

Interpretation of Women Characters in the Folk Shahnameh of the 948 AH/1540 AD of the Second Tabriz School According to Panofsky's Method

Abstract

The position of women in diverse periods is influenced by the fluctuations in the society in which they live. By scrutinizing illustrated books outside the court, their statuses in various historical periods can be carefully studied. Shahnameh, as one of the remarkable books of Safavid kings, has been illustrated many times and throughout many artistic phases. This research, accomplished with a descriptive-analytical method and by using the documentary sources, seeks to examine the status of women in the folk Shahnameh created in the year 948 AH/1540 AD. In this regard, the interpretation and role of women in the painting of this Shahnameh is discussed by adopting the approach of iconology and iconography. The results of the research indicate that court women have always been of interest during the Safavid period, the Shahnameh and exclusively painting as many conjoint points can be seen. In all paintings, only court women or princesses are stated with mention of street and market women. Therefore, women that have mentioned in the Shahnameh are of wisdom, politics and charity. On the other hand, in the history of the Safavid period, all women belong to a high social class. In the association between text and image, in a number of cases, the painter has proceeded according to his taste. Likewise, it was found that the pictorial themes in the painting of this Shahnameh depend on many factors including the developments of the Safavid society, the position of women in that period, Ferdowsi's view of women and the tradition of Iranian painting. Moreover, in order to better verify the connections other sources should also be analyzed.

Research aims:

1. Analyzing the role and position of women in the painting of the Shahnameh of the Safavid period.

2. Investigating the role and position of women in the Safavid period and the painting of the second school of Tabriz.

Research questions:

1. What patterns did the author of the Shahnameh use to show the position of the image of women based on Panofsky's theory?
2. What are the similarities and differences between the role and status of women in the Safavid era, with Ferdowsi's view and Tabriz school of painting?

Keywords: Shahnameh, Safavid period, female character, The second school of Tabriz, Panofsky

Introduction

Shahnameh is one of the longest and most eloquent literary masterpieces in Persian poetry that contains various epic, mythological, lyrical, and edict themes. After the Mongol conquest of Iran, the Shahnameh became more popular among artists and was painted and written by most prominent artists of every age. For this reason, the exquisite and significant works of Ferdowsi's Shahnameh have survived to this day. During the Safavid era, art reached its peak and book design grew along with art. During this period, the Safavid kings exhibited great interest in the Shahnameh, and for this reason, more than 2,500 Shahnamehs from the Safavid period are remained most with illustrations depicted from the heart of the society and many works were sent to other countries for trade and were depicted in workshops outside the court. In this research, the illustrations of one of the folk Shahnamehs dated 948 AH/1540 AD are examined. Artistic and literary works have various textual and metatextual aspects that each layer deals with one of these aspects. Iconology is one of the methods that takes into account all the dimensions of the work of art in its three stages. The pictorial themes in the painting of the Shahnameh 948 AH/1540 AD depend on many factors such as the developments of the Safavid society, the position of women in that period, Ferdowsi's view of women and the tradition of Iranian painting and other related issues. These pictures should be referred to other texts and their relationship should be determined. Therefore, iconology seems to be the most suitable method for analyzing these images. The innovation of this research is the analysis of the image of women in the paintings of the mentioned version of the Shahnameh by means of a new approach.

Regarding cultural, artistic and social developments of the Safavid period, there are many published sources; nevertheless, few sources have investigated the position of women in this period, which can be seen mostly in travelogues or comprehensive historical books. On the other hand, there are many researches concerning women, which often deal with Iranian women and their images in paintings on a case-by-case basis; however, in these sources, the study of the role of women in paintings has not been reflected considerably. In this regard, a dissertation by Soheila Sadeghi Attar (2016) titled "Examining the position of women in Ferdowsi's Shahnameh and explaining its educational implications" deals with the role of women in the Shahnameh and states in this literary work, a woman is by no means a downgraded being; rather, it preserves the identity of its high ethnic and racial values and examines the different social layers of women in the Safavid period. Another research conducted in this area is an article by Hadi Abbas-Nejad Khorasani with his co-authors (1400) with the title "Exploration and highlighting of women's traits and personality from Ferdowsi's point of view and its reflection in Baisanghri's Shahnameh (two images "Zal and "Rudabeh" and "Meeting of Ardeshir and Gulnar"))" which was published in the Islamic Art magazine. The results show that the presence of women's pictures in the Shahnameh of Baisangari has given a special delicacy to this work and the women described by Ferdowsi in the Shahnameh have more unique characteristics than women of his era. The present research, in addition to following a historical approach, has considered the Safavid period folk Shahnameh illustrations as research materials. In this research, by studying artistic features, travelogues and written sources, an attempt has been made to reach a logical understanding between these samples from a new perspective using the Panofsky method, in addition, analyzes women and their place in the Shahnameh.

Conclusion

In this research, according to the approach of iconography and iconography and the three semantic levels of Ervin Panofsky, the role of women in the paintings of the folk Shahnameh was investigated. During the first stage of the iconology method, the apparent meaning and stylistic features of Shahnameh 948 AH/1540 CE were found to be most influenced by the Indo-Iranian school. In the second stage, it was determined from the affiliation between illustrations, texts and stories that the meaning of the pictures is directed to them. At this stage, the secondary meaning of the images was determined through the revelation of intertextual relationships. In the third stage,

according to the position of women in paintings, in order to reveal their hidden meaning, the paintings are analyzed from the perspective of reflecting factors such as the developments of the Safavid society, the position of women in that period, Ferdowsi's view of women and the tradition of Iranian painting. The examination of selected pictures from Shahnameh 948 AH 1540 AD in this research showed that the artist applied a series of single patterns such as facial expression, clothing, and the atmosphere of the garden and palace in drawing the illustrations. From another point of view, the social classification of women ruling the Safavid era is also clearly evident in these images as royalties have an additional cover of gold and are placed upon a throne. The maidservants are in the same rank as they are drawn with the same covering in various colors; Therefore, it seems that the images of women are chosen based on their role, position and social status. On the other hand, in all four paintings, the painter has been faithful to the text in the story as he has used his mind and imagination in creating the image space. In the final words, based on the concepts received from the analysis of selected paintings and narrative texts of the Safavid period, women enjoyed a special social position during this period, and therefore, women had a distinct place for the author of the folk Shahnameh of 948 AH. 1540 AH. This is due to the fact that in most of the pictures, the strong presence of women can be understood. In the few copies of the Shahnamehs of the Safavid period, the presence of women can be observed to this extent. In all these scenes, only court women or princesses are mentioned with no mention of street or market women. These women are shown in a lowly position such as a maidservant or companions. Consequently, women mentioned in the Shahnameh are mostly pictured due to their wisdom, politics, tact and charity. In the history of the Safavid period, all women belong to a high social class. Court women are depicted in the role of queens, princess or king's mistress, mother or king's companion in war. They were not of ordinary women and each of them had a special status and position in the court. Also, the pictorial themes in the paintings of the folk Shahnameh of 948 AH/1540 AD depend on many factors such as the developments of the Safavid society, the position of women in that period and Ferdowsi's view of women and the tradition of Iranian painting; moreover, in the process of finding meaning in these paintings, it is necessary to refer to other texts and specify their connection.

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