

TEHRAN URBAN SPACES IN "1001 NIGHTS" AND THE 19TH CENTURY ILLUSTRATIONS (A COMPARATIVE STUDY WITH INTERTEXTUALITY APPROACH)

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Abstract

Although for the first time, Tehran became the capital of Iran in 19th century under Zand dynasty, but its rapid extension happened under Qajar era. As the result of population growth, urban spaces of Tehran such as allies, streets, squares and bazaars developed very rapidly and different aspects of its cultural life boomed as well. The urban spaces of the capital were represented in the literature (novels and poems), photos and paintings. This article surveys the urban spaces of Tehran in the illustrations of a famous story called "1001 Nights", painted by Sani-ol-Molk. This story was already popular in that era but some avant-garde artists tried to find new ways of presentation in their artistic career. Appearance of photography and printing industry were two determinant factors which directly influenced Iranian painting. The traces of European painting are also evident in the illustrations. The artists of that period attempted to use some elements of Western naturalistic painting like perspective and at the same time keep many standards of traditional Persian painting; between them Sani-ol-Molk was the most significant. He illustrated the urban spaces of Tehran instead of Baghdad which was narrated as the main city in "1001 Nights". With the help of this delicate manner, he succeeded to link the plots of an old story with his contemporary events and demonstrated the daily life of people. For uncovering some hidden layers of the illustrations, the article chose Intertextuality as the main approach and conveys the status of Tehran urban spaces narrated in the travelers and biographies. The main challenge of 19th century in Iran, which was dual opposition of "west" and "East", is also shown in this comparative study.

Keywords: Urban space, Tehran, Iranian literature, "1001 Nights", Qajar painting, Intertextuality approach.

1. INTRODUCTION

Tehran historically was known as Ray that is etymologically connected to the Old Persian and Avesta Rhaga. The first mention of Tehran has been made in a work by the Greek Theodosius who has mentioned Tehran as a suburb of Rey about 2000 years B.C. However, the oldest Persian document on Iran shows that the city existed before the third century AH. After many historical ups and downs, Rey was demolished by Moguls in 617 AH. Although it was relatively prosperous under Mogul Ilkhans, but Klavikhu, who passed through the city in 806 AH, has described it deserted. The city became prosperous again under the Safavi rule, but it never achieved its past status. Although for the first time, Tehran became the capital of Iran in 19th century under Zand dynasty, but its rapid extension happened under Qajar era. Robert Ker Porter (1777- 1842), a painter and diplomat British tourist wrote about Tehran in his itinerary: Tehran which is today an important city as the capital of Iran was not a significant place half a century ago. It was located on the low grounds of the east-northern part of the lands called Iraqi-Adjam. It was like a dull point on the map of Iran but suddenly Agha-Mohammad-khan Qajar chose this place as his royal residence and Tehran entered a new stage of his existence. One of the reasons of the sudden importance of Tehran was this fact that it was near a place called Ester-Abad, the birth place of the king. Another reason which made this unvalued village so significant was for its special position as the camp of Qajar tribe (Nadjmi, 1988: 24).

In the early years that Tehran had become the capital of Iran, it was not a brilliant place. Many tourists visited this city in those years among them the French travelers were very distinguished. They were from different

backgrounds and professions and in terms of the motives that led them to travel, they may be divided into different categories. Édouard Comte de Sercey was sent to Persia as ambassador by Louis Philippe in 1839-40. When he arrived in Persia, he was welcomed by Eugène Boré, another pupil of de Sacy who were engaged in restoring archaeological monuments and bas reliefs. They also took a wide interest in the political, economic, and cultural conditions of the country. Comte de Sercey wrote about the new capital:

"Tehran seemed to me like other cities where I had already passed by. The allies were muddy and the macadam was ruined. There were no windows on the very tall walls and the only way into the houses was through the small doors. Although there was not such traffic in the streets, the bazaars were crowded. We sometimes noticed a prince on a horse while some tatter men tried to make him pass. The women were covered with chadors; the donkeys carried the cargo; the men smoked the pipes and the horses napped; these were all which can be seen in almost all the central Asian cities"(Nadjmi, 1988: 24). As little by little Tehran became more crowded, its urban spaces expanded improved; many squares, streets, allies and bazaars were formed and new Tehran was born.

2. 1001 NIGHTS

"One Thousand and One Nights" is a collection of West and South Asian stories and folk tales compiled in Arabic during the Islamic Golden Age. The earliest mentions of the these stories refer to it as an Arabic translation from a Persian book, Hazār Afsān (or Afsaneh), meaning "The Thousand Stories" but the whole work was collected over many centuries by different authors, translators, and scholars across West, Central, South Asia and North Africa. The tales trace their roots to ancient and medieval Arabic, Persian, Indian, Egyptian and Mesopotamian folklore and literature. Up to 16th century, some manuscripts of this collection have been found. The bulk of the text is in prose, although verse is occasionally used to express heightened emotion, and for songs and riddles. Most of the poems are single couplets, although some are longer. The tales include historical tales, love stories, tragedies, comedies, poems, as well as various forms of erotica. Many stories depict sorcerers, magicians, and legendary places, which are often intermingled with real people and geography. A French orientalist and archaeologist, Antoine Galand (1646-1715) is famous for being the first European translator of this book. 1001 Nights influenced European literature which made others to translate it to other languages. In 1840 an English translation by Edward William Lane (1801-1876) was done. Other translations in English and German were also published by the end of 19th century. Abdol-Latif Tasooji translated 1001 Nights in Farsi in 19th century too.

The main story is about Sultan Shahrbaz who hated women as the result of the past treasons of his wives. He used to make love with a woman every night and condemn her to death the next morning. Shahrzad, the intelligent daughter of the minister, asked his father to let her solve the problem; she married the Sultan and at the first night started telling a story. She didn't finish the story the same night but she stopped telling the tale in a critical moment and promised the king to continue it the following night. The stories told by Shahrzad captivated Sultan Shahrbaz as they were full of action, mystery and romance. She knew how to enchant a terrible Sultan through the art of Story-telling. This process lasted for one thousand nights and during this long period of time, the king was completely treated. He was also informed that within those years, Shahrzad had given birth to three children. With the help of this special psychotherapy, Shahrzad succeeded in curing a lunatic Sultan and eventually saved the girls of her homeland.

3. PASSAGE STYLE AND SANI-OL-MOLK

3.1. Passage Style

The paintings of 19th century (under Qajar dynasty) have been divided into three main styles: Traditional Style, Passage Style and Naturalism. Traditional painting was very decorative. The painters used various motifs and combine them with each other to create new ones. Blank spaces were all covered with decorative elements. The artists spent long hours to finish a piece of work. This is one of the most characteristics of Iranian art which can be seen in handicrafts, architecture ... etc. professor Pope apply this attitude to the patience of Iranian people. He noticed some elements of abstraction in Persian art which was very much emotional and on the other hand was related to religious and mythical believes.

The Passage Style is predicted to a period which some avant-garde artists tried to find new ways of presentation in their artistic career. Appearance of photography and printing industry were two determinant factors which directly influenced Iranian painting in 19th century. Photography was introduced to Iranian society by a French man called Jules Richard between 1844 and 1846 which was only 3 years after its invention in Europe. Iranian aristocrats, court men and even the king became interested in this new media.

Naser Mirza, the 13 years crown prince, was very fond of taking photos. He gathered his photos in some albums. Harm's women, beautiful palaces and court people were his favorite topics. He used to add some texts to his photos which serve us as a very precious documentary for recognizing the character of the photos. Some of the young students of Dar- ol- Fonon (the modern school of Qajar era) who belonged to the highest social class were sent to Europe to learn more about photography. King ordered to establish a well-equipped workshop for photography. Apart from aristocrats, the Armenians were very active in the field. Many photos were taken by foreigners such as military consultants or physicists who stayed in Iran. A. Kriziz (Austrian) and L. pesce (Italian) were officers who took many photographs of Iranian landscapes. The photos taken by focchetti (Italian officer) had considerable influence over Iranians. A French photographer named Carllione was very influential not only as an instructor but also as a seller of chemical substances and instruments related to photography.

The traces of European painting are also evident in the illustrations. The artists of that period attempted to use some elements of Western realistic painting like perspective and at the same time keep many standards of traditional Persian painting [4]; between them Sani-ol-Molk was the most significant. He was a court artist who was sent to Italy to learn printing industry and European methods of painting. After his return from Europe, he was appointed by Naser-el-din Shah to publish a state newspaper. His other important task was establishing an art school. Many costly paintings, drawings and lithographic works have been done by Sani-ol-Molk but the illustrations of 1001 Nights are doubtlessly the most noteworthy. The manuscript of 1001 Nights contains 3600 illustrations which were painted by 42 artists leading by Sani-ol-Molk.

Group working was a typical manner in traditional ateliers. The master used to draw the main lines and the pupils used to add color the background and unimportant spaces. Delicate and significant parts of painting were done by the master himself. For instance in the process of illustrating the book called *1001 nights*, Sani-ol-Molk painted the face of the characters and the clothes but the backgrounds were done by the pupils. Stylization was a trait of Iranian painting. The painters tried to recognize the main features of nature and demonstrate them with some established ways. This method of vision was somehow apposite to the naturalism. Simplifying and Repeating were used and symmetrical compositions helped the artists to demonstrate some visionary scenes. The traditional artists used to change the normal scales of nature. They exaggerated the reality to display an unreal and imaginary world. In contrast with European illustrated manuscripts which demonstrated the events of this story in its quoted time and location of the happenings (Haroon-al-Rashid era in Baghdad), Sani-ol-Molk chose Tehran in 19th century.

3.2. Nayeb-ol-Saltaneh Passageway

Nayeb-ol-Saltaneh passageway was a principal street in the courtier residential area in Tehran. This street was named from Kamran Mirza who was the viceroy (Nayeb-ol-Saltaneh in Farsi) and the war minister of the time. He had made an edifice in the eastern part of this street. Lack of light and shadow, absence of perspective and linear drawing instead of naturalistic representation assisted the traditional artists to present an imaginary world. In traditional painting the inside and outside of a space were shown in the same illustration and several events were manifested coincidentally in the same frame, so the time and location as the necessary elements of naturalistic expression were not fix and exact. On the other hand, in traditional Iranian painting the objects were demonstrated from different point of view. Colors were not realistic and the artists did not care about color perspective but the avant-garde painters of Passage style mixed the old methods of presentation with naturalistic tendencies of their time. Sani-ol-Molk illustrated this street regarding very accurate geometrical scales; the image is divided into two equal halves by the right wall; the other divisions in the page are also very delicate (figure 1). Although there is a linear perspective in this illustration but the artist did not care about color perspective and like other painters of the Passage Style, used his own imaginary colors. He shows some noble aristocrats in a ministerial and masculine atmosphere. Some of them are looking through the windows while others are staring at the spectator with a photographic gesture. The scene of this illustration is in accordance with a real passageway in Qajar era. Other elements such as lights, windows, curved ledges and decorative details are also relevant to the 13th century standards.



Fig. 1. Nayeb-ol-Saltaneh passageway, 1001 nights

3.3. Tehran Grand Bazaar

While bazaar-like construction in Iran has been dated as far back as 4,000 BCE, Tehran's bazaar is not this old. It is difficult to say exactly when the "bazaar" first appeared, but in the centuries following the introduction of Islam, travellers reported the growth of commerce in the area now occupied by the current bazaar. The bazaar grew as a "city within a city" for much of the 19th century, and was largely able to expand itself without much outside interference. The word "Bazaar" was used in the Sassanid Pahlavi texts in the form of "Wazar", and it was used in some combinations such as "Wazarg" (of the bazaar), "Wazargan" (business person), "Wazarganieh" (Commercial), "Wazarbad" (head of the bazaar). Afterwards, this Farsi word was introduced in other languages and found similar applications. Mentioning the word bazaar, many Easterner visitors immediately are reminded of a place where the ceiling lets delicate rays of sunshine come down from architectural intervals. It is also a place with a collection of stores in both sides. The powerful smells of various spices, the cries of sellers, the noise up of the customer, and the rhythmic sound of hammers played by artists are some elements which are always reminded in the minds.

In addition to the shops, the Grand bazaar has contained financiers, mosques and guest houses. Grand bazaar predated from the growth of the village of Tehran under the Safavids' dynasty. It was during and after this period that the bazaar began to grow gradually. Western travelers indicated that by 1660 BC and beyond, the bazaar area was still largely open, and only partially covered. Traditionally, the Tehran bazaar was split into corridors, each specializing in different types of goods, including copper, carpets, paper, spices and precious metals, as well as small traders selling all types of goods.

Many travelers, who came to Tehran in 19th century, described Grand bazaar. Among them Gaspard Drouville, French officer, is notable. He visited Iran in 1812-1813 and his itinerary in two volumes called *Voyage en Perse* was published in Paris in 1828. He portrayed Grand bazaar as a rather cool place in summers because it was mostly covered and the burning rays of sunshine had little ways to it and for the same reason, the Grand bazaar was partly warm in winters. He offered a long and picturesque description of the inner and outer parts of the bazaar as well as the sellers and customers (Drouville, 1991: 123). The Drouville's explanations accord with the illustrations made for some scenes of 1001 Nights (figures 2&5). The painter demonstrated the shopkeepers sitting in their chambers filled with different goods. The main character of the story, accompanied by another woman, is completely covered with chador.

Charles James Wilson, an English physician, was another tourist who visited Iran. He arrived in 1882 and during his fifteen years stay, wrote two books. They are nowadays considered as very precious references about 13th century Persian culture. The presence of women in Grand bazaar is mentioned in his traveler: The Persian women never walk in streets or other urban spaces without veils. They cover themselves in blue clothes called chadors (Wilson, 1991:103). The artists of *Passage Style* took advantage of light and shadow as well as perspective but they saved some elements of Iranian paintings. They utilized ornamental motifs and forms and kept their traditional view. One of the most important elements which had direct effect on painting was photography. Photographical vision can be seen in many paintings which become more common in the last years of Qajar dynasty.

Invention of photography in 19th century in France was coincident with kingdom of Qajar dynasty in Iran. The early cameras were brought to Iran not a long time after their invention in Europe. There are many albums in

which great collections of different photos are gathered. Iranian people, ancient monuments, fascinating landscapes and even ordinary places such as bazaars were their favorite topics (figures 3-4). The influence of photography was evident on the painters of Passage Style and some of them even used photography as the first step for creating their paintings but Sani-ol-Molk kept his individual way of presentation and envisaged the potential of photography.



Fig. 2. Grand bazaar, 1001 nights



Fig. 3. A photo of Tehran Grand bazaar in 19th century

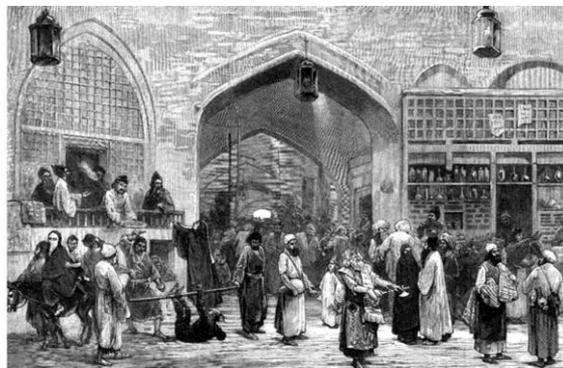


Fig. 4. Tehran Grand bazaar, 1873



Fig. 5. Grand bazaar, 1001 nights

4. CONCLUSION

In addition to the shops, the Grand bazaar has contained financiers, mosques and guest houses. 13th century (Qajar era) for Tehran is considered as a golden period because it changed a small village into a populous capital city. Royal residence and some public structures around it were constructed and the urban spaces expanded very rapidly. On the other hand Tehran became a good market for artistic productions. Social reforms produced a powerful impact on forming different artistic manners. Travelling abroad, getting acquaintance with modern ideas, constitutionalism movement, entering new technology such as photography and printing industry were some of the most influential causes which affected all aspects of Qajar society. Idealistic vision of Safavid painters changed into naturalistic one and the imaginary illustrations altered to more realistic images. On the other hand, for the sake of printing industry (lithography) and the constitutional movements, some concepts such as real urban spaces appeared in illustrations. These elements directly influenced the artistic expressions and some Iranian painters, who were sent to Europe by the court, used some naturalistic methods in their works.

It is essential to mention that Persian illustration has been always related to the literal texts. The traditional artists tried to manifest loyally the whole atmosphere of the poets and prose texts and the illustrators made their best to demonstrate the characters and places as they had been described in the literature but in new tendency of Persian painting, artists mixed the old elements of texts with real places, quotidian characters and even current events of their time. By using this method, they obtained new ways of artistic expression and could better communicate with the people of their own time.

The artists were very much related to some particular texts such as "1001 Nights". Among avant-garde artists, Sani-ol-Molk chose this book for being illustrated. He was very talented and as an artist of the Passage Style, he remained loyal to the main principals of traditional Persian painting while he experienced some new artistic tendencies of the time. Leading by him, 42 artists made 3600 illustrations for "1001 Nights". Sani-ol-Molk chose Tehran urban spaces as the scenes for the outer events. He demonstrated the characters of the stories not in Baghdad spaces which were quoted in the book but he selected the urban spaces of Tehran. The time of the happenings was also altered from Haron-al-Rashid period to 19th century. With the help of these delicate alterations, he succeeded in demonstrating the real situation of his time as well as the daily life of people. He illustrated the pathways, allies, streets, squares, bazaars and green spaces of Tehran as various backgrounds for the adventurous events of 100 Nights. Even though the influence of photography is evident in these illustrations but the spirit of Persian traditional painting is overbearing; this is doubtlessly the factor which makes Sani-ol-Molk the most brilliant artist of the time.

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