Women, Patronage, and Self-Representation in Islamic Societies

EDITED BY
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STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK PRESS

Published by
State University of New York Press, Albany

For information, address State University of New York Press,
State University Plaza, Albany, N.Y., 12246

Production by Cathleen Collins
Marketing by Fran Keneston

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Women, patronage, and self-representation in Islamic societies / edited by D. Fairchild Ruggles.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-7914-4469-4 (alk. paper) — ISBN 0-7914-4470-8 (pbk. : alk. paper)
1. Arts, Islamic. 2. Muslim women in art. 3. Muslim women—Art patronage.
I. Ruggles, D. Fairchild.
NX688.A4 R84 2000
700'.82'0917671—dc21

99-054125

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

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Gendered Patronage

Women and Benevolence during the Early Safavid Empire

Kishwar Rizvi

The Safavid dynasty was founded by Ismaʿil b. Haidar (r. 1501–24) in Tabriz, Iran.[1] Upon his ascension, the new shah established Shiʿism as the state religion, thereby merging tribal, Sufi, and Shiʿi concepts of authority into a unique imperial ideology. The Safavids traced their ancestry to the Sufi Shaykh Safi al-din Ishaq (d. 1334), whose order was based in Ardabil, in the northwestern province of Azerbaijan. The rulers' authority also relied upon their Shiʿi lineage; in the sixteenth century, Shaykh Safi's biography *Ṣafwat al-ṣafa*, was re-edited with a fabricated family tree branching back to the prophet, Muhammad.[2] This distinction augmented their power base, much of which was composed of Qizilbash tribesmen of Anatolia and Syria.

The relationship between the Qizilbash followers and the Safavid shahs was the same as that between a Sufi shaykh (*murshid*) and his disciple (*murīd*). While founded on Turco-Mongol kinship ties, allegiances were framed within a fervent Sufi mode of Islam, with the head of the Safaviyya order as the supreme spiritual and political authority.[3] Loyalty to the visionary Safavid call to Islam (*daʿwā*), was strengthened through blood ties and intertribal alliances such that it was not just the shah who was held in high regard, but his entire family, including the women. In the early years of the dynasty, the Safavids contracted matrimonial alliances mostly with high-born men and women of the Qizilbash tribes. The women, who came from devout and powerful families, brought with their dowries not only prestige, but also land and wealth.[4] They played an important role

in the construction of a Safavid imperial image, one that chose selectively from tribal traditions and cloaked them in the rhetoric of Islam. In this overlay, both women and men defined equal and complimentary aspects of rulership. The settings they chose for the dissemination of this image were the shrines they embellished and the written histories they commissioned, both of which documented their aspirations and particular worldviews.[5]

The aim of this paper is to analyze the manner in which Safavid forms of authority and legitimacy were manifested by royal women during the formative period of the dynasty prior to the reign of Shah ʿAbbas (r. 1587–1629).[6] Study of the cultural environment, through contemporary texts and architectural patronage, reveals the language of power and piety utilized by the Safavid family. The site chosen for the analysis is the shrine of Fatima al-Maʿsuma (d. 817) at Qum, which was actively patronized by the women of the Safavid house. Their sponsorship of the building reveals the cultural significance of patronage in sixteenth-century Iran, and the place of architecture in it. The royal women emerge as autonomous actors in the context of familial relationships, while simultaneously furthering the common cause of the supreme dynastic rulership led by their male kin.[7]

Modern scholars have attributed the independence and political activism of the Safavid women to their Turco-Mongol ancestry.[8] According to Maria Szuppe, who has made a lengthy study of Safavid royal women, the Turkmen tribes from the time of the Seljuks retained their "pagan" social mores, which were not as restrictive as the Islamic ones. She argues that Turkmen tribal customs were based on nomadism, which accorded a great deal of importance to blood ties and the independence of women.[9] This conclusion is perceptive yet incomplete, for it does not take into consideration the influence of Islam, the presence of which is well documented in the culture of the provinces, as well as cities of northwestern Iran.[10] To assume that Safavid women were aberrations within the social structure of Islam is to present a monodimensional aspect of both the religion and of them. In addition, the nomadic Mongol customs of the thirteenth century cannot adequately explain the choices that defined society in the sixteenth century, of which the Turkmen elite were an integral component.

Previously, women who were part of the rulership in Iran had left their mark through institutions that were popularly and orthodoxly recognized. For example, when the Timurid princess Gawhar Shad (d. 1457) commissioned the famous addition to the Shrine of Imam Reza in Mashhad, and her own tomb complex in Herat, which was comprised of a mosque,

madrasa, and dynastic mausoleum, she was exploiting codes of piety and politics that were standard to the cultural language of fifteenth-century Khorasan. Similarly, women at the beginning of the sixteenth century (both Iranian and Turkman), like their male counterparts, reinterpreted and made use of the dominant forms of religious expression, whether it was made publicly visible in the architecture of the shrines they visited or remained less visible in the form of their pious, charitable activities.

Building on earlier models of tribal and Islamic rulership, the Safavids also tapped into another source of authority, their ʿAlid ancestry.[11] Shahs like Ismaʿil and Tahmasb (r. 1524–76) were rulers propagating the Shiʿi version of Islam, as well as Sufi masters. Both of these roles were necessary components of their imperial persona, relying on orthodox and popular forms of devotion. Shiʿism was instituted as the religion of the land, and scholars and clerics were brought to Iran from traditionally Shiʿi enclaves, such as Jabal ʿAmil in Lebanon;[12] in coins issued by Shah Ismaʿil in 1501, to the Islamic profession of faith (*shahāda*), was added the Shiʿi slogan, *ʿAli walī Allah* (ʿAli is the friend of God).[13]

The royal household assumed an air of sanctity through their genealogical ties to the Prophet; Safavid men and women received respect and veneration, and their status was elevated almost to sainthood. Although never explicitly assuming the role of religious leaders of the Shiʿi, Shah Ismaʿil and his descendants manipulated popular belief to create an aura of holiness that surrounded the person of the shah. His family was identified as the *al-i Muhammad* (the family of Muhammad) and when Shah Tahmasb went forth among the people, men carrying steel drums would lead the procession, praising God and the Shiʿi imams and cursing symbols of Sunnism, the caliphs Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman; they bore a lance with a copper circle, in the center of which was inscribed *ʿAlī walī Allah.*[14] The particularly messianic zeal and revolutionary spirit of the Safavid "movement" is reflected strongly in the poetry written by Shah Ismaʿil, under the *nom de plume,* Khataʿi. The poetry exhorts his followers toward devotion, obedience, *jihād,* and sacrifice for the young shah. In one verse, written in the Turkish language of his followers, Ismaʿil extols, "Know him to be God, do not call him human. . . . My name is Ismaʿil, . . . my mother is Fatima, my father ʿAli."[15] Thus, while the men modeled themselves after Shiʿi archetypal male figures such as ʿAli, the women found a role model in the person of Fatima al-Zahra, the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad.

In the Sufi and Shiʿi worldview there are five People of the House (*ahl al-bait*); Muhammad, his daughter Fatima, her husband ʿAli, and her

sons Hasan and Husayn. As daughter, wife, and mother, Fatima al-Zahra was a pivotal character.[16] In the stories of the Prophet Muhammad and his family, Fatima al-Zahra is given the place of honor and the title, "Leader of Women (*sayyida al-nissa*)" as she was the closest to her father and would be the first from his family to rejoin him in Paradise.[17] As an ideal woman, Fatima al-Zahra was venerated by the Safavid elite. A prominent seventeenth-century Safavid cleric listed the names of Fatima al-Zahra in a hagiographic treatise. She was said to be made from light—hence the appellate, *al-zahrā'* (the radiant); her titles included *tahira* (pure), *zakīya* (intelligent), *razīya* (agreeable), *ṣadiqa* (true), *ma'suma* (innocent), and *pakīza* (clean).[18] The names are encountered again and again in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century descriptions of Fatima al-Zahra, as well as those of Safavid women. Thus, the daughter of Shah Tahmasb, Princess Pari Khan Khanum (d. 1578) was not only the "queen of the age" (*maleka-i zamāni*), but also the "Fatima of the age" (*Fatima-i zamāni*); Mahd-i 'Ala ("the lofty cradle," d. 1579), the mother of Shah 'Abbas, was called the "queen of the times," "the chaste" (*'afifa*)," "the radiant (*zahrā'*)," "the lawful progeny of the leader of the women (*dhariya tayiba sayyida al-nissa'*)" and the great Maryam (that is, Mary, mother of Jesus).[19]

The marriage of Fatima al-Zahra to her father's cousin, 'Ali, is a significant event in Shi'i hagiography. It is through this divinely inspired match, blessed by the Prophet himself, that the family of Muhammad was assured perpetuity and prosperity. The continuity of a family's lineage through the female heir is a pattern also shared by many Sufis. For example, there are several instances where the mantle (*khirqa*) of a Sufi master was passed on to the disciple and formalized through marriage with the master's daughter. In the case of the Safavids, bloodlines and spiritual lineage were simultaneously emphasized: in the Safavid genealogies, their Sayyid connections lead back to Fatima al-Zahra, while their Sufi source of authority (leading to 'Ali) was dependent on another woman, also named Fatima, who was the daughter of Shaykh Zahid (d. 1301) of Gilan.

The Safaviyya order, of which the Safavid rulers were supreme masters, was founded by a pupil of this Shaykh Zahid, Safi al-Din Ishaq. Safi's meeting with his spiritual master took place around the end of the thirteenth century, and he then followed the shaykh for twenty-five years, eventually becoming the head of his order.[20] Sixteenth-century Safavid court historians described the momentous event when the links between these two great families were solidified: after some years of meditation and

contemplation, Safi was made Shaykh Zahid's spiritual successor, whereupon the great shaykh gave to his disciple in marriage a daughter, "of the same name as Zahra—peace be upon her (i.e., Fatima al-Zahra), who was nourished within the veil of chastity." Fatima was described as a gift (*'aṭīya*), which ignited a flame of envy in the hearts of the other disciples. An exalted daughter and devoted wife, she was praised as the ideal woman. When her husband died, she was struck by extreme grief, crying that she could not live another month without him. Eighteen days later she too passed away and was buried ceremoniously in the shrine of Shaykh Safi in Ardabil, in a tomb constructed by her son.[21] This Fatima, like the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad, had her own family prestige, independent of that obtained through marriage. In fact, it was the young shaykh who, through marriage to her, gained political and religious favor, a situation often repeated by sixteenth-century Safavid royalty.

The contemporary histories and chronicles reveal that Safavid women enjoyed considerable social importance at the court. Blood ties were solidified through marriage, and prominence for a woman could be achieved through the role of wife and mother, similar to women in contemporary Ottoman society. For example, the favorite wife of Shah Isma'il was Tajlu Khanum (d. 1540), who hailed from an influential branch of the royal Aqqoyunlu family, the Mausillu, and owned much land in central Iran and the Veramin district. Shah Isma'il's marriage with a woman of this powerful family was a strategic alliance, which solidified tribal loyalties and strengthened the Safavid hold on the region. This relationship between the Mausillu and Safavid houses continued for at least two generations afterward, for Shah Tahmasb was married to Khadim-i 'Ali Sultan Begum (d. 1593), who was the daughter of Musa Sultan Beg Mausillu, and his daughter from this alliance was married to another Mausillu, a chief of the Turkmen amirs.[22] That the latter marriage was a politically meaningful affair can been seen in the attention given to it by Safavid historians. In the accounts of the year 1580, Iskander Munshi relates the joyous event of this marriage, which was celebrated by three days of festivities in Tabriz. The initiation of the husband into the Safavid family was ritualized by the giving of a robe of honor and a jeweled crown, a scimitar and sword with their gem-studded sheath and hilt, a horse with a jeweled bridle, and luxury fabrics. The honor bestowed on him is further highlighted when Munshi points out that a rival from the Takkalu clan had also vied for the hand of this princess but was not considered suitable for "this magnificent gift" (*īn 'aṭīya-i 'āzimī*), Fatima Sultan Begum.[23]

The daughters and sisters of the shah were powerful women who often participated in the political arena. While Tajlu Khanum held considerable sway over the court of Isma'il, she was later in competition with her daughter, Mahin Banu "Shahzada Sultanom" (d. 1561–62) for the attentions of her son, Shah Tahmasb. It was Mahin Banu who exchanged diplomatic correspondence with the Ottoman queen, Hurrem Sultan, and was an intermediary in negotiations between Shah Tahmasb and the Mughal emperor Humayun.[24] She was portrayed as an accomplished woman, famous for her patronage of shrines and places of pilgrimage, and foundations that were set up with her income from properties in Shirvan, Tabriz, Qazvin, Ray, and Isfahan. She also established an endowment for the welfare of women, which aided the marriages of young orphan girls. At her death, her jewels and china collection were made into a pious gift.[25]

Tajlu Khanum's granddaughter, Pari Khan Khanum, was recorded in the Safavid histories as playing a causal role in the rise to power of her brother Isma'il Mirza and she was described by Iskander Munshi as an intelligent and great lady of the age.[26] While unmarried (and thus childless) women rarely appear in the histories of other Islamic societies, the Safavid writers give prominence to the unmarried daughter. Mahin Banu and Pari Khan Khanum were notable political players, and in the reign of Shah 'Abbas, his unmarried aunt Zaynab Begum (d. 1642—daughter of Shah Tahmasb) held great sway over the court politics.[27] The respect and power given to the pious, celibate sister in Safavid society was due to the strong blood ties that united the social and political culture of the time.[28] The unmarried daughter gained social legitimacy through her distinguished birth and lineage. In Safavid Iran, this attribute was augmented by the representation of two ideal daughters about whom the Shi'i scholars wrote: Fatima, the daughter of Muhammad, and Maryam, the daughter of Imran. These two women, Fatima and Maryam, are often conceptually conflated through their appellate *al-batūl*, the Virgin. Indeed, Shi'i hagiographers often took a quotation from the Qur'an concerning Maryam and substituted in it the name of Fatima: "O Fatima (Maryam) . . . Allah has chosen you. He has made you pure (*tāhara*) and exalted you above all women (*al-nissa' al-'alamīn*). Fatima (Maryam) be obedient to your Lord; bow down and worship with the worshippers."[29] The virtues exemplified by Fatima and Maryam, such as virginity, purity, and celibacy, were highly regarded traits in a woman of the Safavid court. However, this respect did not prevent the women from being given comparable attention and opportunities as their male siblings. Like the princes, they too were tutored by their Qizilbash guardian (*lālā*) and were taught the arts of calligraphy and horsemanship, along with religious doctrine.[30]

The educated and powerful Safavid women participated in the political and cultural arena, and were known as active patrons of art, architecture, and religious institutions. As mentioned earlier, Mahin Banu spent much of her wealth on charitable works, especially at the shrine of Imam Reza in Mashhad; similarly, Zaynab Begum built bridges and caravanserais along the Qazvin-Sava route. Pari Khan Khanum was not only a poet in her own right, but also a patron of poetry, having many poems dedicated to her by prominent contemporaries.[31] Moreover, she was influential in encouraging her father, Shah Tahmasb, to endow charitable institutions.[32] During his reign, in cities such as Mashhad, Qum, and Ardabil where Shi'ism was particularly strong, alms were distributed and feast days, such as the birthdays of Muhammad and Fatima al-Zahra, were celebrated regularly.[33]

The Safavids focused their attention on predominantly Shi'i cities and popular shrines. In contrast to the Sunni Ottomans on their western borders who built Friday mosques, the Shi'i state favored shrine worship, which typically venerated holy persons who played the role of intercessor between the supplicant and God. For the itinerant Safavid monarchs, shrines were the loci for political action and for the enactment of their dogma.[34] They were arenas in which social and cultural mores were established and disseminated. Emphasis was laid on pilgrimage to shrines such as that of Imam Reza in Mashhad, the shrine of his sister, Fatima al-Ma'suma in Qum, and to the shrine of Shaykh Safi al-Din in Ardabil. These three buildings had different functions: Shaykh Safi's was a Sufi shrine, dependent on the services linked to such an institution; that is, it was a *zāwīya* (Sufi lodge) that served the community and its secondary buildings were originally for Sufi practice and ritual. In contrast, the shrines at Qum and Mashhad were both monuments built in veneration of a member of the Prophet's family and for the propagation of the Shi'i dogma. The secondary institution linked to them was the *madrasa,* or theological college. The shrines of Sufi shaykhs and Shi'i imams, while dissimilar in function, shared many similarities in terms of ritual, and hence, architecture. During the early Safavid period, the boundaries between Sufi and Shi'i architectural types, which were already indistinct, were obscured even further. For example, in 1418 at Imam Reza's shrine, the Timurid princess Gawhar Shad had built a Hall of Readers (*dār al-ḥuffāz*) for Qur'anic recitation, a practice associated with Sufi worship. In the same manner, Shah Isma'il

built a hall for hadith study (*dār al-ḥadīth*) at the shrine of Shaikh Safi for teaching orthodox Shi'i theology.

Rituals of piety and benevolence were enacted at the shrines by both the humble and the rich. For example, Shah Tahmasb was commanded in a dream to thank Imam Reza for aiding the Iranian victory in Samarqand and to erect a dome in his name.[35] Shah 'Abbas' reconquest of Khorasan from the Uzbeks in 1598 was also viewed not so much as a political event, but as a religious one, in which the objective was that of retrieving for the Shi'i their holy site, the shrine of Imam Reza.[36] When Shah 'Abbas saw the dome of the shrine, he was said to have wept and kissed the holy ground in thanks to the Imam for answering his prayers. As a sign of gratitude for this victory, Shah 'Abbas bestowed upon the shrine chandeliers and candlesticks of gold and silver, and expensive carpets, and he ordered "the extension of the shrine complex, including lofty porticos and the buildings around them; (and) the painting and decoration of the sanctuary."[37]

The shrines of Shaikh Safi, Imam Reza, and Fatima al-Ma'suma served as sites for the commemoration of victories as well as for enacting ceremonials of sovereignty, such as those of charity and largess.[38] For example, in 1526 Shah Tahmasb built the minaret at the northern entrance of the shrine of Imam Reza and replaced the tiles on the dome with plates of solid gold.[39] To the shrine of Fatima al-Ma'suma in Qum, he gave a beautiful Qur'an.[40] Such benevolence was interpreted not only as a sign of piety, but also as the symbol of the Safavid political and religious ideology.

Since the Safavid shahs were heads of the Safaviyya order, their links to Ardabil were strong and many notable shaykhs and members of the Safavid family were buried within the precincts of the shrine of Shaykh Safi. This Shaykh's tomb was constructed in a room within his shrine where the Shaykh had performed his meditations and prayers. Situated between the tomb tower of Shaykh Safi and the mausoleum of his son and family members (including his wife and daughter) was the domed tomb of Shah Isma'il, built at his death in 1524 by Tajlu Khanum. When Fatima Sultan Begum, the daughter of Shah Tahmasb died in Tabriz, her body was taken to Ardabil for burial at the holy shrine of her great forefathers (*rawza-i mathra-i āba' o ajdād-i 'āla*).[41] In the 1570 land register, *Ṣariḥ al-milk,* it is mentioned that the tombs of Shah Isma'il's mother and wife were also in the main shrine complex, although the location is unknown.[42] The shahs and their immediate family were buried within the precincts of the shrine, and the others were interred outside. The ancestral tombs of the Safavid family were venerated to such an extent that they were believed to provide blessings to whoever was buried near them. A Venetian visitor to the court of Shah Tahmasb wrote, "And if he was a man who was in the Shah's favor, he (Shah Tahmasb) orders him to be buried in the city of Ardabil . . . which would be three days from Tabriz, to the east."[43]

Whereas Ardabil was the dynastic shrine and associated primarily with Shaykh Safi, the shrine at Qum was perceived quite differently (fig. 7.1). An old and important city of Iran, at the beginning of the fourteenth century, Qum became a winter hunting capital for the Turkmen sultans.[44] The fifteenth-century historian, Ruzbihan Khunji recounts the time when Sultan Yaqub was at his winter quarters in Qum when Shaykh Haydar (the paternal grandfather of Shah Isma'il) sent his mother to the royal household there to get permission for a raid on Shirvan.[45] Her mediation on his behalf secured the order as well as assistance for the march. The involvement of his mother in Shaykh Haydar's political ambitions—she was, after all, the sister of the Aqqoyunlu sultan, Uzun Hasan—highlights her influence and also draws attention to the presence of women at the royal court in Qum.

Safavid shahs, such as Isma'il and Tahmasb, often wintered in or outside of Qum where game was abundant and the weather more clement than that of northern cities like Tabriz and Sultaniyya. Qazi Ahmad Qummi relates an episode of the year 1502, which is invaluable in reconstructing the imperial residence in Qum. The author's grandfather had been an architect (*mi'mār*) and state clerk for Shahrukh Mirza and for subsequent Turkmens sultans. After retiring, he returned to his birthplace Qum, and built a *zāwīya* there known as "Husayniyya." At Shah Isma'il's ascension, with the help of other builders, engineers, and architects, he repaired the old Imperial Palace (*daulatkhāna*) of Qum, which had earlier been the royal residence of Uzun Hasan and his son, Yaqub. Adjacent to this was built a new Residential Palace (*haramsarā*) of four storeys, with portals and balconies. This palace was decorated with carvings and beautiful paintings. A painting from the famous *Shāhnāma-i shāhi* of Firdawsi (the so-called Houghton Shahnama), completed c. 1527 during the reign of Shah Tahmasb, gives us an idea of what this imperial palace might have looked like (fig. 7.2). The scene "Dream of Zahāk," shows the king's chambers on the left, connected by an exterior corridor to the women's quarters on the right. Although illustrating a fictional situation, the visual similarity of this scene to Qazi Ahmad Qummi's written description allows us to imagine the appearance of Safavid royal residences in the early sixteenth century.[46] When the attention of Shah Isma'il turned to Qum, called the City of the

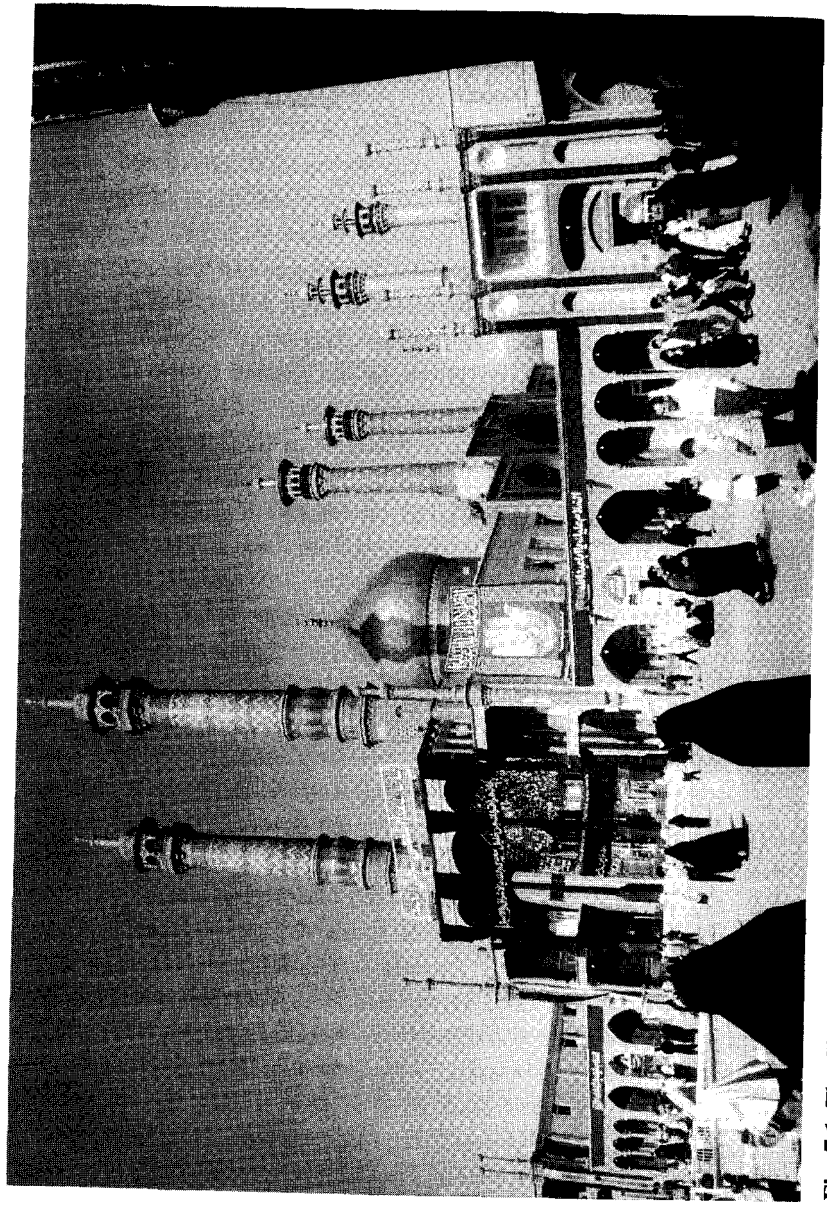

Fig. 7.1. The Shrine of Fatima al-Ma'suma at Qum seen from the New Courtyard

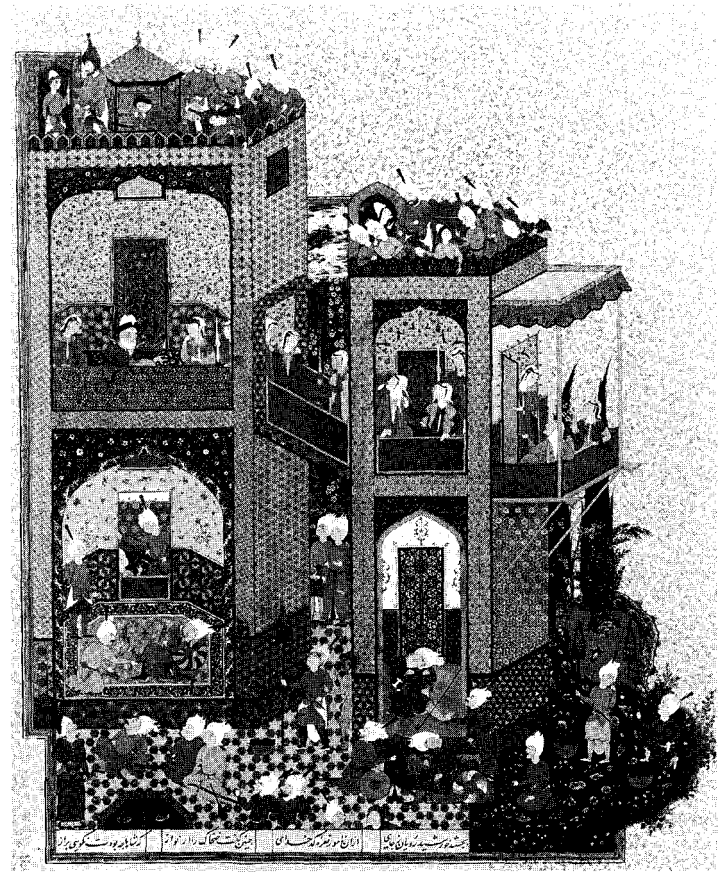

Fig. 7.2. "Dream of Zahāk," *Shāhnāma-i Shāhi* (1527) (Courtesy of the Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University)

Faithful (*dār al-mominīm*), all the nobles, patricians and Shi'i aristocracy of the city were present in order to welcome him to his new palace.[47] It was here that the head-shaving ceremony of Shah Isma'il's son Sam Mirza took place in 1518,[48] and in 1536, the birth of Shah Tahmasb's son, Ibrahim Mirza, both amidst great rejoicing.[49]

The palace in the city of Qum was a surrogate, winter residence for the Safavids and also the site of retreat and exile from the court, especially for the women. After his mother had aided his brother Bahram Mirza against him, Shah Tahmasb sent her to Qum in 1528. In the account of 1578, Iskander Munshi recounts that when Sultanom Begum, the mother of Shah

Muhammad Khudabanda, sided against her son in a political intrigue, she was banished to Qum where she remained mourning the death of another of her sons, Ibrahim Mirza. He also writes that since Pari Khanum, the sister of Shah Muhammad Khudabanda had control at the court in Qazvin, the Shah had his loyal viziers come to Qum to pay allegiance to him, until his position was secure enough for him to go to Qazvin for his enthronement.[50] When the Shah's wife Mahd-i ʿAla gained too much control, and thereby offended his Uzbek amirs who were not pleased to take orders from a woman, the Shah made plans to send her away to Qum, just as his father before him had sent his mother.[51] The association of Safavid women with the city of Qum was a recurrent theme in the writings of the chroniclers and the City of the Faithful became a focus of female attention, particularly the shrine of Fatima al-Maʿsuma, located outside its walls. For the Safavid women, this shrine was not only a holy edifice deserving their benevolence but also a place where their physical inclusion as women was accepted.

The saintly Fatima al-Maʿsuma was seen as an intercessor on behalf of women and hence her shrine became a highly gendered space where acts of piety were performed. She is said to have arrived in Qum in 817, en route to visit her brother, the eighth Shiʿi imam, ʿAli b. Musa al-Reza, at Tus (Mashhad). On the way she fell ill and asked to be taken to Qum, which since the early eighth century had a reputation as a Shiʿi center. (According to Qazi Ahmad Qummi in the late sixteenth century, it had been an abode of Shiʿism for over seven or eight hundred years.)[52] After reaching the city, she died and was buried in the gardens of a cemetery belonging to a dignitary of Qum, Musa b. Kharaj, who subsequently made the cemetery *waqf* (endowed perpetuity) for the public. By the ninth and tenth centuries the shrine had become a popular place of pilgrimage and continued to attract many followers during the Timurid and Aqqoyunlu period.[53]

During the Safavid era the shrine was held in high esteem, and received two particularly interesting acts of benevolent endowment. The manner of patronage reveals the role played by royal women in the cultural and social dynamics of their time. In 1519 the dome of the shrine was rebuilt and the entire courtyard embellished in honor of Shah Ismaʿil. Four years later, Tajlu Khanum, his wife, made mortmain a large portion of her neighboring property and bestowed it to the shrine. The *waqfnāma* (endowment records) and the inscriptions on the entrance of the old courtyard are evidence of the religious and political significance of the shrine of Fatima al-Maʿsuma during the early sixteenth century.[54]

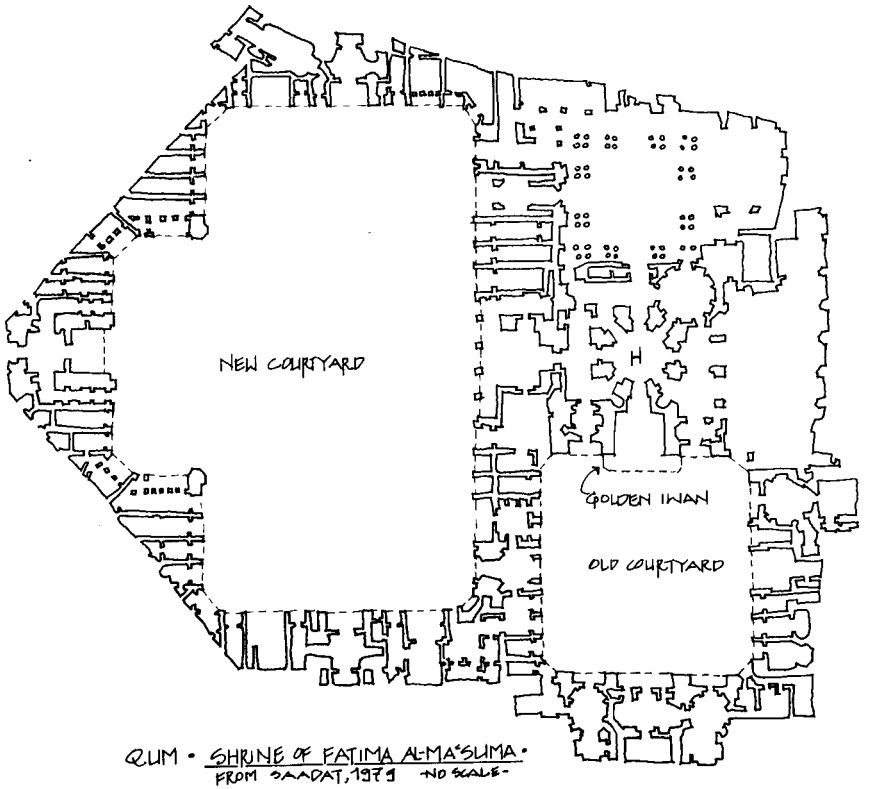

Fig. 7.3. Plan of the Shrine of Fatima al-Maʿsuma (after Saadat)

The tomb precinct of Fatima al-Maʿsuma is an octagonal room (marked H on fig. 7.3) centered on the cenotaph, and is sheltered by a large hemispherical dome. Attached directly to the tomb precinct is a deep portico, or iwan (fig. 7.4). Through an arched opening, this iwan leads to the old courtyard and to the original entrance of the shrine. The semidome of the iwan was decorated in the nineteenth century with golden *muqarnas* mirror-work, for which it is now called the Golden Iwan. The main portal is flanked by two secondary iwans. The facade and enclosures are decorated in tile mosaic with a wide palette of colors. The designs are of two types: the first is an accumulation of sinuous, floral motifs that cover broad surfaces of the wall; the second type is of fuller compositions, forming panels of either large floral medallions or of blossoming plants sprouting

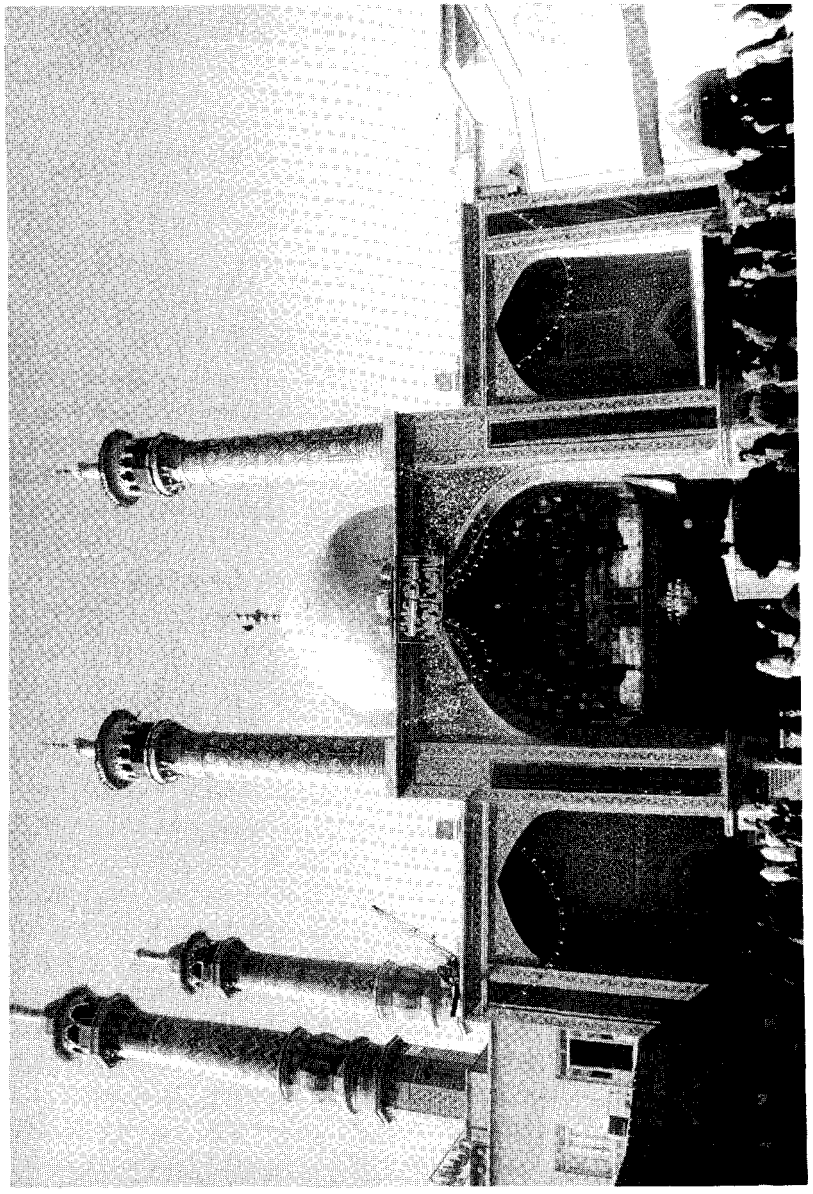

Fig. 7.4. Golden Iwan, entrance to the tomb precinct from the Old Courtyard

from vases, the whole framed in an ogee arch. There are three inscription bands adorning the iwan: a wide band below the *muqarnas* dome that envelopes the interior back and sides of the iwan; a second, lower band that is parallel to the first, but is also on the interior of the small iwan; and a narrow band that highlights the inside arch of the main iwan, consisting of the verses from the Qur'an, *surat al-nūr* (the Light verse).[55] In the pendentives of the secondary iwan are pairs of epigraphic medallions. There are six attributes written in white *naqshī* script: "the Merciful, the Proof, the Judge, the Glorious, the Compassionate, the Benefactor" (*yā raḥmān, yā burhān, yā dayān, yā subḥān, yā ḥanān, yā manān*).[56] This medallion was also mounted on the gateway of the Shrine of Shaykh Safi in Ardabil (in carved marble) and in the courtyard in the Shrine of Imam Reza in Mashhad (in tiled mosaic), in what might have been Safavid reembellishments.[57]

The first horizontal band, 0.60 meters wide, consists of white *thuluth* script, on a dark blue lajverdi background that starts from the lip of the arch and encircles the interior. Beginning with a Qur'anic verse, "Praise be to Allah who has guided us hither (7:43)," the inscription continues to document the construction of "this exalted building and insurmountable, holy precinct" which was built during the reign of the "just and all-knowing sultan," Shah Isma'il.[58] The name of the Shah occurs directly above the pinnacle of the arch and is rendered in a light blue mosaic, highlighting and differentiating it from the rest of the text. The titles of the king are standard, reiterating the Islamic image of the ruler as one who supervises the faithful, protects the land against tyranny, and who resurrects justice and benevolence. However, he is also depicted as "the Guide (*mahdī*)" who will lead all creatures to the great religion.[59] The position of this king is enhanced as he is cast in the role of proselytizer and master, taking on attributes often reserved only for God (for example, *al-malak al-manān*—"the Benefactor"). This was not unusual among the Safavids who posited the ruler as a semidivine godhead. The end of this foundation inscription bestows on his kingdom the eternal blessings of the Prophet Muhammad and is dated Rajab A.H. 925 (1519).[60]

The second inscription is divided in two halves, interrupted by the door into the tomb chamber. In style and embellishment, it is similar to the first, only slightly smaller. The white *thuluth* script is easily read as it is just above the dado and at a height of 1.80 meters from the floor. The body of this text contains a saying (*ḥadīth*) of the Prophet Muhammad. The first half of the repetitive verse is: "Whoever dies for the love of the family of

Muhammad, dies a martyr; whoever dies for the love of the family of Muhammad, dies cleansed/ . . . repentant/ . . . a perfect believer; . . . he meets the Angel of Death . . . (and) is conducted to Paradise like a bride to the house of her betrothed; . . . whoever dies for the love of the family of Muhammad, God makes his grave like a shrine of the Angels of Mercy." This last is at the entrance door of the tomb chamber, an appropriate site for such a verse, blessing the grave of Fatima al-Ma'suma. After this there are warnings to those who die through hatred and opposition to the family of Muhammad, who would be denied the happiness of Paradise. The inscription ends with blessings on Muhammad, 'Ali, Fatima, her children Hasan and Husayn, and the remaining nine Shi'i Imams, popularly called the Fourteen Innocent Ones.[61] The honorific title is given for each: *al-muṣṭafa Muḥammad, al-murṭada 'Alī, al-batūl Fatima,* and so on. The emphasis in this inscription on the respect and allegiance to the family of Muhammad is striking but not surprising. On the one hand, it venerates Fatima al-Ma'suma who, while not one of the Fourteen Innocent ones, is closely related to them; on the other hand, it reiterates the claim to religious authority of the Safavid shahs. One aspect of their rulership is revealed in the girdling inscription with the name of Shah Isma'il, which reinforces his duties as sovereign and pious leader, signaling his temporal supremacy as the *sultān bin al-sultān bin al-sultān,* that is, the scion of a family of kings (incidentally, the same title used by his Ottoman rival). Another aspect is unveiled in his title, *al-mahdī,* the honorific reserved for the twelfth imam, Muhammad, reinforced by the second inscription elliptically, which alludes to Isma'il's exalted ancestry through further transposing associations with the family of Muhammad by constantly reiterating the notion of *ahl al-bait.*[62] This theme is reiterated on the interior walls of the tomb chamber, below the dome, where there are sayings attributed to the Prophet Muhammad such as "The family of the Prophet is like the Ark of Noah; to ride it is to gain deliverance, to oppose it is to drown (in destruction)." In the sayings, the "people of 'Ali', (*shi'iat 'Alī,* that is, the Shi'i) are depicted as the victorious ones, and the family of Muhammad is described as a tree in Paradise with its branches spreading over the earth.[63]

The highly charged ethos of idolization bestowed upon the family of Muhammad and the Safavid identification with them, as observed in the epigraphic program of the shrine, is also reflected in the *waqfnāma* of Tajlu Khanum, dated 1523.[64] The endowment deed makes mortmain properties around Qum and Sultaniyya for the Shrine of "Sitti Fatima, situated outside the Sava gate of the city of Qum." It begins with praises of God, Muhammad and 'Ali, and continues by expounding on the virtues of charity and almsgiving as ways of gaining blessings for the afterlife. After this, the donor of the endowment is identified as: "The great lady, the mistress, queen of the World, leader of the chosen (pure) people, . . . (she is) affluent, beneficent, pure, . . . the just, the ruler, the sultana of the chosen women. . . . Builder of great, charitable works, founder of benevolent foundations, the signs of sanctity and rectitude from the tent of her high position are brilliant (and) the lights of purity from the (bridal) canopy of her greatness are dazzling. The virtuous one of the World and of the Religion, Shah Begi Begum, daughter of the great Amir, Mihmad Beg, son of Hamza Beg Bektash Mausillu, may her greatness and chastity be eternal."[65] The endowment deed goes on to list the properties, gardens, and residences that were made mortmain, many of which lay outside the city of Qum.

Although the woman is here named Shah Begi Begum, she was identified by Qazi Ahmad Qummi as the previously mentioned Tajlu Khanum, favorite wife of Shah Isma'il.[66] According to him, she donated many of her numerous properties to the shrine of Fatima al-Ma'suma. He also mentioned the presence of other buildings at the shrine which the architects of that "great Lady" built with her generous donations.[67] In addition to this, she was credited with building the dome of the Jannatsarā at the shrine of Shaykh Safi at Ardabil.[68] The manner in which Shah Begi Begum is described in the *waqfnāma* is interesting because, while most of her honorific titles credit her with purity and an exalted, sublime position, there are also those that point specifically to her role as the patron, builder, and founder of pious charities. Her important imperial position is alluded to by her identification as the just ruler (*'adila*) and sultana, feminized versions of the titles shared by her husband Shah Isma'il (as seen in the girdling inscription of the iwan).[69] And yet, it is not her husband's lineage that is mentioned but her father's, for she is introduced in the legal document as the daughter of Mihmad Beg Bektash Mausillu, a Turkman. Thus, although the parallel designation with her husband serves to identify her today, in her own time, the status and importance worth mention was her blood genealogy, which was not a function of her prestigious marriage but rather her birthright. Shah Begi Begum's ties to the Turkman elite was a source of distinction, as is acknowledged by the court historians.[70]

The Mausillu family's ties to Qum were considerable, judging by the amount of land and property owned by Shah Begi Begum in the town and its environs. As mentioned earlier, the Queen had a residence in Qum, where she had moved in 1528 with the rest of her entourage while Shah

Tahmasb was campaigning in Khorasan.[71] This trend of maintaining a primary residence in Qum continued with her daughter-in-law and cousin, Sultanom Begum.[72] These women of the Mausillu/Safavid houses who lived in Qum frequented the tomb of Fatima al-Ma'suma. Moreover, that shrine became a focus of their charitable donations as living patrons and a site for their commemoration after death.

The *waqfnāma* of Shah Begi Begum postulated that a large portion of the endowment was for the shrine of Fatima al-Ma'suma. The income from the numerous villages and properties outside the city of Qum were to be administered by the *mutawalli* (administrator) Sultan Ahmad al-Razavi. The terms of the endowment stated that the money was to be used by the *mutawalli* for the maintenance of the holy tomb and its environs (courtyards), and for the carpets, vessels and other necessities of the shrine. The building is identified with the woman who it commemorates, that is, the one with the same name as "the leader of the women of the world," Fatima al-Zahra. The shrine is described as divinely chosen, "the greatest of the great, the sublime, the pure, the magnificent, the radiant," and from whose canopies the people gain guidance and piety. The door of its great precinct would be made into a *qibla* from the desires of the nobility; the courtyard of its lofty resting place would become a Ka'ba for the wishes of the great and honorable ones. In the *waqfnāma,* a saying attributed to Imam Reza states that "whoever visits the shrine of my sister in Qum, is promised Paradise."[73] Veneration of the pious sister is also conspicuously evident in the *waqf* document of Shah Begi Begum, according to which the charitable act of endowment has been undertaken "with the desire that the blessings (*thawāb*) from it be upon the spirit of her ailing sister . . . , the crown of women and the queen of the angels of creation . . . , from the family of the joyous ones among the Muslims, . . . the deceased lady, the innocent, Beksi Khanum." The document is dated Safar A.H. 929 (1523).

In the same group of endowment deeds from Qum, there is one which mentions the *zāwīya* of Beksi Khanum.[74] While little is known about this sister of the queen, her immortalization by Shah Begi Begum's generous gift to the shrine of Fatima al-Ma'suma highlights aspects of piety and patronage undertaken by the Safavid household in the early years of the dynasty. Primary clan relations at the turn of the sixteenth century, especially among the ruling elite, were shrouded in an air of religious adoration. Granting gifts to the shrines of holy men and women was a common practice through which aspects of the donors' religious commitment, as well as his or her financial and political power, was made public.[75] Another function of

such charity was to make explicit one's own familial and social alliances. Endowing the *waqf* in such a way that the Divine favor gained by it would be conferred on a beloved relative, further accentuated the familial duty and serious intention of the founder. Who was chosen to receive the outward benefits of this charity was an expression of one's own loyalty. By donating the spiritual reward from her philanthropic *waqf* to the spirit of her sister, Shah Begi Begum was reinforcing not only her own familial ties, but also asserting her autonomy as a powerful political player in the Safavid court.[76]

The independence displayed by Shah Begi Begum in endowing the shrine of Fatima al-Ma'suma brings to the fore the question of personal income. While the chroniclers document the considerable amount of wealth possessed by the Safavid queens and princesses, very little information is given as to how it was obtained. The identification of the famous and powerful wife of Shah Isma'il (Tajlu Khanum) through her own blood lineage (as Shah Begi Begum, daughter of Mihmad Beg Bektash Mausillu) may be construed as reflecting also the source of her wealth. The Qizilbash Turkmen and Safavids acquired status through cognate relationships, especially in terms of family recognition and allegiance, and wealth was similarly procured. Furthermore, adherence to Shi'i laws and tribal customs allowed women greater equality in terms of inheritance. In Sunni law, outside of the rights given in the Qur'an, there are few provisions for female heirs to inherit; Shi'i law as formulated in the eighth century, does not exclude women from sharing the family assets in company of male heirs. The closest relatives, irrespective of gender and from either the male or female side, inherit according to the Qur'anic divisions. This parity regarding inheritance (and also divorce) is attributed to the importance given to Fatima al-Zahra by the Shi'i. As the sole link with the Divine lineage of Muhammad, without whom the Shi'i imamate would not exist, she is revered and given rights comparable to those given a son.[77] Thus, the Shi'i involvement with the family, beginning with that of the Prophet, gives a broad preference to the role of women, especially the daughter. In fact, one of the most cited events in the life of Fatima al-Zahra is that of the denial of her inheritance, which included the lands of Fadak and Khaybar. According to Shi'i commentators, after the death of Muhammad, the Caliph Abu Bakr flatly refused to give to Fatima her share of the inheritance, saying that Muhammad had said that a prophet had no heirs and all his property was to be distributed as alms. The debate about the injustice done to the daughter of the Prophet and how she was denied her rights became a symbolic division between Shi'i and Sunni scholars.[78]

In 1540, the substantial properties of Shah Begi Begum were confiscated by her son Shah Tahmasb, for treason against him, and she was banished to Shiraz. She died shortly afterwards, and was buried in the shrine of Bibi Dokhtaran (Lady of Daughters) in Shiraz.[79] Her position as the primary authoritative female figure was taken over by her daughter, Mahin Banu. This was the same woman whom Shah Tahmasb had earlier ritually betrothed to Muhammad al-Mahdi, the twelfth Shi'i Imam, insuring her celibacy and continued presence at his court.[80] Upon Mahin Banu's death in 1562, her properties were vested in Shah Tahmasb who managed the endowments made by this favorite sister in the name of the Fourteen Innocent Ones.[81] He instituted a *waqf* at the shrine of Fatima Ma'suma that included money for Qur'an recitation in her name, in order that the blessings from that devotion would benefit her spirit. Mahin Banu was buried in Qum, near the dome (*qubba*) of Fatima al-Ma'suma.[82]

Although Shah Begi Begum was herself buried in Shiraz, her daughter and at least one other female relation were buried at the shrine of Fatima al-Ma'suma.[83] The Safavid women were identified with this woman who, like themselves, shared the titles of Fatima al-Zahra and was associated with the family of the Prophet Muhammad. Ironically, even at this most venerated of feminine edifices, the most visible presence was that of a man: it is Shah Isma'il's name that is inscribed in the girdling inscription of the great iwan, not that of his counterpart, Shah Begi Begum, whose wealth most probably financed the construction. However, in both the epigraphy of the iwan and the *waqfnāma,* veneration is given to the family of Muhammad regardless of gender. In the iwan inscriptions, the Safavid claim is propagated by the image of the just ruler and godlike leader, Shah Isma'il. In the endowment deed, his consort's building and charitable donations provide a complimentary facet of religious authority, one of benevolence and generosity.

At the shrine of Fatima al-Ma'suma the women protagonists were mothers, sisters, wives, and daughters of the prestigious and wealthy families of the Safavid royalty. Taking advantage of their elevated status, these women affirmed their presence in the shrine, allowing us an insight into the cultural dynamics of the time. Kinship laws based on tribal codes were merged with Islamic perceptions of womanhood. As mentioned earlier, the prototype for the Safavid shah was variously Muhammad/'Ali/Husayn, or Mahdi, and the role model for womanhood was Fatima al-Zahra, daughter of Muhammad, wife of 'Ali, and mother of Husayn.[84] Thus, the Fatima depicted

in the Shi'i Safavid hagiographies is a woman with at least three familial aspects: daughter, wife and mother.[85] These are also attributes shared by Fatima al-Ma'suma, Shah Begi Begum and her sister Beksi Begum in the 1523 *waqfnāma.*

Like the names of Muhammad, 'Ali and the other Imams, Fatima al-Zahra's is associated with one of the attributes of God, *al-fāṭir,* the Creator; as such, she is the symbol of earthly creation. In the Shi'i hagiographies, Fatima al-Zahra is depicted as the grieved yet vengeful mother who stands to judgment before God, seeking divine retribution for the wrongdoing to her sons, Hasan and Husayn (who was martyred on the fields of Karbala).[86] Her *kunya,* or sobriquet, refers to her as *umm abīha* (Mother of her Father), a surprising and unusual term, suggesting once again a link with the Christian Mary, Mother of Jesus Christ. Like Mary, Fatima is seen as the "Mistress of Sorrows," mourning the death of her sons.[87] The mother figure was an important symbol for the Safavids and given a revered and elevated status. In Shah 'Abbas' famous endowments of 1607, when his property and wealth in Isfahan was made mortmain in the names of the Prophet Muhammad, of the twelve imams, and of Fatima al-Zahra, a large portion of the spiritual reward went to his mother.[88] Writing about Shah 'Abbas' building of the *sharbatkhāna* (a room for the distribution of sweet, perfumed water or milk, especially during religious feasts) at Ardabil in 1621, Jalal Munajjim also states that the building was endowed in the name of his mother, and this act was regarded as a highly religious event.[89] Here the veneration of the mother figure (like the idolization of the celibate sister Mahin Banu) represented a facet of male piety in which women became the vehicle for the dissemination of the Shah's religious persona. This secondary role played by the Safavid women reflects their recondite position in the social and religious milieu of their times, as the performers of charitable acts, and those in whose names such benevolence was undertaken.

While in the sixteenth-century sisters and daughters held privileged positions of power, by the seventeenth century, royal harem dynamics were transformed by the increased authority of the wife and mother. This was largely due to a change in marriage partners. Although Shah Tahmasb had begun the practice of contracting marriages to Georgian and Circassian women, when it came to succession, the sons who gained the throne were born of Turkmen mothers. During the reign of Shah 'Abbas, however, shifts in the authority of royal women became more noticeable. The marriage alliances contracted for his daughters show a shift from Qizilbash followers chosen as husbands, to favoring the bureaucratic 'ulema and

Sayyids. As a result, the legitimacy of the Safavids as a tribal consortium began to change in favor of a more hierarchical and fixed patrimonial line of sovereignty. Fearing competition, Shah ʿAbbas had the royal princes confined to the harem where they were brought up away from the influence of tribal chieftains, in close association with the queens and princesses (much like the Ottoman system of family politics described elsewhere in this volume). Within the harem, concubine mothers gained greater control, overshadowing the Qizilbash guardian, who had earlier guided and reared the young princes.[90]

Changes in harem politics caused subtle displacements in attitude toward the Safavid family's patronage of the shrine of Fatima al-Maʿsuma. The women's authority was still veiled behind the actions of their male relatives, and the women from the family of Shah Begi Begum continued to frequent and make sizable donations to the shrine of their ideal. Although they did not leave permanent deeds such as that of Shah Begi Begum, their legacy is reflected in the burial and commemoration of four subsequent shahs of the Safavid dynasty: Shah Safi II, Abbas II, Sulayman, and Sultan Husayn were all buried in magnificent tombs at the shrine of Fatima al-Maʿsuma at Qum between 1629 and 1722. This marked shift in dynastic burial practice from Ardabil to Qum may have been due to increased orthodoxy or regional politics, but the most likely cause was the influence of the queen-mother. Her heightened political prestige in the court and sway over the young princes resident in the harem that she supervised must surely have contributed also to the great honor given to the shrine of Fatima al-Maʿsuma. As the institutional status of the queen-mother rose, so too did the status of Fatima al-Maʿsuma's shrine in Qum.

The early Safavid era has been described as one of "religious eclecticism" in which devotional attachment to the family of the Prophet Muhammad was widespread.[91] The Safavids benefited from the regard given to the *ahl al-bait* when they linked their own genealogy to that of the Shiʿi imams, and modeled their public personas after those of Muhammad, ʿAli and Fatima al-Zahra. Like their male kin, the women also participated in the propagation of the Safavid imperial image, that is, one dependent upon royal and religious authority. Shiʿi and Sufi devotion to the Safavid family was merged with Qizilbash tribal loyalty to produce a situation in which women had a complex and recondite position. Mistresses of their fortunes and active players in court politics, the Safavid women transcended gender inequality, yet often within fixed rules of social and religious expectation.

Like their predecessors, the Safavid family chose popularly venerated shrines in which to enact their vision of rulership, although their focus was particularly on those directly associated with the Shiʿi imamate. At the shrines, the Safavids disseminated an aura of sanctity and devotion, especially through the charity of women, or on their behalf. The buildings were embellished, money and food donated, and much land and property endowed for the prosperity of the shrines. In return, the rulers immortalized themselves and their loved ones; their names were inscribed in the architecture and their spirits forever blessed through religious foundations. At what was to become the dynastic shrine of the later Safavid shahs in Qum, the earliest interventions seen were those by women of the royal family. The shrine of Fatima al-Maʿsuma in Qum was a representative case in which the acts of piety undertaken by Shah Begi Begum in the name of her sister were a means of drawing attention to the extraordinary women of her family. Perhaps royal women enjoyed an economic autonomy and political agency greater than that available to less privileged women.[92] Their patronage was not indicative of the status of women in general, but gifts such as Shah Begi Begum's endowments to the shrine in Qum provide a rare and important window onto the cultural involvement of women of the Safavid house and their patronage during the early Safavid era.

NOTES

I'd like to thank Gülru Neçipoglu and Nasser Rabbat for commenting on an earlier version of this paper, and D. Fairchild Ruggles for her editorial expertise. This paper is dedicated to my own role models, Doreen and Fateima.

1. H. R. Roemer, "The Safavid Period," *The Cambridge History of Iran,* vol. 6. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

2. The familial genealogy was: Shaykh Safi al-din "Abu'l Fath" Ishaq bin Shaykh Amin al-din Gibrail bin al-Saleh bin Qutb al-din Abubakr bin Saleh al-din Rashid bin Muhammad al-Hafiz bin ʿAwaz bin [P]iroz al-Kurdi al-Sinjani "Zarinkulah" bin Muhammad Sharfshah bin Muhammad bin Hasan bin Muhammad bin Ibrahim bin Jaʿfar bin Muhammad Ismaʿil bin Muhammad bin Ahmad al-ʿArabi bin Muhammad al-Qasim bin Abu'l Qasim Hamza bin Imam Musa al-Kazim bin Imam Jaʿfar al-Sadiq bin Imam Muhammad al-Baqir bin Imam Zain al-ʿAbidin ʿAli bin Imam Husayn bin Imam ʿAli bin Abi-Talib, in Ibn Bazzaz Ardabili, *Ṣafwat al-ṣafa* (759/1358), ed. Ahmad Karim Tabrizi (Bombay, 1911). Reprint (Ardabil: Danishga Azad Islami, 1990), p. 70; the version that circulated in the sixteenth century was edited by Abu'l Fath al-Husayni under orders of Shah Tahmasb in 1533.

3. I use the term Safaviyya to refer to the religious order prior to the imperial phase, after which the family will be called Safavid, in accordance with current scholarship. Kathryn Babayan, "The Safavid Synthesis: From Qizilbash Islam to Imamate Shi'ism," *Iranian Studies* 27 (1994): 135–62, esp. 138. For a more detailed analysis on the Qizilbash, see Babayan's "The Waning of the Qizilbash: The Spiritual and the Temporal in 17th-Century Iran" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1993). See also, Michel Mazzaoui, *The Origins of the Safawids: Shi'ism, Sufism and the Gulat* (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1972).

4. The precedent for contracting political alliances had been set much earlier, for Isma'il's great grandfather Junayd was married to the sister of the Aqqoyunlu king, Uzun Hasan, with a great deal of fanfare and honour; Fadullah bin Ruzbihan Khunji-Isfahani, *Tārīkh-i 'ālam'āra-i amīnī (Persia in AD 1478–1490),* trans. V. Minorsky (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1992), 267. For an exhaustive documentation of women at the Safavi court, see Maria Szuppe's "La participation des femmes de la famille royale à l'exercise du pouvoir en Iran Safavide au XVIe siècle" in two parts, *Studia Iranica* 23 (1994): 211–58, and 24 (1995): 61–122.

5. For example, Mir Ghiyas al-din Muhammad Husayni Khwandamir, *Ḥabīb al-siyar fī akhbār afrād al-bashār* (Tehran, 1334/1954). Volumes 3 and 4 translated by W. Thackston Jr. as *Habibu's Siyar, Tome Three: The Reign of the Mongol and the Turk* (Cambridge, Mass.: Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, Harvard University, 1994). This was completed in 1524; Qazi Ahmad Qummi, *Khulasat al-Tavarikh,* ed. Ehsan Ishraqi, (Tehran: University of Tehran, 1984) completed in 1590; Iskander Munshi, *Tārīkh-i 'ālam'āra-i 'abbāsī,* ed. Iraj Afshar (Tehran, 1971), written during the reign of Shah 'Abbas. Although Munshi's work is later than the period under consideration, it is based mainly on the earlier histories; the language for the description of the royal family is also in keeping with the general reverence bestowed on them by his predecessors.

6. This is an important turning point in the history of the Safavid rule, as it was during the reign of Shah 'Abbas that a number of socioeconomic and religious reforms were undertaken that effectively also altered the role of the harem and its women inhabitants. Changes included transformations in the bureaucracy and shifting authority from Qizilbash tribesmen to the more urban Persian elite. Although these changes in policy had begun during the lifetime of Shah Isma'il himself, it was the transfer of power from Qazvin to the central Iranian city of Isfahan that made them irrevocable. On the urban elite, see Kathryn Babayan, "The 'Aqa'id al-nisa': A Glimpse of Safavid Women in Local Isfahani Culture," *Women in the Medieval Islamic World: Power, Patonage and Piety,* ed. G. R. G. Hambly (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998).

7. Howayda al-Harithy suggests that women in Mamluk Egypt were participants in the political agenda of their male counterpoints, in that their patronage of religious buildings was a form of meditation between the "foreign" military aristocracy and the civilians. This argument can also be applied to the case of the Safavids, where the royal women and men were part of a larger sociopolitical agenda in which the conquerors had to find ways of legitimizing their power and dogma. Howayda al-Harithy, "Female Patonage of Mamluk Architecture in Cairo," *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review* 1.2 (1994): 152–74.

8. Guity Nashat, "Women in Pre-Revolutionary Iran," in *Women and Revolution in Iran,* ed. Guity Nashat (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1983), p. 13.

9. Szuppe, "La participation des femmes de la famille royale" 23:213. When she cites the cases of the thirteenth-century Ayyubid/Mamluk queen Shajar al-Durr (d. 1250) and her contemporary in India, Razia Sultana (d. 1240) she reminds us of their Turkic origins.

10. See for example, Ann K. Lambton, *Continuity and Change in Medieval Persia, Aspects of Administrative, Economic and Social History* (Columbia Lectures on Iranian Studies 2, 1988).

11. Ann K. Lambton, "Concepts of Authority in Persia: 11th to 19th Centuries A.D.," *Iran* 26 (1988): 95–103, p. 100.

12. Rula Jurdi Abisaab, "The Ulama of Jabal 'Amil in Safavid Iran, 1502–1736: Marginality, Migration and Social Change," *Iranian Studies* 27 (1994): 103–22.

13. Munshi, *Tārīkh,* 28. 'Ali, the fourth Caliph after Muhammad, was an important figure in Shi'ism as the reason for the split between Sunnis and Shi'is. The Shi'i contend that as the son-in-law and cousin of Muhammad and thus one of the venerated *al-i Muhammad,* 'Ali should have succeeded the caliphate upon the death of Muhammad, instead of Abu Bakr. See Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

14. Michele Membre, *Mission to the Lord Sophy (1539–42),* trans. A. H. Morton (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1993), 20.

15. Wheeler Thackston Jr., "The *Diwan* of Khata'i: Pictures for the Poetry of the Shah Isma'il I," *Asian Art* 1.4 (1988): 37–63.

16. Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam,* 14.

17. The Timurid eulogist, Kashifi devotes an entire section to Fatima. Husayn Waiz al-Kashifi, *Rawḍat al-Shuhudā'* (Tehran: Kitab-faroshi Islamiyya, 1952), 117–45.

18. Muhammad Baqir Majlisi, in his popular Persian treatise on the lives of the Fourteen Innocent Ones. Muhammad Baqir Majlisi, *Jala' al-'ayun* (Tehran: Intesharat Rashidi, 1983), 81.

19. Szuppe, "La participation des femmes de la famille royale," 23:241; Munshi, *Tārīkh,* 248. Women in the Mughal courts were also given titles elevating them to the status of Maryam; for example, Akbar gave his mother the title Maryam makani (Mary of both worlds) and Jahangir's mother was called Maryam al-zamani (Mary of the age); see Ellison Banks Findly, *Nur Jahan: Empress of*

Mughal India (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 94. The titles suggest an association of the queen-mother with the archetypal Christian mother, Mary.

20. Roemer, "The Safavid Period," 192.

21. For example, Qummi, *Khulasat al-Tavārīkh,* 415. Most events narrated by the Safavid historians are based on the biography of Shaykh Safī by Ibn Bazzaz Ardabili, *Ṣafwat al-ṣafa.* The story of envy and initiation in this event is similar to that describing the marriage of Fatima Sultan Begum, daughter of Shah Tahmasb. Iskander Munshi identifies her with the titles of *sabiyya-i qudsīa, Fatima, zuhrā-i zahrā;* Munshi, *Tārīkh,* 13. Also in Amir Mahmud bin Khwandamir, *Irān dar rūzgār-i Shāh Ismaʿīl va Shāh Tahmasb Safavī,* ed. Iraj Afshar (Tehran: Kitabkhana Khayyam, 1370/1991), 38.

22. Szuppe, "La participation des femmes de la famille royale," 23:234. The biography of Amir Khan Mausillu is given in Munshi, *Tārīkh,* 140.

23. This section in Munshi is very revealing concerning the dynamics of marriage contraction. He mentions the marriage of another daughter of Tahmasb's, Shahrbanu, to Salman Khan, the leader of the Ostajlu tribes, who was then given the governorship of Shirvan. Munshi, *Tārīkh,* 260.

24. Szuppe, "La participation des femmes de la famille royale," 24:70, 77. Earlier Aqqoyunlu women had also held the position of intermediary and "diplomat," such as Uzun Hasan's mother Sara Khatun, who was sent to the Ottoman court of Mehmed II. See Leslie P. Peirce, *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 219.

25. Qummi, *Khulasat al-Tavārīkh,* 429.

26. Munshi, *Tārīkh,* 138. A fair amount of misogyny is noticed in Munshi's writing, where he credits the failure of the prince to his listening to the advice of feebleminded and intellectually limited women—"*zanān-i nāqis ʿaql kutāh khard*"—however when he refers to the women of the Safavid household directly, it is with the utmost respect.

27. Szuppe, "La participation des femmes de la famille royale," 24:100.

28. Superficially, this construct is visible also in Mughal cases, for example, Jahanara Begum, the sister of Akbar; Gulbadan Begum, the daughter of Humayun; Nur Jahan, wife of Jahangir and mother of Shah Jahan.

29. For example, Ibn Babawaya (d. 381/991), *Al-amalī wa al-majālis,* quoted in Mahmoud Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam* (The Hague: Mouton, 1978), 239. The original verse is from the Qur'an, Surat al-Imran (3:42–43). Fatima, like Maryam, also remained pure, a virgin, giving birth mystically from her left thigh, whereas Mary gave birth from her right. L. Veccia Vaglieri, "Fatima" in *Encyclopedia of Islam,* 2nd ed., 847.

30. Szuppe, "La participation des femmes de la famille royale," 23:243.

31. Such as Maulana Muhtasim Kashani.

32. Shohreh Gholsorkhi, "Pari Khan Khanum: A Masterful Safavid Princess," *Iranian Studies* 28 (1995): 143–56, p. 147.

33. Munshi, *Tārīkh,* 123.

34. I borrow the term "itinerant monarch" from Charles Melville, who has convincing shown that during the early phases of Safavi rulership, the notion of a capital "as the permanent center of government and administration" does not really apply. C. Melville, "From Qars to Qandahar: The Itineraries of Shah ʿAbbas I (995–1038/1587–1629)," *Études Safavides* (1993): 195–224.

35. Shah Tahmasb, *Tazkira-i Shāh Tahmāsb: sharh-i vāqayi va ahvālāt-i zindigāni-i Shāh Tahmāsb biqalam-i khudāsh,* Abd al-Shukur (Berlin-Charlottenburg and Tehran: Intesharat Sharq, 1343/1964), 23.

36. Munshi, *Tārīkh,* 566.

37. Ibid., 377.

38. Although Ardabil in the early period, and Qum in the later period, developed strong dynastic associations for the Safavids, the case of Mashhad is different. Very interesting chronological links can be formed between the military campaigns of Shah ʿAbbas and his building programs at Mashhad, where the political dynamics are seen. For example, Shah ʿAbbas' victory over the Uzbeks in 1598 was celebrated by generous endowments to the shrine of Imam Reza. Another famous pilgrimage of Shah ʿAbbas in 1601 from Isfahan to Mashhad corresponds to the end of successful campaigns in the northeast, which resulted in a large exodus of Uzbek princes into Iran, who were welcomed and settled in Isfahan. It was at this time that Shah ʿAbbas had the gold tiles of the dome replaced (which Shah Tahmasb had installed in 1526 and which were looted by the Uzbeks in 1589). At the shrine of Imam Reza, ʿAbbas gave burial spaces to his favorite government personel; for example Hatem Khan, his vizier who died in Tabriz (d. 1609) and is buried in a mausoleum (*gunbad*) which he had himself restored, and the renowned general Allahverdi Khan (d. 1613) who had also built his mausoleum (*gunbad*) during his own lifetime. Munshi, *Tārīkh,* 827, 871, respectively. Only one member of the Safavi family is buried in the immediate precincts, Maryam Sultan Begum (d. 1608), the daughter of Shah Tahmasb.

39. Munshi, *Tārīkh,* 123.

40. Modaressi Tabatabai, *Turbat-i Pākān,* 2 vols. (Qum: Chapkhana Mehr, 1390/1976), I:141.

41. Munshi, *Tārīkh,* 293.

42. Zain al-ʿAbidin ʿAbidi, *Ṣariḥ al-milk* (Shawwal, A.H. 977). Ms. 3598, microfilm 10; Iran Bastan Museum, Tehran, n.p.

43. Membre, *Mission to the Lord Sophy,* 40. This is affirmed by the existing sixteenth-century gravestones in the graveyard of the shrine.

44. J. Calmard, "Kum," *Encyclopedia of Islam,* 2nd ed., 371.

45. Khunji-Isfahani, *Tārīkh-i ʿalamʿāra-yi āmīnī,* 280.

46. For more on this manuscript, see Martin B. Dickson and Stuart Cary Welch, *The Houghton Shah-nama* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).

47. Qummi, *Khulasat al-Tavārīkh,* 79.

48. Khwandamir, *Ḥabīb al-Siyar fī akhbār afrād al-bashār,* 510.

49. Qummi, *Khulasat al-Tavārīkh,* 266.

50. Munshi, *Tārīkh,* 224–25.

51. Ibid., 250.

52. Ibid, 79.

53. Bijan Saadat, *The Holy Shrine of Imam-zadeh Fatima Maʿsuma,* 2 vols. (Shiraz: Asia Institute, Pahlavi University, 1977), I:24; Calmard, "Kum," 371.

54. The *waqfnāma* of Shah Begi Begum is reproduced in Tabatabai, *Turbat-i Pākān,* 131.

55. "[This lamp is found] in house which Allah hath allowed to be exalted and that His name shall be remembered therein. Therein do offer praise to Him at morn and evening. Men whom neither merchandise nor sale beguileth from remembrance of Allah and constancy in prayer and paying to the poor their due; who fear the day when hearts and eyeballs will be overturned; that Allah may reward them with the best of what they did, and increase reward for them His bounty. Allah giveth blessings without stint to whom He will. As for those who disbelieve, their deeds are as a mirage in a desert. The thirsty one supposeth it to be water till he cometh unto it and findeth it naught, and findeth, in the place thereof, Allah Who payeth him his due; and Allah is swift at reckoning" (24: 36–39).

56. As not all of the names are God's attributes, such as "the Proof" and "the Glorious (Majestic)," the question becomes "to whom do they refer?" The presence of this medallion in the most prestigious Safavid shrines hints at a self-referential Safavid identification. However, similar (but not exact) medallions are also present in the Blue Mosque in Tabriz, and appear in earlier fifteenth-century manuscripts.

57. In Mashhad two more attributes are added, "the Imam, the Forgiver" (*yā imām, yā ghufrān*).

58. Modaressi Tabatabai, *Turbat-i Pākān,* 64.

59. *Hadi al-khalāʾiq ilā ashraf al-adyān.* The same designations of the king, the precedent having being set here, are copied later in another section of the courtyard, on an inscription dedicated to Shah Tahmasb, dated A.H. 950.

60. Written by Vali al-Husayni, who is no doubt the same Sayyid Vali Qummi mentioned in Qadi Ahmad Qummi's *Gulshan al-Hunar,* as being a master of the *thuluth* script. Qazi Ahmad mentions that the inscriptions on the *suffa* and the doorway of Hazrat Maʿsuma are in his hand. Apparently the inscriptions on the inside and outside of the dome of the same edifice were written by Maulana Haydar Qummi, another master calligrapher. Qazi Ahmad Qummi, *Calligraphers and Painters: A Treatise by Qadi Ahmad, Son of Mir Munshi (1015/1606),* trans. V. Minorsky (Washington: Freer Gallery of Art, 1959), 74.

61. Reference to the "Innocent Imams" is also made in a 938/1531 inscription in the Isfahan congregational mosque, dedicated to Shah Tahmasb; see Lutfallah Hunarfar, *Ganjīna-i āthār-i tārīkh-i Isfahān* (Isfahan: Sagafi, 1965).

62. For a study of Qur'an exegesis on this subject, see Moshe Sharon, "*Ahl al-Bait*—People of the House," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 8 (1986): 169–84.

63. "*Mathal ahl al-bait kamathal safinat nūh, min rakab fiha naja wa min takhaluf ʿanha gharq.*" These verses are very common during the Safavid period, appearing as epigraphy in the Qum and Ardabil shrines; they were also often repeated by the Safavid chroniclers to reinforce the Safavid genealogy. See Khwandamir, *Ḥabīb al-siyar fī akhbār afrād al-bashār,* 459, and Qummi, *Khulasat al-Tavārīkh,* 15. The theme is taken up also in Safavid miniatures; for example a famous image of the *ahl al-bait* is in the *Shāhnāma-i shāhi* of Firdawsi (Houghton Shahnama), "The Ship of Shiʿism," folio 18 verso; reproduced in Stuart Cary Welch, *A King's Book of Kings* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1972).

64. Tabatabai, *Turbat-i Pākān,* 131–41.

65. "*ʿAlīa hazrat makhdūma-i ʿazamī bānu-i kubrī, malaka-i malkāt ʿalam sarwar-i matharāt-i umm, manaʿma-i, muḥsana-i makthara-i makrama-i maʿzama-i rafiʿa-i jalīla-i hakima, ʿadila sultana al-khawātīn al-matharat muhzara-i anwah al-saʿdat wa insāf al-makarmāt, . . . bānīa-i mubarāt-i ʿazima, moʾassa-i asās-i khairāt jasīma, asār-i taharāt wa salah az khayām-i rafiatash tabān . . .ʾasmat al-dunyā wa al-dīn, Shāh Begī Begum,*" ibid., 135.

66. The name Tajlu Khanum is a pet name, sometimes given to more than one person in a family. Morton in Membre, *Mission to the Lord Sophy,* 82.

67. According to Tabatabai, Tajlu Khanum is responsible for the iwan and dome reconstructions of A.H. 925, which is quite plausible, given her connections to the shrine and her other charitable works; however, I was unable to find any specific architectural or programmatic evidence either in the epigraphy or other texts I consulted.

68. Qummi, *Khulasat al-Tavārīkh,* 290. In the *Ṣariḥ al-milk* of ʿAbidi it is mentioned that a Begi Sultan, known by (Qalajlu/Tajlu?) bint Hamza Agha bin Murad Agha Rumlu had endowed the tomb of Shah Ismaʿil in Ardabil.

69. The title "*al-sultān al-ʿadl*" was also shared by the Ilkhanid princess, Sati Beg Khan (daughter of Uljeitu); see Gavin R. G. Hambly, "Becoming Visible: Medieval Islamic Women in History and Historiography," in Hambly, *Women in the Medieval Islamic World: Power, Patronage and Piety,* 13.

70. For example, after her husband's death in 1524, she was consulted along with the male tribal leaders, regarding the coronation of her son Tahmasb. Qummi, *Khulasat al-Tavārīkh,* 176.

71. Ibid, 186. Also mentioned in Szuppe, "La participation des femmes de la famille royale," 24:72.

72. Munshi, *Tārīkh,* 224.

73. This is also found in a book of *ḥadīth* attributed to Imam Reza, collected by the tenth-century scholar, Ibn Babawiya, *ʿAyvān al-akhbār al-riḍa* (Tehran, 1977), 713. Muhammad Baqir Majlisi also repeats this *ḥadīth* in a section devoted

to pilgrimage to the shrine of Fatima al-Ma'suma, in his *Tuhfat al-zāirīn* (Tehran, 1897), 543. Interestingly, the prayers for this pilgrimage include sisters, aunts, and mothers of the imams!

74. Tabatabai, *Turbat-i Pākān,* 133.

75. This is, of course, not novel or specific to the Safavid case. Earlier and similar examples can also be found in India, Iran, Turkey, and Egypt. See also Richard M. Eaton, "Political and Religious Authority of the Shrine of Baba Farid," in *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam,* ed. B. D. Metcalf (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984) 333–56; Eva Maria Subtelny, "Socio-Economic Bases of Cultural Patronage under the Late Timurids," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 20.4 (1988): 479–505; Raymond Lifchez (ed.), *The Dervish Lodge: Architecture, Art and Sufism in Ottoman Turkey* (Berkeley: University of California, 1992); Lenore Fernandes, "The Evolution of the Khanqah Institution in Mamluk Egypt" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1980).

76. A point proven in the histories and chronicles. See Szuppe, "La participation des femmes de la famille royale," 24:71. In his article on the 1604 and 1614 *waqfs* of Shah 'Abbas, Robert McChesney makes the argument that the main motivation there was politcal legitimacy concerning the Safavid dynasty. R. McChesney, "Waqf and Public Policy: The Waqfs of Shah 'Abbas, 1011–1023/1602–1614," *Asian and African Studies* 15 (1991): 165–90.

77. Wilfred Madelung, "Shi'i Attitudes toward Women as Reflected in Fiqh," in *Society and the Sexes in Medieval Islam,* ed. A. L. al-Sayyid-Marsot (Malibu, Calif.: Undena Publications, 1979), 74–75. Also see Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam,* 183. Some of these rights were curtailed in the late seventeenth century by the likes of Muhammad Baqir Majlisi. For an analysis of Majlisi's writing on the rights of women, see Adele K. Ferdows and Amir H. Ferdows, "Women in Shi'i Fiqh: Images through the Hadith," in Nashat, *Women and Revolution in Iran.* These authors depict the scholar as an extreme misogynist. For our analysis, however, distinction must be made between royal Safavid women and their nonaristocratic counterparts.

78. Vaglieri, "Fatima," 844.

79. Qummi, *Khulasat al-Tavārīkh,* 290.

80. Morton, relying on Qummi's *Khulasat al-Tavārīkh,* writes: "Her piety and purity were such as to enthrall Tahmasb, who dedicated her by vow to the Mahdi or twelfth imam, consulted her in all state affairs and did not act without her approval, making her the 'Queen of the Age, the Mistress of the time.'. . . Her place as the Mahdi's wife to be was later taken by one of Tahmasb's daughters." Membre, *Mission to the Lord Sophy,* 80.

81. On Shah Tahmasb's behalf, the actual administration was undertaken by Mir Kalantar, a Sayyid from Astarabad. Munshi, *Tārīkh,* 150.

82. Her coffin remained there until 1584, when it was removed to Karbala. Qummi, *Khulasat al-Tavārīkh,* 431.

83. There is a gravestone found at the Shrine of Fatima al-Ma'suma, dated 941 (1535), which records the death of another female relative of Shah Begi Begum: Aga Shah Khatun, the daughter of Hamza Beg bin Bektash Beg Mausillu. Tabatabai, *Turbat-i Pākān,* 133.

84. For other important female role models in Shi'ism, see David Pinault, "Zaynab bint 'Ali and the Place of the Women of the Households of the First Imams in Shi'ite Devotional Literature," in Hambly, *Women in the Medieval Islamic World: Power, Patronage and Piety.*

85. Shaykh al-Mufid does not devote any specific chapter to Fatima al-Zahra, but she is always an important and crucial adjunct to the narrative, her role shifting according to her relationship with her male kin; Shaykh al-Mufid, *Kitāb al-irshād,* trans. I. K. A. Howard (New York: Tahrik-i Tarsil-i Quran, 1981). The seventeenth-century theologian and historian Muhammad Baqir Majlisi devotes the second chapter of his Persian hagiography to Fatima, giving it as great importance as the Prophet, Muhammad (but, of course, most of the emphasis is on Husayn!). Muhammad Baqir Majlisi, *Jala' al-'ayun.*

86. Mahmoud Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam,* 212.

87. Barbara Freyer Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an: Traditions and Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 80.

88. McChesney, "Waqf and Public Policy: The Waqfs of Shah 'Abbas," 170.

89. Jalal al-Din Munajim, *Tārīkh-i 'abbāsī, yā rūznāme-i mullā jalāl,* ed. S. Vahidniya (Tehran: Intesharat Vaheed, 1965), 301. In an administrative manual written in the beginning of the eighteenth century, the belongings of the royal *sharbatkhāna* are listed: "vessels of gold, silver, china, glazed ware (*kashi*) and copper, as well as crystal sugar, candy (*qand*), medicinal herbs (*'aqaqir*), coffee, tobacco, glass; tops, tubes (*sar-na-nay*) and other accessories of hookahs; *halila, amula,* and other preserves; lemon juice, rose-water, etc., spirits (*'araq*?), *turshi* (pickles), perfumes, etc.." *Tadhkirat al-Muluk: A Manual of Safavid Administration,* trans. V. Minorsky (London: Luzac, 1943).

90. Kathryn Babayan, *The Waning of the Qizilbash,* 80; see also her article, "The 'Aqa'id al-nisa': A Glimpse at Safavid Women in Local Isfahani Culture," in Hambly, *Women in the Medieval Islamic World: Power, Patronage and Piety;* Roemer, "The Safavid Period," 278.

91. S. Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 106.

92. In the *Ṣariḥ al-milk* of 'Abidi many transactions are undertaken on behalf of women, from as early as the fourteenth century. Here, women are portrayed as business partners, owning stores and property, as well as patrons, endowing money and donations to the Shrine of Shaykh Safi al-Din in Ardabil. Many of the women in the later (sixteenth century onwards) periods belonged to the extended Safavid-Zahidi family.