

DOI: 10.7596/taksad.v5i4.622

The Role of Persian Historical Bath in City and Urban Life

Fariba Kermani¹

Abstract

The importance and necessity of bath and its status in city, the role of bath in social relations, its strong tie with religious and indigenous traditions and costumes, its significant relationship with medicine and medical approaches and its presence in most of important stages of life are examples of features that place the bathes in special position. Traditional requirements and health related approaches positioned washing and bathing as one of the Iranian customs accompanying the man from birth, to even after death. Obviously such a widespread and subtle phenomenon has been manifested in all different aspects of Iranian people's social life. Accordingly, the location of baths in the city was determined based on social relations and environmental requirements and location of the water supplying system. This study answers these questions: What has been the role and status of the Iranian historical bathes in cities and people's life? And based on that how have been the distribution and substitution of baths? The results suggest that bath had an important role more than other public buildings and even in many cases it had been an assistant to them.

Keywords: Historical bath, City life, Urban life, Persian bath, Culture.

¹ A member of Iranian Research Institute for Cultural Heritage and Truism Scientific Board.

Introduction

Iranian baths have great antiquity and they will contribute to the clarification of many aspects of cultural and social life in the study of social history and civic life. Baths were the places that all people, including men and women of various ages and from different social classes went there. In addition to being cleaning, informing, teaching, treatment, and a reconciliation place, it has been the place to choose spouse, place of celebration and even the murder of important people.

Public baths during the Islamic period, had been one of the important elements in shaping and developing of neighborhoods and the symbols of city and village flourish that depending on their founder's financial strength and social status and their situations had different extent and valuable. These important buildings, apart from their purification and cleaning role, have been a social institution. A comprehensive study on them can help us to understand the social history and a better understanding of past societies in Iran.

In the early Islamic periods, constructing public baths had been considered important and it had not been possible without the governor's permission. Large revenues that were accrued to the owners of these buildings made the bath a place of overflowing asset and caught the attention of the Muslims from the early stages (Akbari quoted baldly, 2012: 116). During the Islamic period, many wealthy donors, who were attempting to construct public buildings, also made public baths that all or part of their income was devoted to their endowments.

Like bazaar, for its own users, bath had not been only for specific use but it had also been convening place for communities of people. The baths had been gathering place from the most beautiful memories such as hanabandan, which is the preparations of wedding and its subsequent, wearing a robe, until the most bitter ones like disease and death. Thus, we can achieve to the knowledge on the depth of close relationship between bath and life and memories of the people. Because of this relationship and the necessity of existence of the bath, the location of them in the city have been very diverse. In the most public places such as bazaar to district centers, neighborhoods, tracks, pathways, houses till gardens, historic baths can be found depending on the location and other considerations they have been of different social status.

Research Methodology

This research was conducted by historical interpretation method; it intends with use of ancient texts, literature and contemporary documents, and pictures to investigate the role and

division of historic baths in urban areas in terms of urbanization and social and cultural point of view.

Classification of historical baths

Historical baths are public building and general utility which have a long history in Iran. Multiple baths demonstrate their importance in proportion to other public buildings. During Safavid era Chardin says that at the time of his residence in Isfahan there had been 162 mosques, 48 schools, 1802 inns, 273 baths and 12 cemeteries (Chardin, 1983, 203). According to this statistics, in this period, number of baths was higher than the number of mosques in Isfahan.

Baths were divided into two general categories: public and private services. In general, public baths had buildings separate from residential buildings and the public use the service with payment. However, sometimes, some of Lords, by paying more for personal use, didn't allow other people to use public bath for a few hours. Thus, the financial strength could even reduce public function of the baths (Mollai Tavani, 2014: 124).

-Public baths: included the following bath types:

***Bazaar baths:** in business centered cities in which bazaars played an essential role, the baths were located along the bazaar and in the heart of its collections, baths such as: Sang Tarashan Bath, Sheikh, Shah and Shahzadeh baths, in Isfahan bazaar. Ganjalikhani Khan, Ibrahim Khan and Vakil baths in Kerman, as well as Mirzamehdi bath in Tabriz bazaar and Khan and Syed Golabbi baths near the Tabriz bazaar, Sayed, Sina, Haji Dadash baths, Mirbaha, Moein and Blori in Zanjan bazaar, Pahneh, bazaar, Najafi and Nokhost baths in Semnan bazaar. The heirs of Mirza Yahya bath, Shahriar bath, Nayeb bath in Rasht, Mirbaha bath in Lar bazaar, Vali, Zahir Khan, Haj Khalifa Fatah bath and Islamic baths in Sanandaj and large bath in the Zavareh bazaar. (M.H&UD, 2009, 63, 84,124,173,216,239,257,276) Most of the baths in the bazaars were only for men using (Figures 1 and 2).

Figure 1: The Bathes in Zanjan Bazaar
Prepared by author on the map of “The Persian Bazaar”
(M.H&U.D,2009: 83)

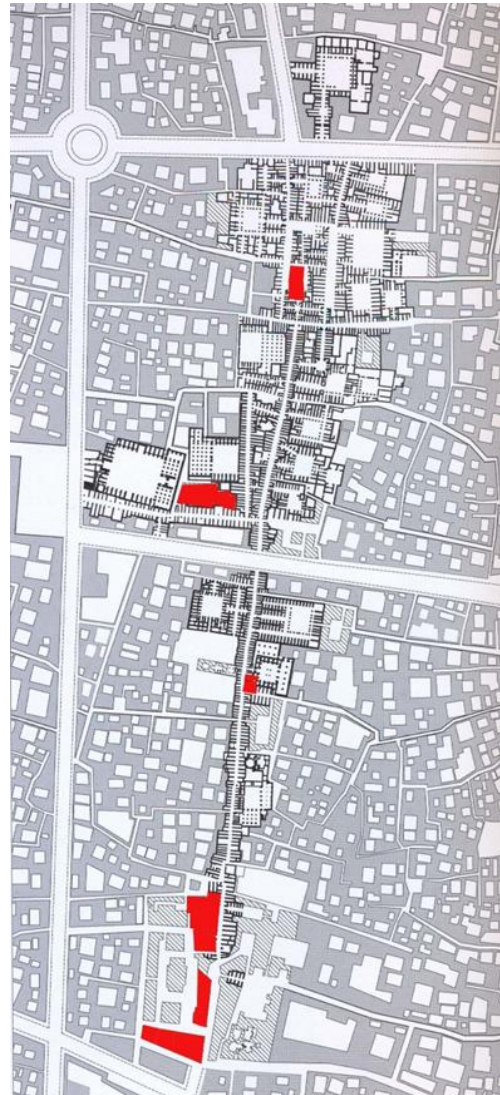
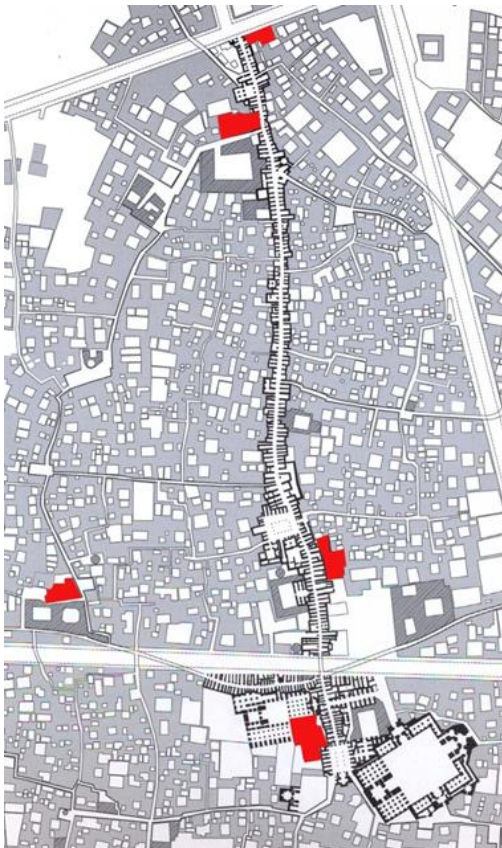


Figure 2: The Bathes in
Semnan Bazaar
Prepared by author on the
map of “The Persian
Bazaar”(M.H&U.D,2009:
172)

* **Local baths:** in some neighborhoods, these baths were twin baths, and other cases, baths in different times were used by men and women. From Safavieh period the construction of these types of baths have had multiplicity and variety. In this period, baths were built in large numbers and on a large city scale, in a way that even small areas of the city also had at least one bath; while in the suburban areas, next to the entrance gates, public centers of the cities, along the main bazaar and near schools and mosques, large public baths were built.

In towns and special complexes the bath had a particular significance as well. In the university town of Robehrashidi constructed by Khajeh Rashid al-Din Fadlallah Hamadani (645-718 AD), analogous most major buildings like hospital foundations, the construction of baths received special attention and some baths were built there. Some important buildings like schools also had a private bath. For students of religious schools, which didn't have a private bath, a monthly stipend as "bath money" was regarded, till the students can use the public baths. This shows that bathing and caring about sanitation were kind of tradition and common social behavior among residents of Muslim cities, and had a special role in the social life of Islamic cities and its relations (Osman, 2000: 233).

***Baths next to the city gates or caravanserais:** in the most of the commercial cities where the caravan was passing through, caravanserais and baths for traders and caravans were established next to the gates of the city. Ghazan Khan expanded Tabriz "and ordered to construct large caravanserais and four bazaars and a bath in each new gate of Tabriz, till the guest businessmen stay in those caravansaries, take bath, and then enter into the city." (Soltanzadeh, 1997, 24; quoted from the history of Mobarak Ghazani). Baths in Tabriz have been located next to the gates or the bazaar (Rashid Najafi, 1389: 64) like Dovachi bath on the Corner of Karbala'i Alia Asghar's caravansary (Rashid al-Najafi, 2010: 67).

***Religious minorities' Baths:** religious beliefs and restrictions led to establishing of special baths in minority settled neighborhoods, because in the Muslims' public baths, non-Muslims were not allowed to enter. Thus, based on religious beliefs we can categorize baths into Muslims' baths and that of religious minorities. Four-season bath in Arak city (Figure 3) is one of the most famous one (Mollaei Tavani, 2014: 124).

Figure 3: Four-season bath in Arak



***Hot springs Baths:** because of health benefits, especially during the Qajar period the surroundings of the hot springs had been used for bathing area (Mollaei Tavani, 2014: 125).

- Private baths: this type of baths was for the use of a family, clan or a particular person or a special group that include the following types:

***Bath inside the house:** private baths were built inside or next to a house only assigned to the grandee, and it was a sign of high social status. Of course, at certain times, some of these baths' door were open to other people, by payment or free, because, the grandee, especially their women, usually went there together with friends and family, even this kind of baths had practically public function too (Mullaei tavani, 2014: 124).

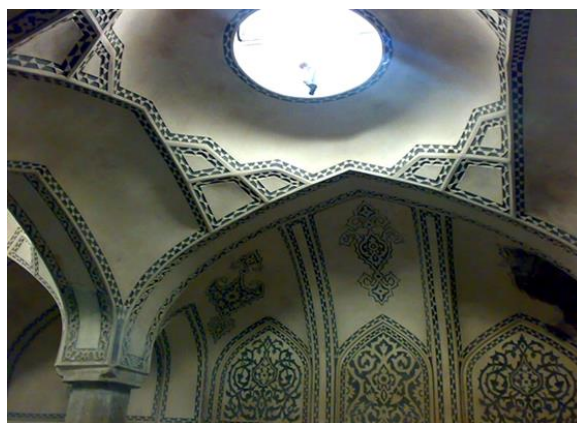
The prevalence of private baths in houses, which previously was very limited and just for rich people, as a result of modern life features, was more as a sign of displaying elegance, pride and dignity than as a way of maintaining hygiene (Figure 4). It was one of the features of historical baths in the Qajar era (Tabassi, 2007).



Figure 4: Asef Bath in Asef mansion- Sanandaj

* **Garden baths:** since kings, rulers and the rich in order to relax, fun or special formalities have created beautiful gardens around cities in good weather areas and usually have stayed there for a while, many historical gardens have baths and these baths have been used only by special people living in the garden and their guests. The baths from this sample are: Abbas Abad garden Bath in Behshar, the bath of Bayram-abad garden in Kerman, Fin Garden bath in Kashan (Figure 5), the bath of Larestan Neshat garden, and the bath of Shazdeh garden in Mahan Kerman.

Figure 5: Fin Bath in Kashan Fin Garden



* **Travel baths:** it has been known as Bulgarian bath because of building it under a Bulgarian leather tent and it had been usually set up in the king camps between tents (Mollaei Tavani quoted from Salur, 2014: 125). In his travelogue, Kolaikho, who had traveled to Iran in Amir Timor era, points to a special type of bath which is set up in camps under the tents in portable fashion: “I saw a lot of butchers and cooks in ILL Jigtai camp, ... more urgent needs than that were observed there. For example, the bath and the guards of them were found on the streets that have put large pots and other appliances under the tents...” (Kolaikho, 1987, 235).

Social role of bath

Special position of bath and its location in the city center, center of neighborhoods and in vicinity of main places like bazaar, caravansary and the mosque have always made baths as one of the most important gathering center in the history of Iran. Thus the baths, in addition to their primary role and function in cleanliness, was also influential in social change.

The importance and position of bath in the history of Iran is such that some of the municipal instruction and knowledge books have been devote to the issue of bath. For

example, Ibn Akhoveh gives a detailed report of the duties of bath keepers, accurate and consistent supervision and inspection on the inspector on bath, prohibiting of drawings on the baths, (quoted from Ibn Akhoveh Shabani, 2014: 92) or Onsorol Maali describes the rules and principle of going to the bath in detail, in the chapter 16 of his book, named "the Ritual of Taking Bath" (Shabani quoted from Onsorol Maali, 2014: 92). Likewise, Yagoot Hamawi informs about the regulations of baths and prohibition on entering patients into the baths (Shabani quoted from Yagoot Hamwi, 2014: 92).

The position of some of the baths was so specific that many of the rich citizens would rather going to that public bath instead of using private bath in their houses. For instance, Haj Rahim's bath in Qazvin city, which even Naseredin Shah had gone there in his trips to Qazvin. This indicates that for dignitaries and many people, the function of bath was beyond just taking bath, it was a place to exchange thought and information too. On the other hand, the significance of this bath, which was acceptable to the tastes of higher social class's people of that period or even the king, has been a way to establish a close relation with government agents (Akbari, 2012: 128).

The study of baths implies that there is a direct link between size and exquisiteness of the baths and social status, economic power of their founders, and the people who go there (Akbari, 2012: 130).

The persons that had dignity and high position, hadn't been going to bath just for ordinary washing, but before wearing the garment and robe donated by governor (Ravandi, 495; 1993 quoted from Beihaghi history) or even for shaving their head and face, They had been going to bath (ibid, 500; quoted from Badayeh al-Vaqayeh).

Religious role of bath

The cleanliness before worship has been one of the conditions of worshipping rituals in most religions and gilders. Washing and bathing is the most principle way of cleanliness and provider the condition for worship; so in all over the history, baths, from ritual and religious viewpoint, have had special significance. According to this approach, it can be argued that the religion forms a part of physical structure, urban locations and other social features of baths.

Bath as entertainment place

Figuerola, the Spanish ambassador at the court of Shah Abbas, points up bathing was one of middle class and poor people hobbies (Figuerola, 1984, 158). Henri René Dalmany also writes in his logbook: "One of the major entertainments of Persian women is going to the bath

or cemetery. In fact, these two places are as club, fun and meeting place for them, and they spend a large part of their time in those places to smoking Ghalyan, eating sweet and nuts, and talking.” (Dalmani, 1956, vol. 3, 634).

Welzh has also visited Iran in that period. He points to this matter that the Iranian women’s common favorite entertainment, form all social classes, is to spend 3 to 4 hours per week in the baths (Tabasi, quoted from Welzh, 2007: 297). But that didn’t mean the baths has been open from morning till evening for the women: "In the old baths, in the dawn, the beeps that were made by cow’s horn had been sounded to inform the bath would be opened. The beeps had been sounded twice in a day, one for opening the bath, and the later to inform the people the change of bath shift from male to female, because the baths had been for the men from three hours after midnight until eight in the morning, and after that, from nine o’clock, for women.” (Najmi, 1987, 438).

Fath Ali Shah Qajar’s entertainment in the bath should be noted. He had one slid bath that numerous of his wives had been gliding naked down and placed in the arms of their Lord. Except Brown, February, Curzon, and Benjamin, as well in their itineraries have referred to slide bath of the Negarestan garden, as if no one is excluded from visiting this Qajari masterpiece (Tabassi quotes, from Furea , Curzon, Benjamin 2007: 71).

Conventional activities in bath

The bathing mores, more or less, has been the same in most cities and neighborhoods and even religious minorities. The culture of bath includes the culture of washing and cleaning, health, beauty, entertainment, native and religious rituals. Human relations and its related costumes and traditions were a part of the identity of the baths. Historical baths have covered a series of activities that included:

- Cleaning and healthy activities: consist of all stages of head and body washing and depilating.
- Make up activities: consist in coloring hands, feet, and hair by henna; shaving hair and beard, tattooing (just for men), face and nails makeup (for ladies).
- Medical activities: consist in bloodletting, circumcision, dental extractions, orthopedics and treatment of diseases related to human nature and different temperaments.
- Sports activities: consist in swimming, massage, steam and dry sauna.

The number of workers and jobs in baths, had depended on the magnitude and importance of the baths, generally, large baths in populated city centers often had more workers. In the women's baths, in addition to the above-mentioned jobs, barbers or

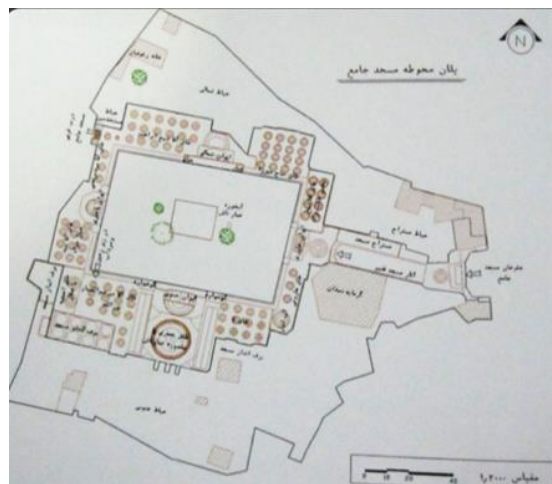
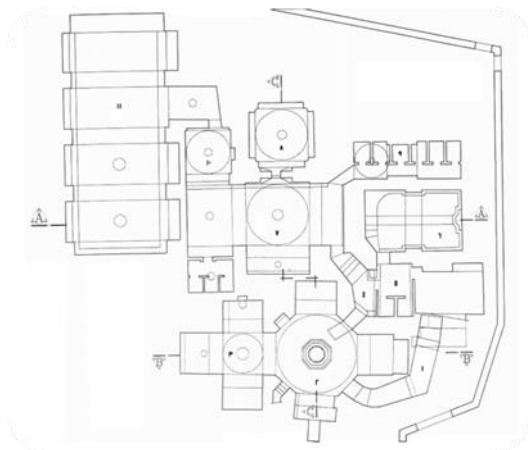
hairdressers had also been present to beautify the hair, face and nails of the women (Ravandi, 1993,497).

Conventional ritual of baths

Historical bath had been one of the important centers of social interaction and the context of many custom and rituals of Iranian people. So that every Iranian, almost from the first days of birth to the last day of his life, certainly have experienced bittersweet memories in the bath. The life's special events and actually, performing rituals and traditional celebrations in connection with baths consist: Henna ceremony (the ceremony before wedding), Childbirth bath, Circumcision bath, National and religious feast bath, Departure bath (before honored to going to Hajj, or pilgrimage to the holy places, and also bathing ceremony for other non-Muslims that chose Islam as their religious), Healthy bath (for irredeemably patients after a partial improvement), Grief and mourning baths (in the past that there was not a place for washing corpse in cemeteries, or in villages, the dead body was washed in the local bath (Naraqi, 1970, 13) especially in winter, was quite common. Forty days after death of a person, survivors and relatives of the dead were taken to the bath by neighbors' residents, and they were disrobed black clothes), Repentance and asking forgiveness bath, Superstitious bath (to neutralize a spell and inviting of fortune, and opening the closed luck) (Tabassi, 2007: 76).

Distribution and replacement of baths in the city

Due to the necessity of existence of baths and diversity of bath types, the location of establishing baths was determined by the owner considering city and neighborhoods requirements, the path of Qanat and wells, or dependent on the type of the city water supply system and the springs places. This spot could be in the vicinities of city gates, near the caravansary, inside the complex in bazaars, near the city Jameh mosque, in the center of the quarter or inside passes (Figures 6 and 7).



Figures 6 and 7: The plan and situation of Seyedin Bath beside Qazvin Jamei Mosque
Source: Student project in Azad University: Ghazaleh Mahdavi, Sara Moein fard

Bath landmark in the city

The baths were usually lower than other neighboring buildings due to the ease of directing water current inside the bath, warming the inner space of the bath in the winter, moderating

the weather in summer and etc. Not to be mentioned that baths in the north of the country were excluded from the rest. Because of Baths were located in the lower level than other buildings in the passes, usually only their entrances were distinguished. Of course the important baths with special costumers had more elegant entrance and the local baths had simpler ones, and sometimes the entrance of the baths was identified by the towel (Long) hanged in front of them. The entrance of the more important public baths had decorations and graffiti related to social, indigenous, cultural, political issues of that region (Figures 8 and 9).



Figures 8: The paintings on Ganjali Khan bath entrance in Kerman, on the theme of daily issues in Ganjali Khan square
Photo by author



Figure 8: The Entrance of Tavakoli Bath in Shiraz
Photo by Marziyeh Shiri

The entrance of some baths was painted of epic stories such as the fight between Rostam and Demon, or in some collection, consistent with other ornaments of the entrance like in Ibrahim Khan bath in Kerman (Figures 10 and 11).



Figure 10: Haj Akbar Bath in Rasht



Figure 11: The entrance of Ibrahim Khan Bath in Ibrahim Khan complex-Kerman
Photo by author

In the surrounding space of baths, especially in Qajar era, piles of animals' dung was discernible that were used as fuel for baths. Although these piles were ugly, but their existence was of exterior features of the baths in that era (Serena, 1983: 152). One of the bath signs was its horn which had a very loud sound and was an informing tool for the local people. Blowing it in the midnight informed the bath opening, in the midday it meant the change from female to male shift or vice versa. The sound of this horn was such consistent with the culture of the people that the interpretation of the horn sound has found its way through the proverbs.

Conclusion:

In the history of Iran, bath's status in the city, due to its great role in the system of social relations, its strong and old bond with the religious and native customs, its relationship with medicine and flowing the important people's lives events in bath, has been very special and in the social life of the Iranian people, has been appearance from birth to death.

Because of these special features, its geographic location also was particular. It was placed in the city center, bazaar, beside the entrance gate, central neighborhoods and near the effective institutions such as bazaar, mosque and government building and always was mentioned as one of the most important centers for gathering in the history of Iran. This caused the bath, in addition to its primary function, the cleanliness, showed off in social and political roles. The routine social needs had caused the baths as an effective tool in occurring of social events had been considered by the actors of this field, such that wealthy people, who had private baths in their houses, had attended in public bath to take advantage of benefits of this important arena. The cultural, social, medical, political and historical roles of bath were very prominent and bath buildings had always been one of the most popular public spaces in the city. It is evident that the revival in the historical baths is very important in resuscitation a part of culture and social relations in today's Iranian society.

References

- Akbari, Parivash (2012). "Haj Mohammad Rahim Qazvin Bath and Its Place Among The City's Public Baths in Qajar Era". *of letter Archaeology*, Issue 3. second stage.
- Chardin, Chardin Jean (1983). *Travelogue, Part of The Isfahan City*. Translated by Hussein Arizi. 2 nd Edition. Tehran: Negah Publications
- Colavikho (1986). Travelage of Colavikho. Translated by M. Rajbnia. Tehran: Cultural and Scientific Publications. 115 to 130.
- Dalmany, Henri René (1956). *Travel Accounts from Khorasan to Bakhtiari*, Translated and edited by Farah-Vashi, Translator Homayoon., four volumes, Tehran: Ibn Sina bookstore and Amir Kabir Publications.
- Ein Al Soltan & Gahraman Mirza (1995-1997). *Ein Al Soltan memorial Newspapers*, Vol 1. Edited by Salur, M-Afshar. Iraj Tehran.
- Fakhar Tehrani, Farhad. *Iranian Architecture in Islamic Period*. Islamic Guidance in Collaboration with Jahad Daneshgahi.
- Figueroa, Don García Disylva (1984). *Figueroa's Travelague the Spanish Ambassador at the Court of Shah Abbas*. Translated by G. Sammie. Tehran: Nashreh No Publication.
- Mullaei Tavani, Ali Reza & Gholampour, Meysam (2014). "Bath and Taking Bath in Iranian Culture". *QajarIyeh*. 121-141.
- Nadim, Mostafa, Latifi Shirdar, Tagi (2015). "Recognition of Local History of Savadkooh: Case Study on Local Public Baths". *Research on Local History in Iran*. (7). 108-118.
- Najmi, N. (1986). *Ancient Iran -Ancient Tehran*. 3. Edition. Tehran: Janzadeh Publishion.
- Naraqi, Hassan (1970). "Historical Baths of Shah Fin Garden in Kashan". *Art and People*. 101.
- Othman, Mohammad Abdul-Sattar (1997). *Madineh Islami*, Translated by Ali Cheragi. Amir Kabir Publications
- Rashid, Najafi, Atieh (2010). "The Study of the Situation of Historical Baths of Tabriz City". *Saffeh*. (51). 61-74.
- Ravandi, Mortaza (1993). *Social History of Iran, Volume V: The Economic Life of the Iranian Economy from the Beginning to the Present*. Tehran: Roozbahan.
- 17-Serena, Carla (1983). *People and Religion in Iran*. Translated by Ali Asghar Saeedi. Tehran: Pilgrims.
- Shabani, Emomali-Jabareh, Saideh (2014). "Bath and social functions in medieval period of Iran". *Study of Social and Economic History*. (1) 89–109.
- Sultani, Hossein-Tabriz (1997). Iran adobe architecture firm. Cultural Research Bureau in Tehran.
- Tabassi, M. (2007). *Identification and Analysis of Factors Affecting the Physical and Functional Changes and Architectural Performance in Iranian Bath Safavid Era*. PhD Thesis in art Research.