

Sussan Babaie. “Chasing after the Muhandis: Visual Articulations of the Architect and Architectural Historiography”

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Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/abstractairanica/50596>

DOI: 10.4000/abstractairanica.50596

ISBN: 1961-960X

ISSN: 1961-960X

Publisher:

CNRS (UMR 7528 Mondes iraniens et indiens), Éditions de l'IFRI

Electronic reference

Iván Szántó, “Sussan Babaie. “Chasing after the Muhandis: Visual Articulations of the Architect and Architectural Historiography””, *Abstracta Iranica* [Online], Volume 40-41 | 2019, document 15, Online since 30 December 2019, connection on 22 April 2021. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/abstractairanica/50596> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/abstractairanica.50596>

This text was automatically generated on 22 April 2021.

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- 1 This article pursues the elusive persona of the pre-modern Iranian architect who remains in the shadow of, among others, the more readily identifiable calligrapher and painter, in no small part because the definition of this profession might have differed significantly from our modern concept of the architect (and the modern Arabo-Persian equivalents of the term, i.e., *muhandis*, *mi'mar*, etc.). During the period under discussion, roughly coincidental with the Timurid and Safavid dynasties, a few practitioners of this profession had earned lasting fame through their own signatures which they have recorded on their own buildings as well as the written testimonies of court intellectuals about them. Sussan Babaie concentrates on these individuals by setting them against the buildings which they helped come into being and which perpetuate their names. Framing the study, the built legacy and written memory of Qawām al-Dīn Šīrāzī (d. 1438 CE), a major identifiable early master builder of Islamic Iran, are discussed in the introductory and concluding parts, while in the mid-section, other, mainly Safavid, examples are invoked not only in order to elucidate and articulate individuals behind this profession but also to circumscribe the nature of the profession itself, and

ultimately, to gauge the limits of these attempts. These supposed architects include 'Alī Akbar Isfahānī and Bāqir Bannā'.

- 2 An apparent limitation is set by the very signature of Qawām al-Dīn Šīrāzī on the dado of the sanctuary of the Gawhar Šād Mosque in Mašhad (dated 1418 CE) in which he humbly calls himself a plaster mason (*al-ṭayyān*), instead of anything that we would interpret as "architect". Babaie examines the ambiguity of the signature which is simultaneously personalising the monument and downplaying the role of the signatory in its creation. Furthermore, Babaie draws attention to the potential danger of giving too much weight to the signatory expression of authorship and personhood; and warns that in architecture this gesture had not been widespread until the modern period.

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