn Arabshah, *Tārīkh-i ʿaima-i maʿsumīn*, Dorn 312, fol. 37r (dated 1526) (Russian National Library, St. Petersburg)

The temporal collapse suggested by the previous image is further repeated in another painting, titled "The first sermon of Imam Hasan in Madina" (fig. 14.3). The painting, signed by the artist, Qasim 'Ali, shows Hasan, the grandson of Muhammad and the second Shi'i imam, at the pulpit of the Great Mosque in Madina. The desert location is alluded to through the appearance of magnificent palm trees in the background, appearing to be sprouting from the columns of the mosque. Hasan, like the men gathered to listen to him, wears the characteristic Safavid headgear mentioned earlier. However, he is also rendered in a manner reserved for the family of the prophet, with the veiled countenance and the halo. The imam is framed by a qibla portal which, although meant to be in Madina, is covered with Iranian floral and geometric motifs. An inscription band praising the shah runs across the top of the structure, and right above the figure of the Imam the name of the shah is highlighted in gold script. This manner of epigraphy is remarkably like that used a few years later at the old Seljuk mosque of Isfahan that was renovated by

orders of Shah Tahmasb in 1531. In the painting Imam Hassan and Shah Tahmasb are rendered as complementary aspects of Shi'i and regal authority. The shah is named the "Shadow of God over the two Terrains," thus representing him as one endowed with spiritual charisma.[26] Once again an architectural setting is called upon to locate the event and also frame—literally in this case—the content of the painting. The epigraphy names Shah Tahmasb as the patron, while the portal contains the person he is being compared to, Imam Hassan.

Early Safavid paintings of the Prophet and imams are linked by two particular visual devices. The first is the fiery halo which blazes skywards from the heads of the *ahl al-bayt*, drawing

26 The epigraphy moves across the top of the building, and just above the qibla, where the Imam is sitting, the yellow calligraphy (below in italics) highlights the name of Shah Tahmasb: "[During the reign of] the great Sultan and the just Khāqān, the most generous Shadow of God over the two terrains ... the Sultan son of the Sultan son of the Sultan *Abi Muzzafar Tahmasb Bahadur Khan may God make everlasting* his kingdom and confer upon the universe his justice; in the month of Dhilhaj of 932 hijra by the humble Qasim 'Ali." My translation.

attention to their divine nature. The symbolic purity of fire and the material opulence of the gold used to depict it point to the sacral and regal implications of the image and, through association, to the Safavid shah's dual nature.[27] The flames rising from the figure of Muhammad was a common motif in Timurid painting as well, as viewed in multiple images of the Prophet's ascension. The second iconographic device was the veiled countenance that became popular during the early sixteenth century.[28] Muhammad and his progeny are shown in the 1526 manuscript with their faces hidden behind a white cloth suspended from their turbans or, in the case of Fatima, a shawl. This significant detail, distinct to the period, was part of the iconography of charismatic divinity that was conveyed in contemporary texts as well as rituals of devotion and visitation. It may be suggested that in the same manner that the face of the prophet/shah was masked in pictorial depictions, the body of the Safavid king became an equally precious substance, displayed in select and precise ways that augmented his aura of charismatic authority. It is thus of little surprise that unlike the preceding Timurids and contemporary Mughals, Shah Tahmasb and his successors shied away from imperial portraiture, choosing rather to be represented through suggestive and surrogate images, such as those in the *History of the Immaculate Imams.*[29] I would argue that architecture played a similar role, acting as a representational proxy for the king.

Imam 'Ali is the subject of a number of the paintings and is sometimes given even more attention than the Prophet himself. 'Ali, like Muhammad, was represented as the ideal of human perfection, and held particular significance for the Shi'i Safavids. In a painting, "The

Resurrection of Umm Farwa," from the section on his miracles (*mujzāt*), 'Ali is shown in a cemetery, sitting on a prayer mat with his hands raised in prayer (fig. 14.4, fol. 290v).[30] A halo marks his divine nature, yet the headgear situates the story in the early sixteenth century, when Iranian artists chose to represent the distinct Safavid headgear, with its turban and red baton. The twelve-gored hat of the Qizilbash tribesmen represented in these paintings was meant to symbolize the twelve imams. It is typically found in paintings from the reign of Shah Tahmasb and is a visual device that makes the historical narrative contemporary. Indeed, the paintings perform an important function in the manuscript, complementing the distant histories of the imams through visual devices situating them in Safavid Iran, thereby making the narratives relevant to sixteenth-century readers and viewers of the *History of the Immaculate Imams.*

In front of Imam 'Ali a grave has split open and Umm Farwa is seen rising from within it, her body whole and complete. On the left side of the painting is a monumental edifice, above whose doorway is inscribed a Prophetic ḥadīth which reads, in Arabic, "My friends are under My cloak, no one knows them save for Me."[31] The connotations of this ḥadīth are multiple, but in the context of this image, it refers to 'Ali's special status as the *walī Allāh*, or "friend of God," a connection evoked by both Sufi and Shi'i Muslims. It is also important to note that cloak (*qabba*) and dome (*qubba*) share the same Arabic root letters, and are thus etymologically connected. The artist has chosen to highlight the connection visually by inscribing the ḥadīth about the cloak on a domed gateway.

Shahzad Bashir has pointed to the esoteric implications of the gateway in Persian paintings as an allegorical threshold between inner and outer forms of knowledge. Through another lens, however, architectural epigraphy on folio 290v (fig. 14.4) helps to understand the iconography

27 A useful discussion on the nature of early Safavid authority and its visual manifestations is in C. Gruber, "When Nubuvvat Encounters Valayat: Safavid Paintings of the Prophet Muhammad's Mi'raj, ca. 1500–1550," in *The Art and Material Culture of Iranian Shi'ism: Iconography and Religious Devotion in Shi'i Islam*, ed. P. Khosronejad (London, 2011), 46–71.

28 This point is brought up in C. Gruber, "Between Logos (*Kalima*) and Light (*Nur*): Representations of the Prophet Muhammad in Islamic Painting," *Muqarnas* 26 (2009): 1–34.

29 I discuss the issue of suggestive portraiture in K. Rizvi, "The Suggestive Portrait of Shah 'Abbas: Prayer and Likeness in a 1605 Safavid *Shahnama* (Book of Kings)," *ArtB* 94, no. 2 (2012): 226–50.

30 According to Shi'i hagiographies, Umm Farwa was a passionate supporter of 'Ali, but was murdered in Madina. Upon hearing of her death, 'Ali hastened to her grave and prayed to God to resurrect her.

31 I am thankful to Shahzad Bashir for his help in interpreting this ḥadīth.
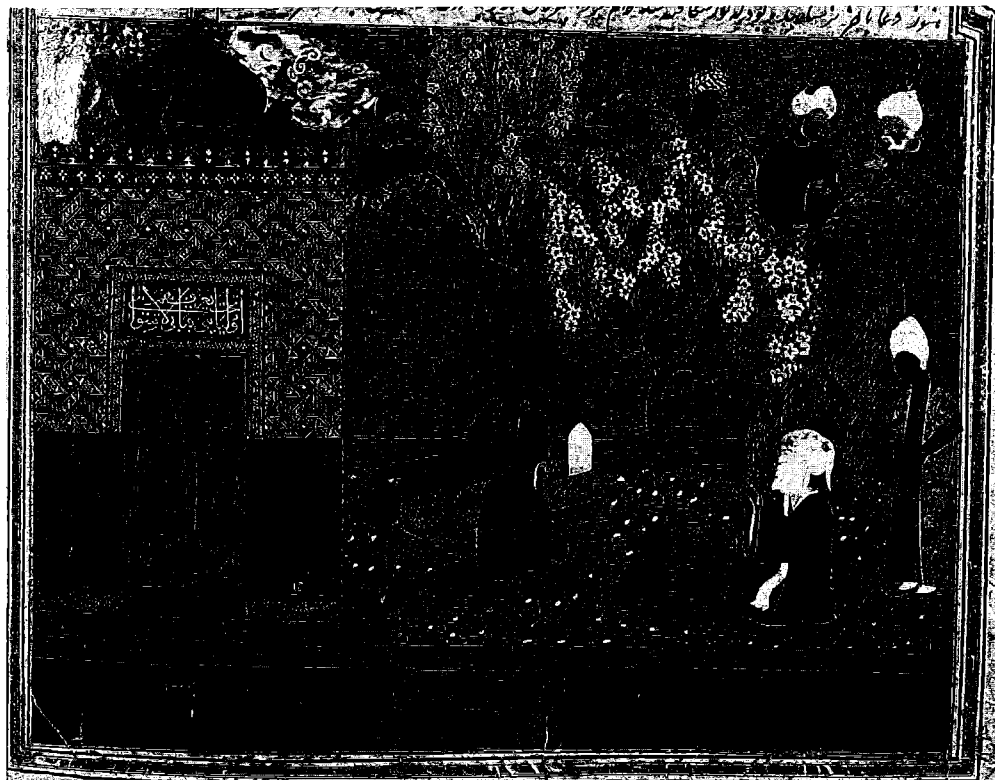
of the painting and its underlying meanings.[32] Similarly, commemorative buildings such as shrines, which were themselves both represented in paintings and inscribed with epigraphy, must be viewed as complex symbols that represented both worldly and esoteric concerns. Indeed, in the painting of 'Ali resurrecting the dead woman, the building located within the cemetery grounds resembles a tomb, with its domed roof and highly embellished facade. Located opposite, and facing, the figure of Imam 'Ali, it might even be viewed as his architectural double, the epigraphy extolling 'Ali's status and the building marking his charismatic presence. In a similar fashion, shrines in early Safavid Iran were built both to memorialize the holy figure buried within and to serve as the physical manifestation of his or her holy presence.

The ability to raise the dead was an attribute of Muhammad and 'Ali (and sometimes the other imams), as it was also in other prophetic traditions, such as Christianity. In the Muslim context, however, the issue is important because the body cannot be resurrected on the Day of Judgment if it has been defiled or dismembered (exceptions are made for martyrs and prophets). The body of a holy person was exempt, in many ways, from natural law in that it emanated a sacred aura that was believed to bless all those who came in its proximity, a quality that was appropriated by the early Safavid rulers as well.[33]

32 S. Bashir, *Sufi Bodies: Religion and Society in Medieval Islam* (New York, 2011), 47.

33 Owing to their divine charisma, great care was taken to make sure that the bodies of the imams were not desecrated. In fact, according to the biographers Ibn Khallikan and Shaykh al-Mufid, 'Ali's burial was kept secret until 791, when the site was "discovered" by the Abbasid caliph Harun al-Rashid who built a tomb over it. Ibn Khallkan, *Ibn Khallikan's Biographical Dictionary*, trans. Baron W. M. de Slane (Paris, 1842–71), 57. Shakyh al-Mufid, *Kitab Al-Irshad: The Book of Guidance into the Lives of the Twelve Imams* (London, 1986), 15. Secret burials were not limited to the imams, but the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs, too, were often buried within the precincts of the palace in order to limit access to the burial spaces. The imams were often buried in their homes or on the battlefield; yet the tombs became important sites for visitation and pilgrimage. T. Allen, "The Tombs of the Abbasid Caliphs in Baghdad," *BSOAS* 46 (1983): 421–31.

According to Ali Amir-Moezzi, a scholar of Shi'ism, "The veritable axis around which the entire Shi'ite doctrine revolves is the figure of the imam.... Indeed from theology to ethics, from Koranic exegesis to canonical law, from cosmology to ritual and to eschatology, all doctrinal aspects, all the chapters of faith are determined and find ultimate meaning by a special conception of the figure of the Guide."[34] This characterization could equally well describe the Safavid shah, who was believed to be imbued with divinity. Thus, for readers of the *History of the Immaculate Imams*, the paintings did more than retell the stories of the Prophet and his descendants; they served to concretize the vision of a Shi'i authority in Iran, one made incarnate in the person of the shah.

The Repository of Safavid History

The dynastic shrine of Shaykh Safi was foremost among the sites associated with the rulers and, just as the paintings studied earlier, played an important role in conveying the physical and symbolic authority of the Safavid dynasty. It was both a repository of Safavid history and itself a sanctified memorial. The shrine had already been a popular pilgrimage site since its foundation in the early fourteenth century, visited by rulers and mendicants alike, but during the Safavid reign new meanings accrued. For example, the *Safwat al-safa* biography of Shaykh Safi located his miracles and devotions in particular places within his house and *khanqah* ("lodge"). When the biography was redacted in the sixteenth century, it was translated into the Turkish language familiar to the followers of the Safavids and acted as a pilgrimage guide to multitudes of devotees. The shrine was augmented and enlarged to accommodate its increasing centrality in the religion and politics of sixteenth-century Iran.

The *Safwat al-safa* led the reader through the history of the Safaviyya order, marking places of particular significance. Miraculous events associated with the shaykh were associated with particular locations in the house which would later become his burial site. In the stories, Shaykh Safi

is shown to have tamed otherworldly beings in the khanqah as well as gone into ecstatic trances; the buildings themselves were magically transformed by the shaykh's deeds, the whole ensemble succumbing to his esoteric powers.[35] Imbued with his baraka, the shaykh's home and khanqah retained their power well into the sixteenth century.

As noted above, during the early Safavid period, manuscripts and objects associated with Shi'ism and the Safaviyya order were housed in the shrine treasury, or *khazina*. An eighteenth-century shrine inventory notes the numerous antique Kufic Qur'an fragments believed to have been in the hand of (*bikhath*) Imam 'Ali.[36] Commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Husayn, beautiful prayer beads and tablets made from the clay of Karbala were part of the collection, as was a Qur'an fragment believed to be penned by Imam Husayn himself. Monumental and ornate bronze and silver *'alam*, or standards, were among the most precious items in the treasury, brought out annually during the ten days of Muharram mourning ceremonies.[37] Pieces of the *kiswa* (covering) of the holy Ka'ba in Mecca were also in the treasury, most likely gifted by the shaykhs or pilgrims returning from the ḥājj. Such ritual and reliquary objects were part of the practice of devotion at the shrine of Shaykh Safi.[38]

Among all these rich possessions, pride of place was given to Shaykh Safi's mantle, or *khirqā*, a modest cloak representing the Sufi path. This may be the very robe mentioned by Ibn Bazzaz

34 M. A. Amir-Moezzi, "Shi'ia," *Encyclopedia Iranica* (London, 1982–).

35 Ibn Bazzaz Ardabili, *Safwat al-safa*, cited in K. Rizvi, *The Safavid Dynastic Shrine: Architecture, Religion and Power in Early Modern Iran* (London, 2011), 39.

36 There were at least 35 such copies, according to the inventory gathered in the *Gangina-i Shaykh Safi* (Tabriz, 1969), 12. This book is a compilation of an inventory taken by the custodian of the shrine in the 18th century, before the Russian occupation of 1836. Several of the books, now in St. Petersburg, including the *Tārīkh-i 'aima-yi ma'sumīn*, are accounted for here.

37 One such event was described by Adam Olearius, *The Voyages and Travels of the Ambassadors sent by Frederic, Duke of Holstein*, trans. J. Davies (London, 1662), 175.

38 Objects associated with Prophet Muhammad, such as his sandals and footprints, also exist in the case of Shi'i imams. J. W. Meri, "Relics of Piety and Power in Medieval Islam," *PP* 206, suppl. 5 (2010): 97–120. Indeed, a *panja*, or handprint, supposedly of Imam 'Ali, was kept at the shrine of Shaykh Safi, and is currently installed in the tomb of Shah Isma'il.

Ardabili which was passed down from Shaykh Zahid Gilani to his pupil Shaykh Safi after the latter's spiritual education was completed.[39] Such a cloak was typical of the mytho-historical artifacts forming the collections of Sufi communities in the medieval and early modern period, as such modest objects used by the Sufis were believed to be imbued with talismanic properties that augmented the aura and efficacy of the order. They would be brought out for public display on special occasions, and pilgrims would have the opportunity to touch them for beneficial effect. Several robes and covers in the collection of the shrine of Shaykh Safi were woven with Qur'anic verses, texts that blessed and protected those that wore them.

The charismatic and powerful leadership of Shah Isma'il was viewed as divinely ordained, and thus artifacts associated with his rule were also collected and displayed at the ancestral shrine. In addition to deluxe objects, such as a precious jasper bowl inscribed with Shah Isma'il's name, ritual objects associated with the Sufi order, such as beggar bowls and jars, were kept in the treasury, potent reminders of the long history of the Safavids (fig. 14.5). Standards associated with particular Safavid victories were preserved and displayed in marches, and replicated in paintings.[40] Bearing the names and attributes of the Shi'i imams, the standards were associated both with Safavid battles and also with those of the fallen Imam Husayn in Karbala. Their location in the shrine of Shaykh Safi furthered the message of sacral and imperial authority, collapsing contemporary politics and Shi'i belief in a sophisticated, if not unproblematic, manner. While artifacts, such as the standards, cannot be compared precisely to relics in the Christian context, they did serve a similar function of commemorating the leader after his death with a memento that had both historical and, more importantly, spiritual associations.

39 A cloak believed to be the *khirqa* of Shaykh Safi remains in the Chinikhana Museum of the shrine. Ibn Bazzaz Ardabili also writes of a coat that was passed down to Shaykh Safi from his master, Zahid Gilani. Cited in Bashir, *Sufi Bodies*, 117.

40 Eskander Beg Munshi described Shah Tahmasb's standard as being surmounted by a golden globe. Cited in J. Allan, "Early Safavid Metalwork," in *Hunt for Paradise: Court Arts of Safavid Iran 1501–1576* (New York, 2003), 222.


FIG. 14.5
Jade jug inscribed with the name of Shah Isma'il, Topkapı Saray Museum, Istanbul, Turkey, no. 1844, first quarter of the 16th c.

The Tombs of Shaykh Safi and Shah Isma'il

The high point of the pilgrimage to Ardabil would have been the tomb of Shaykh Safi himself, built by his successor and son, Sadr al-din Musa led in 1335 (fig. 14.6). According to the author of the *Safwat al-safa*, numerous miracles took place at the time of Shaykh Safi's burial and several at the construction of his tomb. The structure itself was located next to the burial chamber of Shaykh Safi's oldest son, Muhiy al-din, who had predeceased the father. The tomb of Shaykh Safi is in the form of a tall tomb tower, reveted in colorful, glazed brick tiles (fig. 14.7). Geometric and floral patterns adorn the entire surface of the structure, but the most striking aspect of the tile work is the epigraphy, consisting of Qur'anic verses meant to bless the structure and those who visit it.

The descendants of Shaykh Safi were interred either in a large familial burial chamber or in the cemetery that surrounded the two tombs. A Hall of Readers (*Dār al-huffāz*) was constructed by Sadr al-din at the threshold of the tomb,

1. Tomb of Muhiy al-Din
2. Tomb of Shaykh Safi
3. Chillakhāna
4. Chīnīkhāna
5. Dār al-ḥuffāz
6. Shahīdgāh
7. Tomb of Shah Tahmasb's mother
8. Dār al-ḥādith
9. Jannatsarā
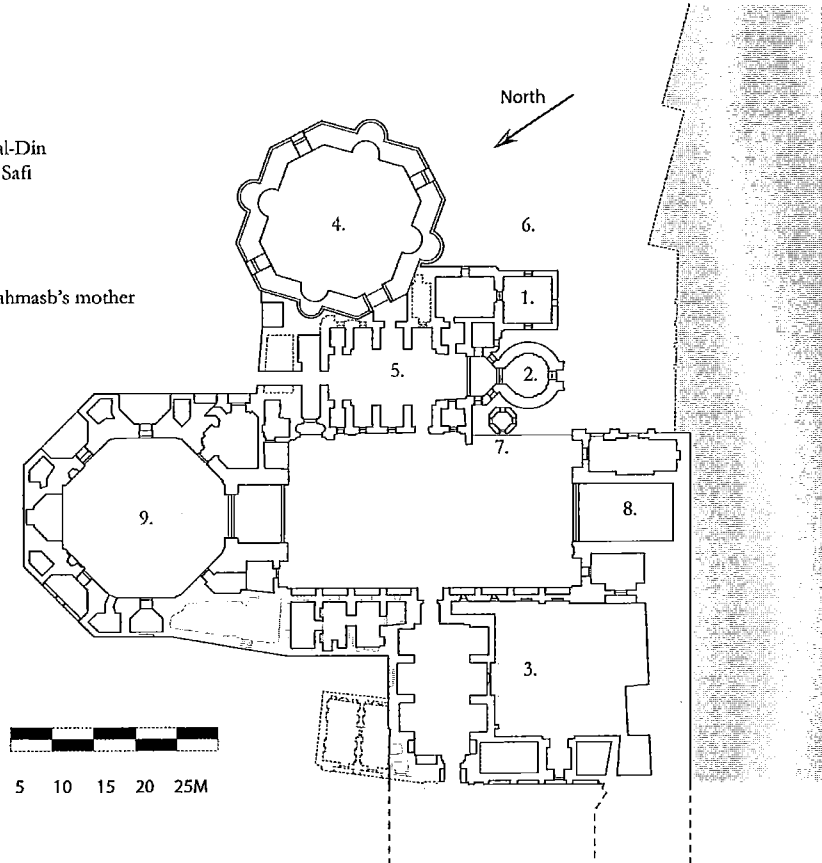
where daily recitations of the Qur'an took place. On the opposite side of the tomb tower, a large octagonal structure was attached to the Hall of Readers, most likely for communal Sufi rituals, such as chanting and meditation, both frequently described in the *Safwat al-safa*. Such devotional practices continued until the sixteenth century, as evinced in eyewitness accounts and Safavid chronicles. The most important change that took place within the architectural confines of the shrine corresponded with the change in fortunes of the Safavid Sufi order, with the advent of Shah Isma'il and the group's access to imperial power. Indeed, the earliest sixteenth-century structure added to the shrine complex commemorated the founder of the Safavid dynasty himself, whose tomb was built soon after his death, in 1524.

The tomb of Shah Isma'il was constructed by orders of Tajlu Khanum, his favorite wife and a wealthy woman from a prominent Qizilbash tribe.[41] Commemoration of rulers was a common practice and monumental tombs were built for the Timurid rulers of Iran. In contrast, Shah Isma'il's mausoleum is a small room, squeezed in between the Haramkhana, a burial chamber built by Shaykh Safi for his predeceased son, and the tomb tower of the shaykh himself—as close to the baraka of the holy ancestor as could have been possible (fig. 14.8). The proximity of the tomb mattered more than its size; certainly, its decoration and iconography left little doubt as to the importance of the man buried within. In Shi'i eschatological beliefs, the shrines of the imams were important locations on the Day of Judgment (*qiyama*), where it was deemed favorable to be resurrected in the company of an imam, who could guide the believer to heaven

41 What is believed to be Tajlu Khanum's grave is located just outside the Hall of Readers of the shrine.
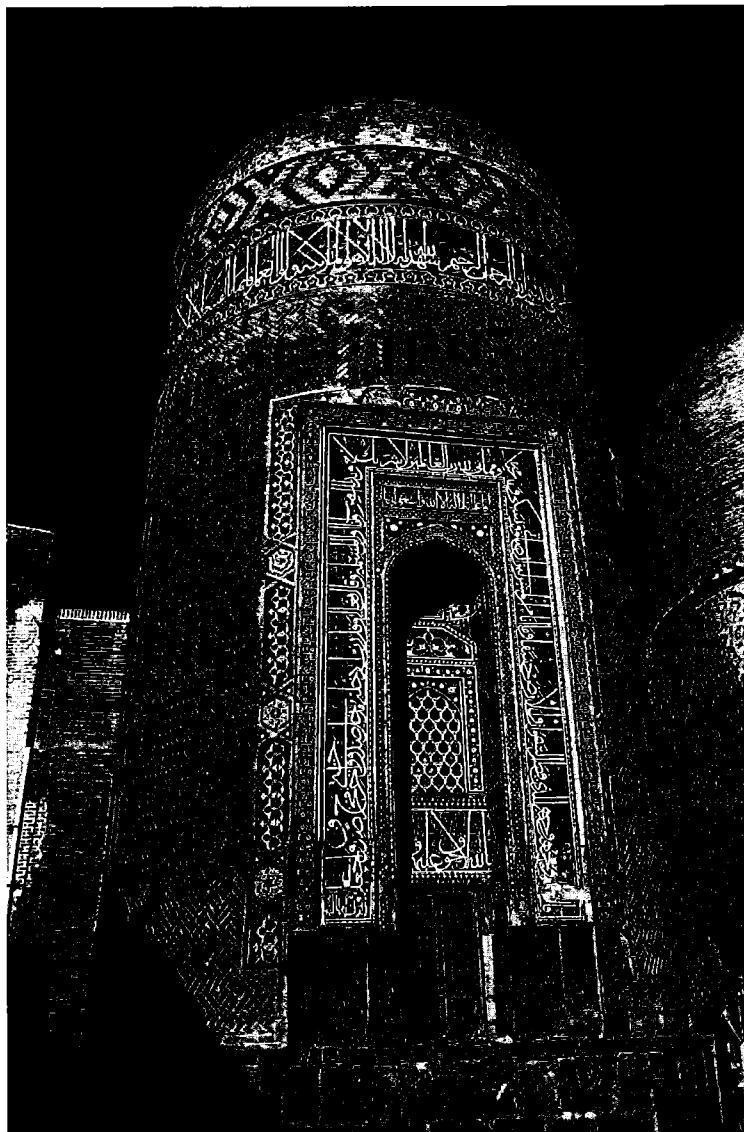
FIG. 14.7
Tomb tower of Shaykh
Safi, shrine of Shaykh
Safi, Ardabil, Iran
(photo courtesy author)

and intercede on his or her behalf. Similar beliefs governed the cult of Sufi holy figures, with devotees wishing to be buried as close to the sacred aura of the shaykh and, in this case, now also the shah.

The interior of Shah Isma'il's tomb is clad in dark blue lapis lazuli tiles with a gold luster. Above the base level is an inscription band in which the epigraphy eulogizes Imam 'Ali, casting him—and by extension Shah Isma'il—as the "victor of the miracles, the purest of the strangers, the parting of the allusions and the bright

flame [over] the horizons."[42] Shah Isma'il's access to esoteric knowledge and his status as a divinely chosen leader is evinced in these inscriptions, which focus primarily on his sacral nature. Indeed, the dome of this jewel-like tomb sits on an ornate drum on which the names and attributes of the twelve imams are inscribed (fig. 14.9).[43] According to historical sources, an

42   From Rizvi, *Safavid Dynastic Shrine*, 71.

43   This renovation may have been done during the reign of Shah Abbas II, judging by its style. However, that does not take

FIG. 14.8
Tomb of Shah Isma'il
(interior view),
constructed ca. 1524.
Shrine of Shaykh
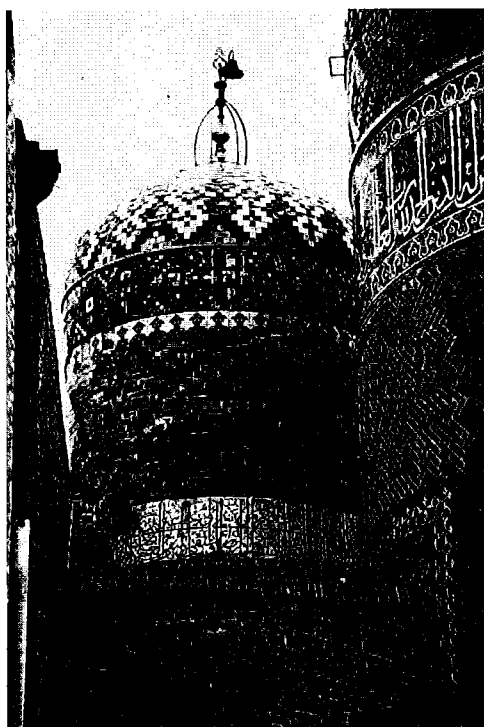Safi, Ardabil (photo
courtesy author)

FIG. 14.9   Tomb of Shah Isma'il (exterior view),
constructed ca. 1524. Shrine of Shaykh Safi, Ardabil
(photo courtesy author)

ornately carved finial was placed at the apex of
the dome. In the form of a crown and sword, the
military connotations of the finial marked the
victories of Shah Isma'il, an apt commemorative
for the founder of the dynasty.[44]

Even earlier than her construction of the
tomb, Tajlu Khanum had honored her husband
in another act of architectural benevolence, at
the shrine of Fatima Ma'suma (the Innocent), the
sister of the eighth imam, Ali Reza (d. 818), who
had herself died in 817 CE en route to visit her
brother in Khorasan. The shrine was closely asso-
ciated with the women of the imperial court, who
often resided in the winter capital, Qum, where
the shrine is located.[45] In 1519 Tajlu Khanum had
ordered that the dome of the *haram*, or sanctuary,
of Fatima Ma'suma be rebuilt and the golden iwan

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away from the significance of the structure for the Safavid heirs
of Shah Isma'il.

44   Reproduced in A. Weaver, "The Conservation of the
Shrine of Shaikh Safi at Ardebil; Second Preliminary Study,"
UNESCO serial no. 2560/RMO.RD/CLP (Paris, 1971).

45   The Safavids, like their predecessors, bestowed a great deal
of authority on the women of the royal family, following in the
footsteps of Shaykh Safi and, more importantly, the prophet
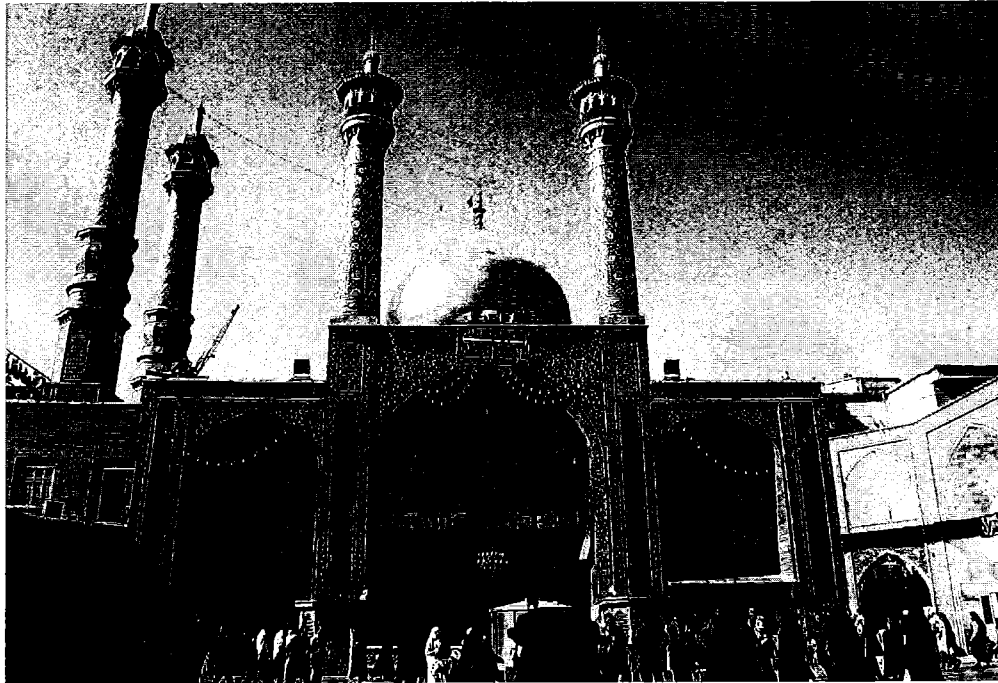Muhammad.

in the main courtyard be dedicated to her royal consort (fig. 14.10). A generous waqf endowment was made for the upkeep of the shrine, whose spiritual benefit was to bless Tajlu Khanum's pre-deceased sister.[46]

Shah Isma'il's name is prominently inscribed on the Golden Iwan, rendered in contrasting light-blue mosaic and placed directly above the pinna-cle of the arch. The ruler is given standard titles of Islamic kingship, such as "the upholder of justice" and "the guardian of the empire"; but he is also called "the Guide (Mahdi)," a title reserved for both God and the twelfth Shi'i imam. The term "Mahdi," which Shah Isma'il had earlier also used in his self-reflexive poetry, highlights an important aspect of Safavid kingship, in which the imams and shahs were conceptualized as surrogates of each other. In the Shi'i context, the title is reserved for the twelfth imam, Muhammad ibn Hasan, who went into occultation at the end of the ninth century. It is believed that he will return, bring-ing with him a new world order, a sentiment that resonated greatly with the millennialism of the

sixteenth century.[47] Thus, like the twelfth imam, the shah's presence was marked by its absence, rep-resented through texts and architecture and dis-played in the rituals surrounding the royal body.

The Imperial and Incarnate Shrine

The overlay of sacral and imperial authority man-ifested in the architectural commissions under-taken by Shah Ima'il's heir, Tahmasb (d. 1577), is a further development to this still relatively modest beginning. In addition to Shi'i edifices, he also made generous donations to the holy sites of the Ka'ba in Mecca and the Prophet's Mosque in Madina, no doubt in order to display a more general Muslim piety. At the shrine of Fatima Ma'suma in Qum, Shah Tahmasb instituted a waqf, or endowment, which included money for six huffāz to recite the Qu'ran in the name of his sister Mahin Banu.[48]

47 For more detail, see M. A. Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism: The Sources of Esotericism in Islam* (Stony-brook, 1994).

48 Shah Tahmasb had ritually betrothed Mahin Banu to Muhammad Mahdi, the 12th imam, ensuring her celibacy and continued presence at his court. After her death in 1562 she

46 Rizvi, "Gendered Patronage" (n. 16 above), 140.

that the shrine of Imam Reza be renovated and he established a waqf endowment in the name of the family of the Prophet. Under his orders the fortifications of the city were rebuilt and the minaret at the entrance of the shrine was constructed.[50] According to a contemporary source, huge amounts of gold were dedicated for the retiling of the dome above Imam Reza's sanctuary, and even more for its drum (fig. 14.11).[51] The shrine was of such spiritual and symbolic importance that Shah Tahmasb was buried there upon his death in 1577 instead of at the ancestral shrine in Ardabil.[52] However, according to early seventeenth-century historians, fears of further Uzbek raids and the defilement of the Shah's corpse prompted his heir, Isma'il II, to have the body removed to Karbala in Iraq.[53]

Although Shah Tahmasb was not himself buried in Ardabil, his presence was clearly marked at the ancestral shrine. Several important architectural interventions were made that transformed the Sufi *khanaqa* into an imperial edifice. The aura of Shaykh Safi was merged with that of his regal descendant in the rituals that were enacted there and the buildings that housed them. Sufi rituals, such as *dhikr* and *qawwālī* recitation, and the playing of the *naqqara* drums, continued, yet were merged with the evolving imperial ceremonial.[54]
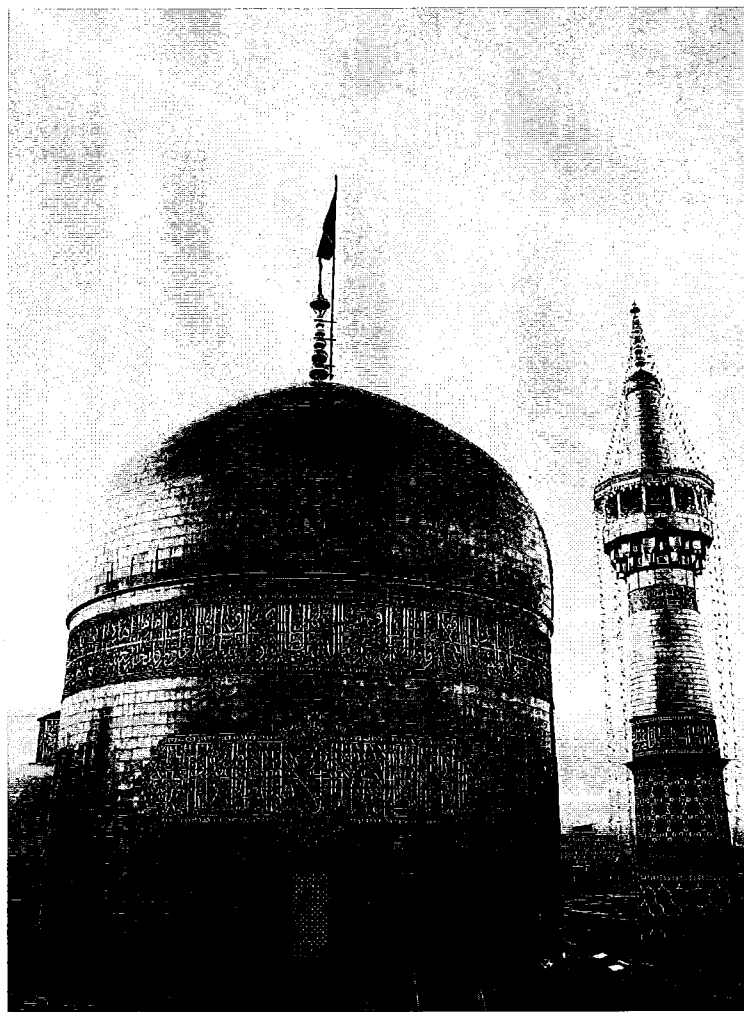
FIG. 14.11
Dome of the Haram.
Shrine of Imam Reza,
Mashhad. (photo:
Khadim Bayat;
courtesy the British
Museum, London)

The shrine of Imam Reza, the brother of Fatima Ma'suma, was the locus of Shi'i devotion in Iran, as the other imams were buried in Iraq or the Hijaz, both ruled, for the most part, by the Ottomans.[49] The shrine had been looted by the Safavids' eastern rivals, the Uzbeks, who attacked Khorasan several times during the first fifteen years of Shah Tahmasb's reign. Two years into his reign, in 1526, the young ruler ordered

was buried near the tomb of Fatima Ma'suma in Qum. Rizvi, "Gendered Patronage," 142.

49   During Isma'il's rise to power, many of the holy Shi'i sites were captured from the Ottomans, such as Najaf and Karbala in 1507, and Baghdad in 1509. These territories were disputed and lost during the reign of Shah Tahmasb, which was a devastating loss.

50   M. Farhat, "Islamic Piety and Dynastic Legitimacy: The Case of the Shrine of 'Alī b. Mūsā al-Ridā in Mashhad (10th–17th century)" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2002).

51   M. A. Natanzi, *Naqawat al-athar fi dhikr al-akhyar*, ed. E. Eshraqi (Tehran, 1971), 1350.

52   M. Farhat, "Shi'i Piety and Dynastic Legitimacy: Mashhad under the Early Safavid Shahs," *Journal of the International Society for Iranian Studies* 47, no. 2 (2014): 201–16.

53   Natanzi, *Naqawat al-athar fi dhikr al-akhyar*, 35. According to Jalal Munnajjim, the casket had been in the possession of the Uzbeks: J. Munnajjim, *Tārikh-i 'Abbāsi, ya rūznāma-yi Mullā Jalāl*, ed. S. Vahidniya (Tehran, 1987), 152. There continues to be some debate about the final resting place of the shah: Farhat, "Shi'i Piety and Dynastic Legitimacy." A recent article touches upon the complexity of pilgrimage and the trafficking of corpses from Safavid Iran to Ottoman Iraq during the 16th century: S. Ates, "Bones of Contention: Corpse Traffic and Ottoman-Iranian Rivalry in Nineteenth-Century Iraq," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 30, no. 3 (2010): 512–32.

54   M. Membre, *Mission to the Lord Sophy of Persia* (London, 1993), 42; See also in A. H. Morton, "The Chub-i Tariq and Qizilbash Ritual," *Études Safavides*, ed. J. Calmard (Paris, 1993), 225–46; S. Bashir, "Shah Isma'il and the Qizilbash:
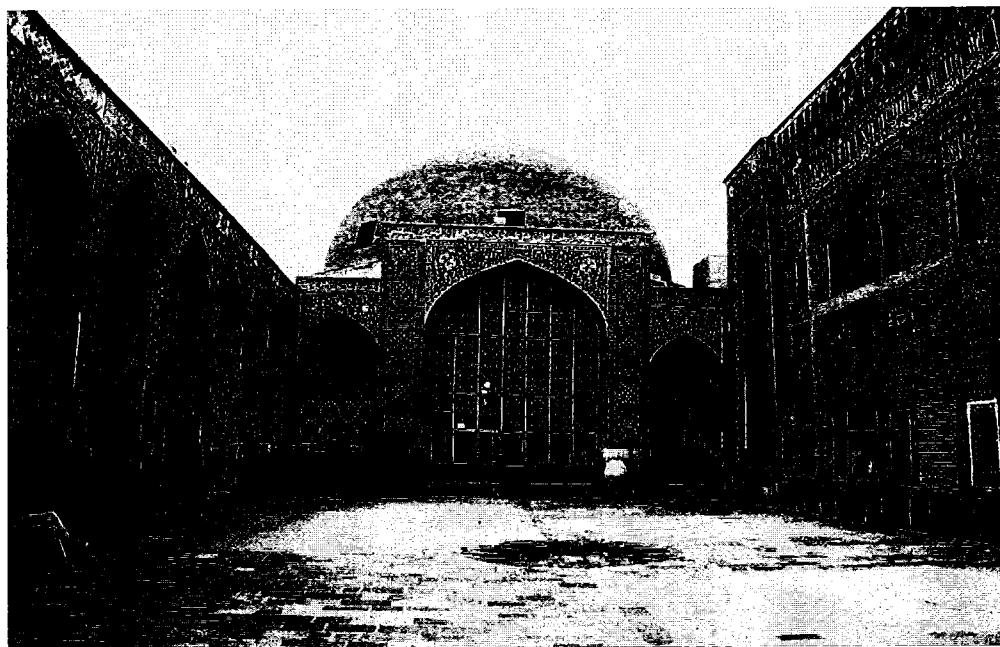
The Venetian traveler Michele Membre went to Iran as an ambassador to the Safavid Empire in 1539, at about the same time as major renovations were taking place at the shrine of Shaykh Safi. According to Membre, Shah Tahmasb's followers came from all over Iran as well as deep within Ottoman Anatolia to pay homage to the man they considered their spiritual guide. His charisma was so great that pilgrims would request a piece of cloth from his turban or handkerchief, which would then be circulated in the countryside like a talisman. The water from the king's ablutions was apotropaic, collected and distributed among the sick as it was believed to have beneficial effect, or *tabarruk*. Devotees kissed the earth that Shah Tahmasb stepped on, and prayed for the longevity of the Safavid dynasty as they would for the intercession of the imams. However, at the same moment, Shah Tahmasb was himself an enthusiastic supporter of the cult of holy men and women.

In 1533 Shah Tahmasb ordered new construction such as a Dar al-ḥadīth (Hall for the study of ḥadīth, where the sayings of the prophet would be tabulated) and the Jannatsara

("Paradisal palace," a setting most likely for initiation rites and for imperial ceremonial). The functions of the Dar al-ḥadīth and Jannatsara were evidence of the two primary trends in Safavid political and religious ideology, namely, Shi'ism and Sufism. The iwan portals of the two structures were inscribed with the titles of Shah Isma'il (over the Dar al-ḥadīth) and Shah Tahmasb (over the Jannatsara). They have since been renovated, and are now inscribed with Qur'anic verses, yet one can reconstruct them, given the evidence found in the shrine of Fatima in Qum and the Great Mosque in Isfahan, the iwans of which were dedicated to Isma'il and Tahmasb, respectively.

Whereas the function of the Dar al-ḥadīth is clear, namely the codification and recording of prophetic traditions, what took place within the monumental Jannatsara is less obvious (fig. 14.12). Contemporary European travelers and Safavid historians give accounts of initiation ceremonies that took place at the shrine of Shaykh Safi, such as the *chub-i tārīq*. The event involved a ritual beating, and was a type of Sufi practice that was viewed as a rite of passage for Safavid disciples and loyalists. As the head of the order, Shah Tahmasb would have often presided over such a meeting and, given the popularity

according to Safavid historians, the two rulers prayed at the tomb of Shaykh Safi for intercession and blessings. Two magnificent carpets are believed to have been commissioned for Shah Tahmasb some years before Humayun's visit and would no doubt have been proudly displayed for the royal guest. The Ardabil carpets, as they are now known, if placed side by side, would have fit perfectly in the Jannatsara, transforming the monumental space into a majestic and palatial environment, as already suggested by its name.

Buildings patronized by Shah Tahmasb were physical reminders of the merging of the cult of Safavid kingship with Sufi and Shi'i authority. The ruler rebuilt mosques and shrines to cohere with an emerging architectural vocabulary of Safavid architecture, namely a courtyard-centered structure consisting of iwan portals.[55] The shrine of Shaykh Safi was no exception. The Dar al-ḥadīth and Jannatsara formally rectified the formal layout of the ancestral shrine, introducing a symmetrically organized two-iwan courtyard. The two additions, however, shifted the emphasis away from the tomb tower of Shaykh Safi toward the courtyard and the renovations of Shah Tahmasb.

An imperial edict, or *farman*, is located on the facade of the Hall of Readers. It forbids heretical practices such as playing music and chanting, as well as unlawful activities, such as prostitution and gambling (fig. 14.13).[56] The primary goal of the edict was to proclaim Shah Tahmasb's authority and his vision to transform the more extreme beliefs of his supporters into a more normative religious practice. The reasons for this are many, from the pressures exerted by Ottoman polemics against the Shi'i Safavids to
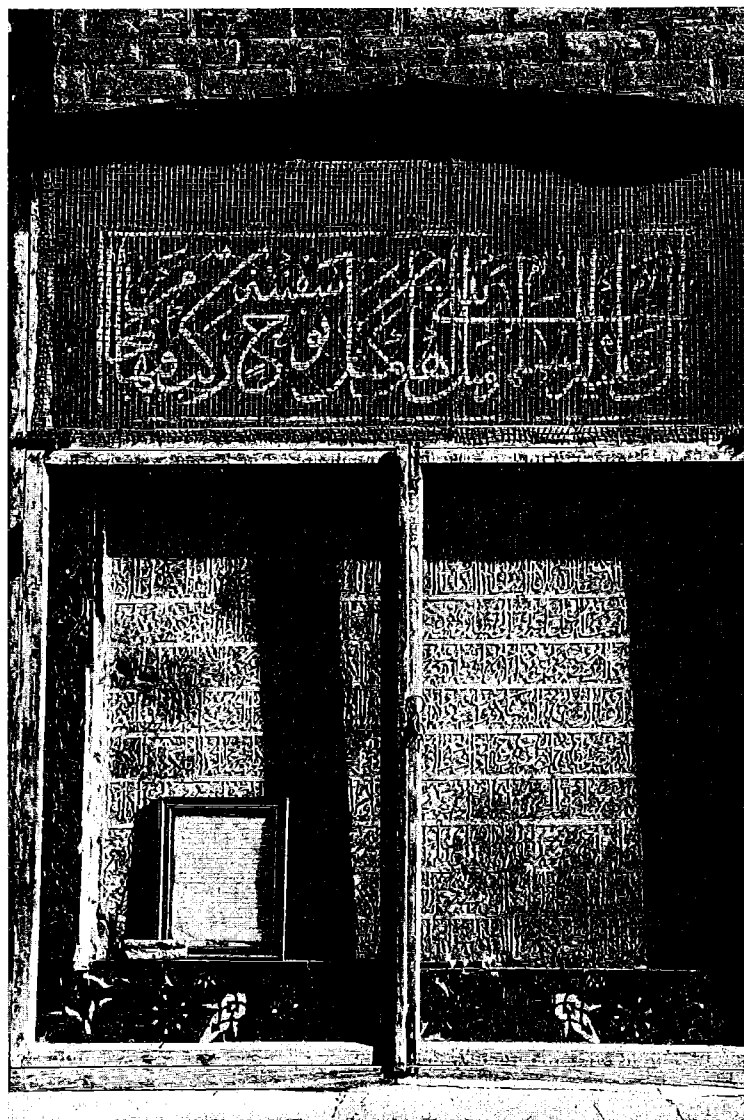
FIG. 14.13
Farmān on the Dār al-ḥuffāz, ca. 1550, shrine of Shaykh Safi, Ardabil (photo courtesy author)

of the cult of Safavid kingship, performance of the event would have required a large hall. The Jannatsara was imbued with the Shah's benevolent aura, where rituals of devotion and the rites of kingship were enacted.

Shah Tahmasb gave regular audiences at the shrine, which also acted as a temporary court where political alliances were augmented. In 1544, the Mughal ruler Humayun left India in exile and arrived at the Safavid court in Tabriz. After great pomp and ceremony, he was brought to the dynastic shrine in Ardabil, where,

55 Although the dynastic shrine was foremost in Shah Tahmasb's attention, his patronage of Sufi cults was not limited to the ancestral shrine; it is well known that he also patronized local shrines, like that of the Suhrawardi shaykh, Shihāb al-din Aharī (also in Azerbaijan, near Ardabil) and that of Abdullah Ansārī at Gazurgah. The shrine of Abdul Azim in Rayy was also a popular destination for Tahmasb as well as for subsequent Safavid rulers. Choosing the types of religious institutions selectively, the Safavid shahs augmented their authority through the association with figures of historic and familial significance to them.

56 Such edicts were also placed in mosques in Kashan and Isfahan. A. H. Navai, ed., *Shah Tahmasb Safavi: Isnād vā makālāt-i tārīkhī* (Tehran, 1989).

struggles between the disparate communities of belief within the empire itself.[57] Above the edict is an inscription which quotes the prophetic tradition, "The family of the Prophet is like the ark of Noah; to ride it is to gain deliverance," a phrase that was ubiquitously disseminated in early Safavid texts, illustrated in paintings, and inscribed—as we see—on buildings. After listing the prohibitions, the edict ends with praises to Shah Tahmasb, who is called the "asylum of divine grace and the lawful friend of God," once again evoking the king's exalted status, on both heaven and earth.

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The illustrated manuscripts and ritual objects housed at the shrine of Shaykh Safi were evidence of the religious and social changes taking place in the sixteenth century, in which Shi'i and Sufi

forms of authority were merged with the cult of Safavid kingship. The veneration of Shi'i Imams, in particular, was made explicit through visual documentation and the collection of physical artifacts associated with them, such as military standards and Qur'āns. The two main Shi'i shrines in Safavid Iran, in Qum and Mashhad, were enlarged and embellished, and served as models for changes in the ancestral shrine in Ardabil, where the charismatic authority of the Shah was most visible. Shah Tahmasb's renovations at the shrine of Shaykh Safi exemplified the manner in which architecture came to proclaim authority, as both a repository of Safavid history and an embodiment of the Shah. The tombs of Shah Tahmasb and the next three Safavid rulers, including the great Shah 'Abbas, remain unknown to this day, disrupting a robust tradition of imperial commemoration which had, until this time, exemplified Iranian architecture. Their charisma, nonetheless, permeates the objects and buildings that they commissioned, serving as artifacts forever associated with their physical and spiritual authority.

57   E. Eberhard, *Osmanische Polemik gegen die Safawiden im 16. Jahrhundert nach arabischen Handschriften* (Freiburg i. Br., 1970).