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Comparison of Iconography in Shahnameh Tahmasp and Haft Orang of Jami

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Abstract

Special consideration of iconography by Iranian artist is one of the properties of Iranian painting. Paying attention to simplification of icons, proportions, clothes and more importantly, specific methods of Iranian artists in the field of iconography are issues that must be considered in depth in the studies related to Iranian painting.

Mashhad Workshop is one of the Iranian painting schools established from the heart of Tabriz School II and the works created in this workshop are typically heir of Tabriz School II. Special features to previous works are evident in these works and it seems that these features can be observed in the icons and characterization in figures. In this study, through comparing Haft Orang of Jami from Mashhad's School and Shahnameh Tahmasp from Tabriz School II, these features are evaluated. In early investigations, it seemed that the artists of Haft Orang have sometimes followed the principles used in Shahnameh Tahmasp to draw configurations. Also, in most works, they tended to show various positions and characterizations through considering variety in the field of designing the icons.

Keywords: Iconography, Drawing, Shahnameh tahmasp, Haft Orang of Jami.

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Introduction

One feature of Iranian painting is paying attention to details in iconography. Painters of different eras have used this feature in their works. There is no doubt that the painting of Safavid Era and 10th century (A.H.) has been one of the brilliant ages of Iranian painting and has authenticated honorable position in artistic civilization of the world. Mashhad Workshop has been typically considered as heir of Tabriz School II and created works in this school are also impressed by Tabriz School. In works of Mashhad's Workshop, special features about past works are evident that can be observed in the figures drawn and the characterizations of figures. In this field, this study implements a descriptive-analytical method to compare Haft Orang of Jami and Shahnameh Tahmasp from Tabriz School II to clear factors affecting characterization of icons. The study seeks answer to the following questions:

- 1- Is iconography of Haft Orang of Jami absolutely based on provisions of iconography in Shahnameh Tahmasp?
- 2- Whether more emphasis is evident in drawing icons in Haft Orang of Jami for characterization and expressions of figures?

In this study, details of iconography properties are investigated in two valuable works including Shahnameh Tahmasp (Tabriz School) and Haft Orang of Jami (Mashhad School). As artists of these two works have attended both school and workshop and are attributed to stream in heart of Tabriz traditions, it is necessary to conduct more detailed and exact comparison, so that the results can be more reliable.

Safavid Era and formation of Tabriz School II

Shah Ismail selected Tabriz as Capital in 906 A.H. after overcoming Aghkoyunlular. Royal library of Aghkoyunlular was in service of Shah Ismail and he made the artists working in a library in his own service. One of the brilliant artists of the Turcoman Tabriz School was Sultan Mohammad Tabrizi, who came in service of Shah Ismail and after that, he became one of the stable pillars of recently established Tabriz School in Safavid Era.

Shah Ismail selected his 2-year old son, Tahmaseb Mirza, and one of the Ghezelbash Emirs as governor of Herat. Tahmaseb began painting and calligraphy under supervision of one brilliant professor in Herat. After spending 8 years in Herat, he came back to Tabriz and gained power in 930 A.H. Apparently, he brought some artists of Herat School like Behzad to Tabriz. Shah Ismail issued a custodianship order of library in the name of Behzad in 928 A.H. and made him the custodian of royal library (Ajand, 2005, p. 7).

Moreover, Shah Tahmaseb was considerably interested in painting and calligraphy and used to support these arts in his era. Hence, Tabriz School of Safavid Era was established and this school gained its final formation and became one of the most glamorous painting schools of Iran. Also, the school created valuable works such as *Shanameh Tahmasp* and *Khamseh Nezami Shahi*.

Considering the interest of Ismail I and Tahmasp in book art, it is not surprising that the most unique work of Safavid Era is a work under supervision of Shah Ismail for his son, Tahmasp, which was not completed till the death of Ismail. This work is nothing other than *Shahnameh Tahmasp*. The difference of writing in pages of this *Shahnameh* creates the assumption that the said version is codified in Herat and Tabriz workshops and mainly under supervision of Behzad and even several icons in it can be attributed to Behzad. Clearly, a group of the most brilliant painters of that time took great action to illustrate this exquisite version. Through combining western (Tabriz) and eastern (Herat) traditions, a perfect style was created. The most brilliant manifestations of it can be observed in *Shahnameh Tahmasp* and one more important version named *Khamseh Tahmasp* (Pakbaz, 2004, p. 87).

"Mashhad-Qazvin" school³

Since 875 A.H. that east of Iran was calm and secure under governance of Sultan Hussein Bayghara, Khorasan changed to the center for growth of literature and education. Jami created his most famous poetry and proses during this period that lasted about 25 years (Tofangdar, 1997, p. 11).

Ibrahim Mirza (nephew of Shah Tahmasp) established a workshop in Mashhad after gaining governance of Khorasan and in addition to artists of Khorasan; he made some professors of Tabriz School in his service. The most important illustrated version codified in this workshop was *Haft Orang* of Jami (964-973 A.H.). This version contained 28 paintings and excellent decorations and gildings and is remained intact. *Haft Orang* is to high extent similar to *Khamseh* of Nezami of Shah Tahmasp and 5 bookmakers made it during 9 years and in 3 cities of Mashhad, Herat and Qazvin. The paintings without code and signatures in this version are attributed to famous artists of the time such as Aghamirak, Mirza Ali, Ghadimi and Sheikh Mohammad (Ajand, 2005, p. 59).

³ Ajand has used the name "Mashhad-Qazvin School" in his book "Tabriz and Mashhad-Qazvin painting School".

Shah Tahmasp Shahnameh

Today, a lot of versions of Shahnameh are available that are booked following orders of kings. However, Shahnameh Tahmasp is on top of all of these works, whether in terms of size and content or magnificent of illustration and painting. 258 paintings, brilliant and glorious illumination and rich bookbinding have made the Shahnameh brilliant.

Shah Tahmasp Shahnameh is in fact a kind of movable art center, at which formation of painting art of Safavid Era on 920s A.H. can be observed to the evolution of this art in the middle of 935s decade A.H. majority of artists and painters of that time had a hand in formation of that school and it seemed that only a name is remained from these artists, so that the works remained from them can be found rarely and this can make hardly possible to understand and perceive their original artistic style. Through studying the Shahnameh and its pictures, one can not only explore works of these artists, but also their artistic evolution by that time could be perceived from the period full of fast changes and formation of Safavid civilization clearly. The Shahnameh has been available in Ottoman Royal Library in Istanbul by 1800. Apparently, Shah Tahmasp has sent it for Ottoman Sultan by 983 A.H. while accession of Sultan Morad III, along with other gifts (Ajand, 2005, p. 115).

Through fundamental investigation of style evolution of 258 paintings of this manuscript, 3 main steps are explained as follows:

The first step has been under influence of Sultan Mohammad as the director of the project. Apparently, in the second step, the project was conducted by Mir Mosavar and in the third step; Aghamirak was the director of the project.

Although Behzad, the previous master of Teimur Era, was appointed as supervisor of the workshop of royal library by Shah Ismail, he had most likely no portion in paintings of Shahnameh by that time. However, his fame and influence among royal painters was clear. Moreover, his influence was clear in style evolution of royal painters like Sultan Mohammad (whose' works went towards elegance). Influence and impact of Behzad's style is evident in young painters like Mirza Ali and Mozafar Ali in Shahnameh under training of Behzad (Sudavar, 2001, p. 164).

Majority of paintings of Shahnameh Tahmasp were under influence of art of Aghamirak and Mir Mosavar (Robinson, 1997, p. 55).

In later years, Rothschild bought it in Paris on 1903. Then, the Shahnameh was owned by Arthur Hooton. On 1959, 78 illustrations of the book were gifted to the Metropolitan Museum of America (Pakbaz, 1999, p. 328).

After Islamic Revolution of Iran, in July of 1994, remained pages of the Shahnameh containing 118 paintings and golden cover and other pages of the prose in size of 47, 5*32cm was returned to Iran and placed in treasury of Contemporary Arts Museum (Masterpieces of Iranian Painting, 2005, p. 231).

Haft Orang of Jami

In the middle of 10th century (A.H.), young prince from Safavid Dynasty named Sultan Ibrahim Mirza called some artists for calligraphy and illustration of the pages of special version of Haft Orang because of his great interest in the poetry of Jami. The efforts of Sultan Ibrahim Mirza and his intention from collecting such glorious work, especially its 28 illustrations, is an exciting story that shows that how poetry and painting have been fundamental elements in traditional culture of Iran (Simpson, 2003, p.13).

The version of Haft Orang was worked for Ibrahim Mirza, nephew of Shah Tahmasp. It was written by Malek Deylami, Shah Mahmud Neishaburi, Eysh Ibn Eshrati and Rostam Ali in Mashhad, Qazvin and Herat. The date of writing of this version was during 963-972 A.H. This version contains 28 illustrations with no code and date and is today belonged to Freer Gallery of Art in Washington, No. 12/46. It has totally 304 sheets and 2 sheets are lost and size of each sheet is 25.4*37.5 cm. About 8 main gildings are existed in title of each Masnavi (Ajand, 2005, p. 177).

Painters: Ali Asghar Kashani, Mirza Ali, Mozafar Ali, Aghamirak Isfahani, Sheikh Mohammad

Calligraphers: Shah Mahmud Neishaburi, Sultan Mohammad Khandan, Rostam Ali, Malek Deylami, Moheballi, Eysh Ibn Eshrati

Painter: Ali Asghar Kashani (Ibid, p. 177).

Haft Orang is the most important and memorable work of Abdorahman Jami. All seven poetries are in style of Masnavi.

The most important feature of illustrations of Jami is high level of human factor, which is shown using positions and emotions, number and variety of main and secondary figures. In general, illustrations of Jami Freer can show wide range of human experience. Fusion, death imminent, spiritual journey, excellence, worship, trade, everyday tasks (preparation of food, washing of clothing, sewing, gather firewood), treatment of animals, intellectual interests (chess, reading), recreation and play, love and sacrifice, fury, perplexity, indecision, fear, disbelief and condemnation are also tangible in different parts of the illustrations (Ibid, p. 20).

Comparative study of iconography in Shahnameh Tahmasp and Haft Orang of Jami

For this purpose, 2 works are selected from each book. According to a wide range of the issue and topic differences, it has been tried to select similar works in terms of structure, form and positions of figures to conduct more exact and fundamental comparison. The paintings have been selected based on the presence of standing and sitting figures and variety in their design and positions. In some works, figures of man and woman are compared and their sex is not important in this comparison according to the text, but also an assumed generality is going to be explained.

Comparison of these works is done based on two main approaches:

- a) Investigation of drawing styles and physical properties of figures
- b) Investigation of the gestures and characterization in figures

According to large number of figures in selected works, the study has tried to compare those figures that are adjusted with each other.

Analysis of figures in painting of Anushiravan to answer question of priest of priests and painting of Majnoon while going to Layli's stopping places for caravans



Figure 1: Anushiravan answers question of priest (from Shahnameh Tahmasp: attributed to Mir Mozavar)

Priest of priests asks some questions from Anushiravan and he answers the questions wisely. Questions of priest are related to faith in God and meeting the desires of believers by God and some questions about high position of human, wisdom and its advantage, kingship conditions, outcome of goodness and evilness, the philosophy of marriage and happiness from child, philosophy of goodness in presence of death and destruction of all human actions. In answer, Anushiravan has referred to good or bad name of people after death and mentions that the outcome of goodness is good name and memory and the outcome of evilness is bad memories after death (Masterpieces of Iranian Painting, 2005, p. 304).

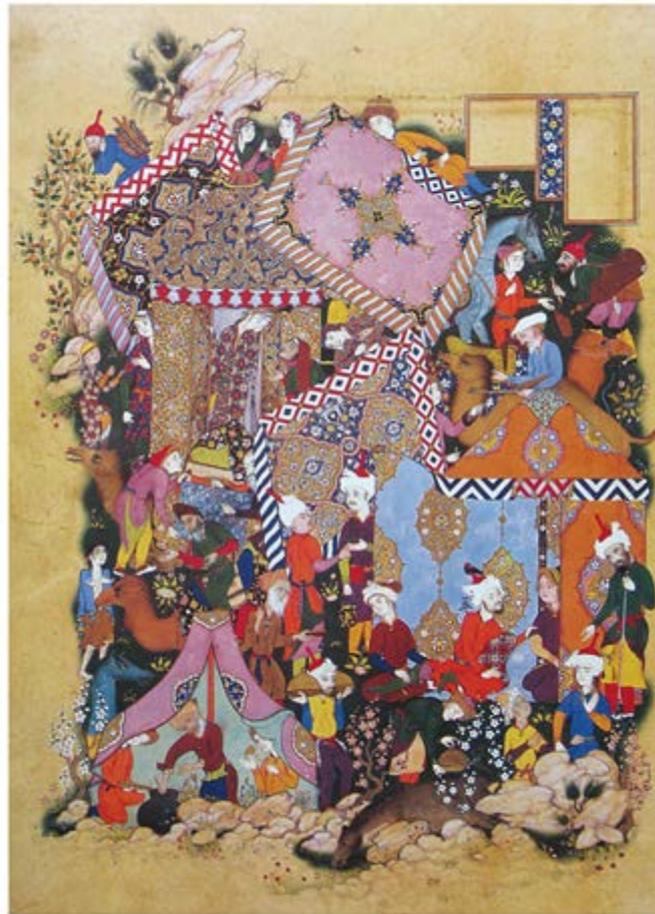


Figure 2: The painting of Majnoon while going to Leyli's stopping place for Caravan
(attributed to Sheikh Mohammad)

Majnoon, who has gone to the desert because of Leyli's Love, is informed that a caravan has stopped from top of a hill. Majnoon asks question about the Caravan from a horse rider coming from the caravan and he says that the caravan is belonged to Leyli and is going to Hajj. Majnoon follows the caravan; although he can't meet his beloved (Hosseini, 2001, p. 42).

In figure 1, the figures are placed in natural space with relatively certain rhythm. The king has sat on his throne in left side of the painting and the priest is relatively in center of the frame on the chair and is speaking to the king. Other icons are placed on stones and between them in standing and sitting postures. White turbans make eyes circled in entire painting. A tangible issue in figures of this painting is that although the painting shows a dynamic space, the icons have simple design in organs and the direction of heads is same with relatively different faces. Considerable features in this painting are as follows: 1) distance between icons 2) uniform sitting position 3) standing with open feet 4) 2-person combinations 5) realistic mode of the person asking question and 6) two directions of vertical head on body and angled mode.

The icons sitting on the ground, except for one figure in right side sitting on knees, are illustrated from front angle and in cross-legged posture. The configurations are almost chubby and highlighting is avoided (figure 3 and 5).

In the painting of figure 2, a confusing and complicated space is illustrated that icons are speaking to each other among the tents. The illustration of tents and variety of figures is artistic. Drawing of figures is various and each figure has been distinguished and characterized with special design of face and body and the difference is clear in comparison with figures 3 and 5. In the figure, due to 3 icons sitting under the tent (figure 4) and 2 icons carrying a box (figure 6), it seems that the artist has thought about the character of each figure and has drawn them. Finally, important properties in this painting can be counted as follows: 1) natural distance of human and their relations 2) different characterization of all faces and their realistic nature 3) adjustment of face illustration and their expression and posture of icons with their action 4) 3-member and 4-member combinations 5) using direction and height of heads that has caused variety in this work in terms of geometric structure 6) various directions of head on body.



figure 4: Haft Orang of Jami: Majnoon is going to Leyli's Caravan



figure 3: Shahnameh Tahmasp: Anushiravan is answering question of priest

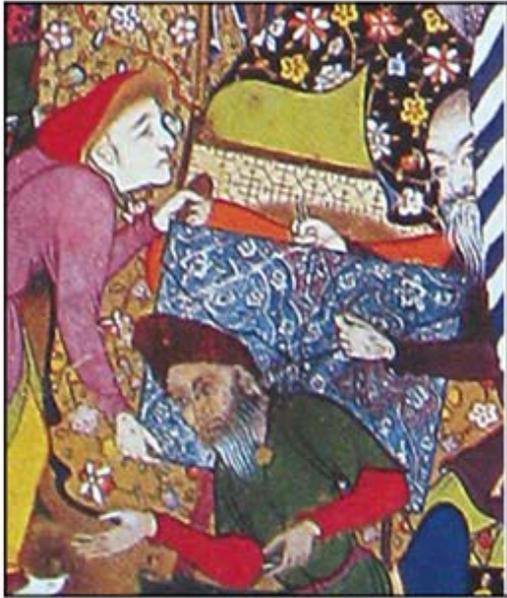


figure 6: Haft Orang of Jami: Majnoon is going to Leyli's Caravan



figure 5: Shahnameh Tahmasp: Anushiravan is answering questions of priest

Moreover, two icons are speaking in two paintings. In figure 7, similarity and uniformity of figures are evident. In figure 8, figure of a man is bent because of the heavy burden on the shoulders and speaking with a young man and the two icons are characterized elegantly.



figure 8: Haft Orang of Jami: Majnoon is going to Leyli's caravan



figure 7: Shahnameh Tahmasp: Anushiravan is answering questions of priest

In main characters of two paintings, the difference in characterization is observable (figure 9 and 10).

In figure 10, the distress of Majnoon is illustrated with a blue robe and naked and thin body. However, in some references, Majnoon is referred as the young man watching the people in upper part of frame (Stewart, n.d., p. 38) that seems wrong.

On the contrary, in figure 9, both faces are different and the tendency for characterizing them is observable; although expression of their innate emotions is not tangible.

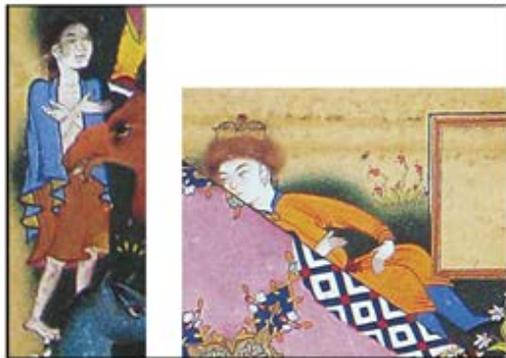


figure 10: Haft Orang of Jami: Majnoon is going to Leyli's Caravan

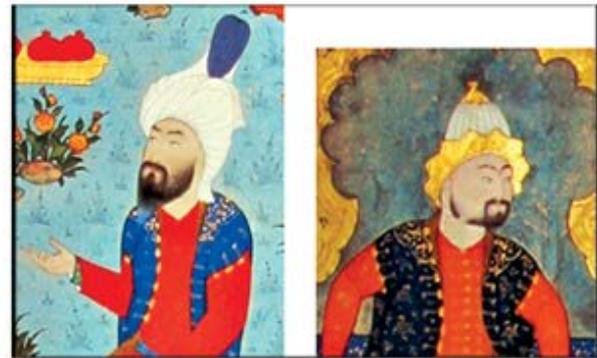


figure 9: Shahnameh Tahmasp: Anushiravan is answering questions of priest

Moreover, characterization in the faces of people speaking (figure 12) is observable compared to (figure 11). In these illustrations, the relationship created by the hands is interesting. Moreover, the position of the child under the tent eating something that is hot and child is trying to make it cold is interesting (figure 14) or face of 3 women among the tents (figure 13) is tangible that the face of each woman is emphasized.



figure 12: Haft Orang: Majnoon is going to Leyli's caravan



figure 11: Shahnameh Tahmasp: Anushiravan is answering questions of priest



figure 14: Haft Orang: Majnoon is going to Leyli's Caravan



figure 13: Haft Orang: Majnoon is going to Leyli's Caravan

Painting of Sadeh Celebration (Shahnameh Tahmasp) (figure 15) (attributed to Sultan Mohammad)

After Kioumars, Hooshang, son of Siamak, became his successor. Hooshang killed the black giant to avenge his father. During his kingship, use of forging and raising animals was developed. One day, Hooshang sees an ugly giant. When he hits the giant with a stone, the giant is disappeared. The small stone crashes with a huge stone and some sparks called on to shine. Hooshang gets it as a sign and created the tradition of worshipping the fire. At the same night, he called all courtiers and their animals and talked about the hidden powers of fire and held a celebration that was named as Sadeh Celebration later.

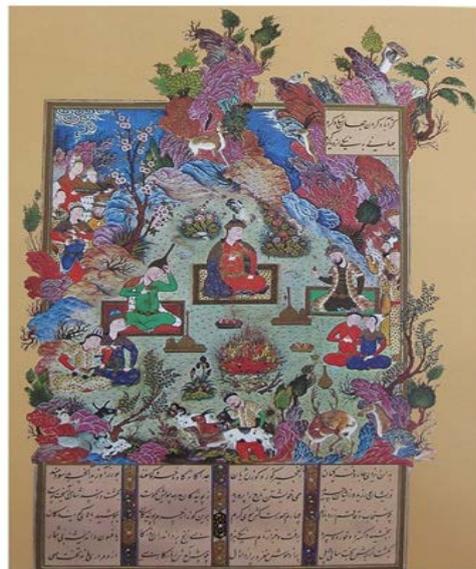


Figure 15.

The painting of Sadeh Celebration includes some sitting icons arranged based on a circle (figure 16). And some figures are watching the meeting in left side of the frame. One issue that is evident in this illustration is specific pattern used by the painter for sitting icons. All sitting icons are drawn from front angle and in cross-legged position. Faces are illustrated differently and icons have relatively short necks, flat shoulders and hands that one of them is on their feet and the other hand has lifted a cup or is pointing the other party to show that they are speaking. It seems that main characters have sat on the carpet singly and other characters are placed on the ground in as couples. A figure is also placed in the lower part of the frame that is taking the goat to cook lunch for the celebration. The figure is also drawn with a head bigger than the upper part of the body.



**figure 16: Shahnameh Tahmasp
Sadeh Celebration**

In this painting, arrangement of icons is elegant and adjusted with the natural surrounding area. Moreover, elegant lines and feather-making are used to draw icons (figure 16).

In the painting of Sadeh Celebration, in right side of painting, two young men are present who are speaking to each other and a relationship is created between them by hands and this is an interesting point of this scene (figure 17).

Although types are different in this painting in terms of faces and drawing of the faces is different, there are many similarities to express innate emotions and the painter has less emphasized characterization of each single person.

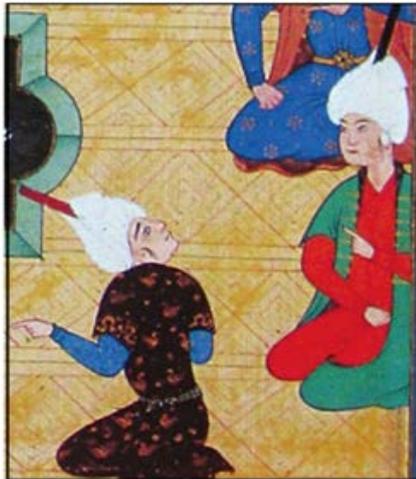


figure 18: Haft Orang
Unveiled conversation between Hazrat
Suleiman and Belqeis

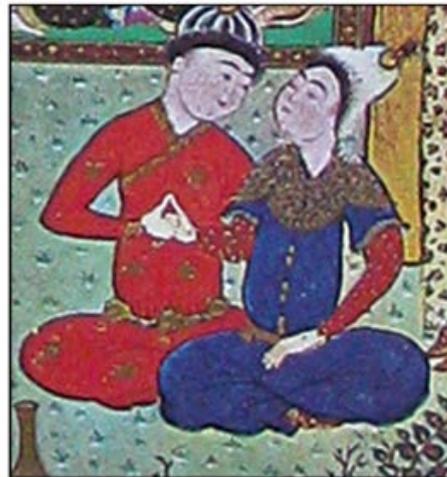


figure 17: Shahnameh Tahmasp
Sadeh Celebration

Painting of Qeis and first time seeing Leyli (figure 19) (attributed to Mozafar Ali)

The story of Leyli and Majnoon is derived from an allegorical story from oral culture of Arabs. In this illustration, Majnoon is kneeling as an adolescent in gray clothes in front of Leyli's family (Hosseini, 2001, p. 40).

Meeting of Qeis and Leyli is happened in range of landscape of a rock, where the tribe of Leyli has erected tents. Apparently, Qeis is going with a short, chubby and bearded man with one hand on the belt to be a bearing for his chubby stomach (Simpson, 1997, p. 70).



Figure 19

In painting of figure 19, some icons are observed placed in a natural and mountainous area and everyone is taking its own action. Main characters of this painting are speaking to each other in the lower part of the frame in a desert tent. Here, 3 icons are in sitting position and are drawn in three-face mode. The young icon (Qeis) is drawn with a back-directed thin and tall body and a long neck that is interesting (figure 21). The main properties of this painting are as follows: 1) all faces are different in terms of drawing 2) angle of head on body is various 3) postures are different 4) use of direction of hands is because of more expression.



figure 21: Haft Orang
Qeis and first time seeing Leyli



figure 20: Shahnameh Tahmasp
Allegory of Ferdowsi about Shia Ship



figure 23: Haft Orang
Qeis and first time seeing Leyli



figure 22: Shahnameh Tahmasp
Allegory of Ferdowsi about Shia Ship

In figure 25, the painter has used more details and has tried to show characters better and to distinguish every person from others. An old man lay on the crutches and watches a child with a worried look who is sat on back of mother and mother is pouring food for the child with compassion.



figure 25: Haft Orang
Qeis and first time seeing Leyli



figure 24: Shahnameh Tahmasp
Allegory of Ferdowsi about Shia ship

Characterization in chubby configuration stood behind Qeis or the icon laid and studying in right side shows the focus of painter on diversity in movements and specific drawing and expression for character of every one (figures 28 and 29). In icons in figure 29, tendency for realism is observable in faces and bodies and the icons are drawn with long upper part of body and they have relatively exaggeration.



figure 27: Haft Orang
Qeis and first time seeing Leyli



figure 26: Shahnameh Tahmasp
Allegory of Ferdowsi about Shia ship



figure 29: Haft Orang
Qeis and first time seeing Leyli

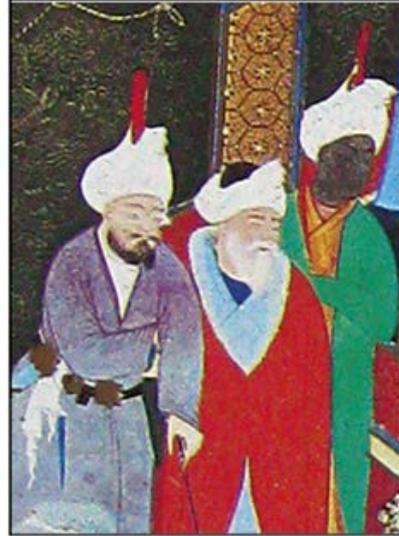


figure 28: Shahnameh Tahmasp
Allegory of Ferdowsi about Shia Ship

Results

Through analyzing details of the icons in two works of Shahnameh Tahmasp and Haft Orang of Jami, obtained results from this study are as follows:

- 1- In Haft Orang, in some figures, design and clothes are similar to Tabriz pattern and in many others; design of icons is with long necks and tall upper part of body.
- 2- In icons of Haft Orang, compared to Shahnameh Tahmasp, the tendency for highlighting organs is observed.
- 3- In icons of Haft Orang, heads are mostly smaller in proportion to body.
- 4- In regard with drawing of sitting and standing figures of Haft Orang, in most cases, more variety and dynamicity is observable compared to Shahnameh Tahmasp.
- 5- Trend for characterization in figures of Haft Orang is emphasized more than Shahnameh Tahmasp.
- 6- The figures are larger than the frame in size in Haft Orang compared to Shahnameh Tahmasp.
- 7- Considering details in drawing organs and clothes in icons of Haft Orang is more than Shahnameh Tahmasp.

- 8- Rhythm of lines and smoothness and circulation of elements in icons of some paintings in Haft Orang is better than Shahnameh Tahmasp.
- 9- The human communications by hands in haft Orang are emphasized more than the latter work.
- 10- In regard with drawing icons in paintings of Haft Orang of Jami, trend for realism is more evident than the Shahnameh Tahmasp.

Conclusion

The investigation of comparing icons of 4 paintings from two valuable books (Shahnameh Tahmasp and Haft Orang of Jami) and the obtained results show that despite similarities of illustrations in Haft Orang and Shahnameh Tahmasp, the painters in Shahnameh Tahmasp have paid specific attention to simplification in icons and proportions and more importantly, they have followed a special pattern to draw the icons; although the painters in Haft Orang have drawn the icons with more exaggeration in body and neck and the icons have small heads. In fact, they have tended to highlight organs and the emphasis has been on characterization of faces, realism and expression of gestures.

Therefore, it should be mentioned that iconography in Haft Orang is not absolutely based on provisions of iconography in Shahnameh Tahmasp and it has its special properties.

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