

Iconography in the 19th century Persian Book Illustration and Painting: the case of *Thousand and One Nights*

Questions:

- What features characterize the available historical knowledge about art in Iran? What are the benefits/ shortcomings of this approach?
- It is claimed that the Persian art of painting declined after the European influence; what is wrong with the reception of a “foreign” influence? To what extent was it mere “imitation”? Where does the agency of Persian tradition of painting stand in this narrative?



Sani ol-Molk (1814-1866)

- (one of) the first Iranian painters who studied in Europe
- productive before and after his European “contact”



- his work is a valuable platform that shifts the center of focus from mere historical collecting of data to the painting itself

- his work’s development provides the means to test the historical assertion about the demise of Persian paintings after the European influence



1. *Thousand and One Nights*

The illustrated book of *Thousand and One Nights* is the last sample of the Royal tradition of book making in Iran, produced under the supervision of Sani ol-Molk between 1852-1859.

- this book alone will not suffice partly because the scope of possibility was ultimately defined by the verbal narrative



2. Single Paintings

- single paintings were produced before and after his European experiences
- a comparative perspective for testing the European impact

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an illustration of Shahrzad from the book: *Shahrzad va Donyazad Hekayat Mikonand* [Shahrzad and Donyazad are Narrating], (vol. 1, p: 56)



Madonna di Foligno (1511-1512), Raphael



- the position of Shahrzad’s head, eyes, neck, and even her scarf seems to have been duplicated from Raphael’s painting

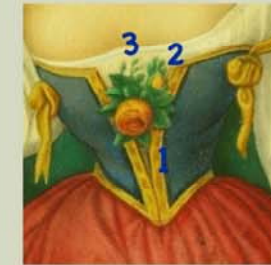


- why is Shahrzad portrayed in a combination of Iranian and European clothes (i.e. a long bell-shaped skirt with a décolleté shirt)?

“She [Shahrzad] had studied philosophy and the sciences, arts and had accomplishments; and she was pleasant and polite, wise and witty, well read and well bred” (*Thousand and One Nights*, p: 4).



- Shahrzad is to represent an educated and knowledgeable woman who is different from other women



The last illustration of the book, vol. 6



- a flower and two buds on her chest foreshadow her upcoming three sons: the vest’s golden stripe encompass the flower and buds, on the one end, and points to her womb in the form of an arrow, on the other



- the illustrations associate the presence of a black person to the concept of death in the narrative



- in this illustration the black lady is separated from Shahrzad with a wall in between. The distinction points out the fact that she is protected from death

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