

## Architecture and Literature: Links and Similarities (An Outlook over Nasir Khosrow's Safarnameh)

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### ABSTRACT

Architecture is a social form of art while literature is verbal. Reflecting on the Iranian literature would form the foundations for understanding of Iranian architecture. One of the oldest travel literatures written in Farsi, Nasir Khosrow's *Safarnameh*, is considered to be a valuable source of information on buildings, architecture, history and geography. His account of urban architecture and the expressions of buildings is in fact so comprehensive that one can depict the entities or draw them by reading the travelogue alone. The primary purpose of this article is to find a junction at which concepts of literature and architecture converge, and to extract mutual concepts of literature and architecture. The method employed is a descriptive one, grounded in historical texts in general, and the *Safarnameh* in particular. The result would be to found a connection between architecture and literature, and to alter of these forms to one another in order to reach a related sense and conception, and to comprehend the thoughts underlying works of architecture contemporary with the *Safarnameh*.

**Key words:** Safarnameh, Nasir Khosrow, Literature, Architecture.

### INTRODUCTION

#### Foreword

Various forms of art are related to one another in nature as they are all rooted in the manifestation of magnificence (Firuzabadi, *et al.*, 2011). On one hand, there is architecture with its realization of ideals within the domain of visual and intuitive conception, and on the other is literature and with its depiction of elite thoughts in the realm of intuition. The two have always been wedded in a marvelous exchange, functioning as one inimitable arena for realization and depiction of the magnificence of the universe. Where architects employ lines, forms and colors to express the magnificence, poets and authors use the lexical and lingual elements in order to highlight the same eternal truth that is the basis for visual and spiritual formation of an architectural structure (Mansuri, 2013). Biographies and travelogues are significant

sources to portray the past history of the city and its architecture (Jabbarnia, 2009). The term *travelogue* [*Safarnameh*] refers to a class of books in which the author gives an account of the cities they have visited, and of the local people's manners, beliefs, traditions and customs, or reports somebody else's journeys. In other words, it is a kind of report on the author's observations of the air of those cities or countries they have visited, and gives details on historical sites, mosques, libraries, bazaars, the elites, national and religious traditions, geographical location, population, climate, and the language(s) spoken in the lands visited (Great Islamic Encyclopedia, *idem*, Vol.4, p399).

#### Review of literature

A research was conducted back in 2013 by Dr. Fakhrossadat Khamesi Hamaneh, entitled "Similarities between Architecture and Literature: a Quest", working mainly on the aesthetical concepts

shared by both literature and architecture, concluding that there are several terms mutually used in the pair of fields, which not only are lexically the same, but also carry similar content and concept. Another pair of articles has as well been written in 2013, processing the connection between literature and architecture: “*The Link between Aesthetics of Iranian Literature and Architecture*” by Seyyed Tajeddin Mansuri, and “*Unit of Measurement for Inter-city and Intra-city Distances and Scales of Structures in Nasir Khosrow’s Safarnameh*” by Saiideh Hosseini Zadeh et al.

### The concept of art

Art is defined as the act of transmission of the artist’s emotion to other individuals of humankind. Skillful artists have constantly succeeded in manifestation of their feelings and experiences in their works in such a fashion as to excite others’ emotions, and to establish spiritual connections with their audience through mutual feelings. Artists have created novel pieces of art to make possible the understanding of what was originally subtle for the public. Photography, painting, sculptor, music, movies, plays, design, architecture and caricature are today considered as inseparable, attractive compartments of life in human communities. “Art is a human act meant to transfer the most exquisite of feelings ever reached by humans”, as put by Tolstoy. In fact, art is the external manifestation of those strong feelings experienced and analyzed by man, expressed in the form of signs, lines, motions, hints, sounds and words (Tolstoy, L. “What Is Art?” tr. Kaveh Dehgan, Tehran, Amir Kabir, p76).

### Art: the mission

According to Tolstoy, “art is not mere creation of pleasing pieces of work. Pleasure is not the most important. Rather, art is a means for humans to communicate, to continue human life, and to reach prosperity for the human individuals and communities. It is thus essential, as it connects the individuals by provoking similar feelings (Tolstoy, L. “What Is Art?” tr. Kaveh Dehgan, Tehran, Amir Kabir, p76).

Tolstoy continues to define art as the most eminent manifestation of the divine magnificence, and as the creator of the purest spiritual and intellectual feelings for man (Grace, W. J., “Response

to Literature”, tr. Behruz GHaribnejad, Tehran, Sima, p15).

### The concept of architecture and art Architecture

Lexically originating from Arabic, the word *me’mâri* [architecture] is derived from *a-ma-ra*, meaning to build and to make prosperous. The Farsi equivalents are *mehrâzi* and *vâlâdgari*. *Mehrâz* is formed up from *meh+râz*, the former meaning *great*, and the latter, constructor. Architecture is thus defined as the art and technique of designing and constructing buildings, urban spaces and other exterior and interior areas in order to provide a uniform reply to both practical and aesthetical demands. It is a social form of art, and one of its many approaches is the historical one, whose main purpose is to determine the history of a given structure, examining its social, political, cultural and economic backdrops. This approach states that theory of architecture is what people say or write on a topic. As this approach holds, the best method for compilation of theoretical foundations is to gather and study historical contexts, to interpret various statements, to assess the relative value of the statements, and finally, to extract conclusions in order to create theories. As a result, this approach is dedicated to deriving the architectural scheme from written texts and from historical features of a given structure (Jamshidi, M. & Jamshidi, M., 2013).

### Literature

Literature is outlined as “*the manifestation and expression of thoughts, feelings and emotions through words in a variety of forms*”. One of the most comprehensive definitions is probably the one that states, “*Literature of a given human society is a collection of their artistic manifestations of any nature, expressed in the form of descriptive words*” (Iman, L. 1973).

Literature is referred to as the most fundamental element of art, deeply influencing all other disciplines. At times, it comes together with history, but is an incumbent component of civilization as the influence of their culture and civilization is evident in the literature of any community. This is proved by clearly visible reflection of states, behavior, traditions and customs of a community in their literature (Saiidi, S. & Purdayayii, A., 2013). Thus,

in any form, literature is manifestation of life, ideals and values on which personal and social life is based (Purjafar Chelikhani, M., (2011).

Literature is one art form in which the author uses words to create a piece of art or literary work of their emotions and imagination.

#### **Literature: the mission**

Sound, prolific literary works have deep influence on human communities and establish deeply rooted links with human individuals. Literature has always been appreciated as the means for expression and promotion of social and human values. It is meant to introduce better ways of living, and to encourage efforts for perfection and development through education and learning, criticism, and correction, and through establishment of unity, affection and sympathy. It has always been attempting to lead people towards magnificent human values. According to Dr. Mohammad Ali Eslami Nodushan, "*adab* [whose plural form is *adabiyât*, i.e. *literature*] was originally defined as manners and orders for living well, from which was derived artistic *adab* (i.e. creation of literary works). In fact, inherent *adab* and acquired *adab* were intertwined into *adabiyât* [literature], which in turn was known as a means for living a better and finer life."

Literature has always been closely linked with morality, together highlighting the significance of self-realization. As self-realization is referred to as the prerequisite to theology in the Islamic instructions, the importance of literature in internalization and development of religious and moral values is even further emphasized (Zarrinkub, A., 1995). It can be thus concluded the aim of literature is to use fine words and delicate pieces of writing in order to reach social prosperity and to establish morality (Jamshidi, M. & Jamshidi, M., 2013).

In the same manner, it can be claimed that literature and art have all their missions and aims in common, are similar in several ways, and there is practically no border between them. Even one can say that literature is a part of art, but one that has developed and expanded so far as to become a subject to be independently taught and studied in educational institutions such as schools and

universities. It is, however, categorized as a form of art by Aristotle as well: a verbal art form as compared to handicrafts, visual arts, fine arts, and acoustics.

#### **Literature and interdisciplinary studies**

Literature covers a very wide domain as for subjects, and is linked to several disciplines. As a result, a variety of methods could be applied in the study of literature. In other words, most literary issues are multidimensional, and rooted as well in other disciplines. Literature scrutinizes several subjects such as youth and old age, death, love, and in short, the whole life with all its diversity. That is why it has never been one purely independent discipline, and has always been examined in connection with others (Farhangi, S, & Rahmdel, G. 2008).

#### **Literature and architecture: shared concepts and terminology**

##### **Atmosphere/space**

The former term can refer to physical space and the latter, to the feeling created by emotional or spiritual stimuli. A common aim in all forms of art is to fashion a spiritual atmosphere (Adinefar, A. *et al*, 2014), and space is of particular significance in architecture. An architect makes all efforts in order to create a variety of spaces in such a way to suggest a variety of atmospheres, just as done by a piece of poetry in creation of mystical, illuminative, and divine air (Khamesi Hamaneh, F., (2013). The literary atmosphere is as well generated by the totality of the piece, and is the entire aesthetical influence of a literary or art work, the air dominating it, and the emotional effect and attraction it has for the audience. In general, the mood created for the reader upon reading of a literary item is referred to as atmosphere (Rezaii, A., 2003).

It goes without saying that although the two terms are applied in literature and architecture differently, and despite the minor functional differences between the pair, the similarities between them are inalienable in the creation of a mental atmosphere for the reader/ beholder based on the creators' viewpoints and the dominant cultural backdrops.

##### **Motion**

Motion in art is a means for comprehending the concept of space, and all art forms are created

through creation of space. In a given literary text deemed as fine, one can find traces of style showing the motion and dynamism and fluency, as well as hints of a movement towards one's ego, of a robust unity originating from an inner source tightly connected and closely related to the origin of motion in the literary text (Atefrad, M., 2007). In architecture, motion is a tool for the architect to perceive and realize the spaces they have in mind, and for the beholder to understand the spaces through motions. Ultimately, it is the very nature of moving within the spaces that leads the mind to certain imaginations (Khalilinia, R. 2007).

### Form or shape

The terms *form* or *shape* are used to define the combination of elements which together, create a wholesome, dynamic ensemble. Form is the feature that brings about harmony between elements (Alemzadeh, H., 2007). In architecture, shape refers to the 3-dimensional, material mass of an object that features a certain weight. While it is usually used to talk about the outer outline of structures, the inner space possesses the shape of its own. In literature, form is the outer structure of a literary work. In Moin Farsi dictionary, shape is defined as the combination of elements which form up a single complex. The method employed to establish harmony between these elements brings a unique character into this complex. Shape or form is the method used in the presentation and expression of a given piece of art or literature, referring in fact to the style and structure of either (Rezaii, A., 2003).

### Style

Style in literature is the process through which thoughts are expressed. Styles of a certain individual, era, school, or a nation or community are figuratively used to entitle certain styles of prose or poetry. Style has been defined in a variety of ways, one of which being the particular manner a writer or poet adopts in order to express themselves. It can be generally explained as a specific way of a poet or author in conception and expression of their thought in the form of word combinations, through certain choice of words and phrases (Rezaii, A., 2003). Style in architecture closely follows the same label and most features. What follows is a brief account of the aforesaid. However, it is to be taken into consideration that elaborating on every single

similarity and difference between the definitions of style in the pair of fields calls for a separate work of writing.

For the sake of study and discussion, scholars of architecture and art history have mainly entitled the 14-century length of post-Islamic Iranian span of art and architecture after the ruling dynasties of the periods, thus naming the various periods as the early centuries, the Seljukid, the Mongolians (Iranian, Mongolian, the Ilkhanid), the Timurid, the Safavid, and the Qajar. In his 1968 article, "*Stylistics of Iranian Architecture*" Dr. Mohammad Karim Pirnia knowingly used the term style for the first time, introducing new phrases to the study of the history of Iranian post-Islamic architecture, in order to pick appropriate, rationally formed names for a number of structures constructed in the same style. He chose to name the architectural styles after poetry styles according to the area where they had been born: Khorasani, Razi, Azeri, and Isfahani.

### Idea

In architecture, idea is the initial tendency of mind towards certain patterns for formation of a volume, solving of a problem, creation of a space, or design the overall outline of a structure. Some outstanding examples of this are the inspiration of bionic-style architects by the shapes of living things, or that of Islamic-era architects by natural, floral patterns. Idea in literature is to express a subject, and to communicate moral, political or critical concepts through simile or metaphors involving one or more incidents or persons (Khalilinia, R. 2007).

### Hierarchy

Adjacency of patterns in Iranian architecture has always been decided in accordance with certain hierarchies rooted in certain disciplines and relations partially based on some corporal and functional features of the spaces. The same hierarchical order has been observed in Iranian traditional music, both in the alteration of musical forms and in the sequence of the *radif* [the traditional repertory of Iranian music] (Adinehfar, A. *et al.*, 2014).

### Rhythm

Rhythm is one fundamental element in music which depends on the time. A given piece of music is recognizable more by its rhythm rather

than its notes. Rhythm thus forms the inseparable component of music, delivering motion to it and affecting our feel and sense of the piece<sup>7</sup>. Rhythm in architecture can be spotted in its most rudimentary form in the repeated pattern of elements along a straight line. Halting and reclining are functional elements used in architecture in order to suggest a sense of repose, which is at times created by addition of certain elements to the whole ensemble and by drawing of the observers' attention (Seraj, H., 2000).

### Nasir Khosrow

Hakim Nasir bin Khosrow bin Harith al-Qobadiani al-Balkhi al-Marvzi, known as Abu Moin and referred to as Hujjat was born in the month of Zul-qa'ada of the year 394 AH, corresponding Tir or Mordad of 382 AH S, [c. 1003 AD] in Qobadiyon, near Balkh, and passed away some time after the year 460, most probably in 481, in Yamagan near Badakhshan (Forunzafar, B., 1990). He considers speech as a general art, and writing as a special one, particular to human. Speech is considered as more general since other animals can produce sounds and voiced messages indicating either their happiness or the opposite, while one differentiating point between human and other animals is the former's speech is more elaborate, being used in order to communicate inner feelings and concepts (Heydari, F. 2012).

### Signs of genius in Nasir Khosrow's prose

Fluency: clarity of messages and fluency of prose are among the features that stand out in his written works. He was not much obsessed with the use of literary figures and rhetorics, but they were innate parts of his prose.

Truthfulness: this scholar values nothing above honesty and no words beyond the truth, and sees truthfulness as the most imperative criteria in his work.

Proportion of word-sense: appropriate choice of words and senses is seen as the material for a poet's literary work, decided by their skill and literary talents. Nasir Khosrow demonstrates unbeatable ability in the choice and combination and words and senses reflected in the abundance and consistency of his combination of words and the most profound senses (Shabani, A., & Radmanesh,

A., 2013).

Novelty: his life and history of literary works clearly prove that he not only avoided merely following his precedents, but also took novelty to such a level as to introduce him as the founder of a revolutionary vanguard in the realm of speech and composition (Firuz, S. 1992).

Mastery over poetry and prose: not many of poets were as eloquent as he was both in poetry and prose, as is evident in his legacy of both (Shabani, A., & Radmanesh, A., 2013).

A given author's eloquence is mainly based on their fund of words; the greater an author, the more considerable is their lexical treasure. A prominent writer does not seek to impress by the choice of big words; rather, they enjoy their vast lexicon. They are fond of collecting words and lexical items of a considerably great variety, and this is what they build their works upon as well as their confidence. Also, prominent authors may as well create and coin their very own terms (Tahmasbi, F, & Amin N.).

### Nasir Khosrow's Safarnameh

Writing travelogue is a long-lived tradition. One of the oldest of the type written in Farsi is that of Nasir Khosrow. Enjoying a perfectly fluent prose and composition, it contains valuable information about geography, traditions and customs, anthropology, etc. His account of urban architecture and the expressions of buildings is in fact so comprehensive that one can depict the entities or draw them by reading the travelogue alone. For those who intend to study the revolution of Islamic art, the Safarnameh is a valuable, reliable source providing an accurate account of buildings, architecture and [their] considerable fineness.

### Features of the Safarnameh

This book dates back to the earliest times of Farsi prose, i.e. the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries and the first half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century AH, whose origin is rooted in Khorasan. The prose in this era is simple, fluent, and void of any type of literary crafts, as it is defined to be "plain, eloquent, and not far from colloquial language, bare of any rhyme, rhythm, verbal cadence or any other type of lexical or conceptual complexity". This

is as well the type of prose Nasir Khosrow has opted for (Rastegar Fassai, M.). Though he had never been educated in architecture and urban design, and his domain of knowledge would confine to style, painting, poetry, literature and secretaryship, he has provided accurate, detailed information on urban design and architecture (Nazari, J, 2005). He has successfully presented images of the cities he has visited, though mainly including the physical features and structural components of the cities rather than historical accounts. At times, he suffices to a very short description of the city, while in some other instances he gives a fully picturesque explanation of the city and its geographical location (Qolami, K, & Dadkhah, H.). It is to be noted that he was a skillful painter, and has given perfect attention to the description of fortifications, mosques and some other structures, while he has failed to give that of the architecture and conditions of bazaars (Amir Gassemi, M. 2003). Archeological studies prove ramparts, fortifications and citadels to have been among main components of urban plans in the cities of early- to middle-Islamic ages (Taqavi, A. 2010).

Characteristics of the Safarnameh can be briefly listed as follows:

1. Truthfulness in the account of facts, even those spiting the author
2. Brevity and avoiding verbosity
3. Careful observation and description of the observations
4. Simple, eloquent prose
5. Objectivity in giving account of issues

Two points that stand out in the Safarnameh:

1. In most cases, he mentions the dates both according to the Islamic/Arabian calendar and to the Persian one.
2. He has unbeatable, even obsessive scrutiny in measurements and descriptions.

### CONCLUSION

Contemplating on the literature of Iran is the foundation to understanding of concepts and ideas. That is, in order to obtain a perfect understanding of the thoughts underlying the architectural works

and designs of any given era, one needs to gain an understanding of the philosophers, mystics and scholars of the time and their written works, which are considered the most significant sources in this regard. Thus, the written works of the prolific authors of the very era must be taken into careful consideration as well as those of the preceding and following periods. Farsi literature is undoubtedly one of the best developed in the world, dealing with a great variety of social issues fluently and eloquently both in poem and prose long before western scholars did. That is why Iranian scholars and researchers need to deeply concentrate on this rich legacy in order to restore their identity. Literature is an expression of all that is fine and delicate.

Nasir Khosrow has truthfully and unbiasedly reported on many architectural works just like a well-educated, well-experienced architect as well as a scholar well-proficient in economy and sociology. He has closely observed the conditions of cities, measurements, areas and distances, architectural styles, historical buildings, and people's means of livelihood, trading, and products, hardly missing any points.

Architecture, as the living culture of man on earth, and literature as the expression of man's thoughts and imagination have both established in a linguistic connection with their audience. Poets and authors enchant the readers with the charm of their words, and so does the architect by the creation of spaces and drawing the beholders' attention. This is how they both produce a discourse which starts in architecture by creation of an exquisite work, and reaches perfection by impressing the observer. Architecture is the expression of materialization in literature, and literature is the account of imagination in architecture. What assists the pair in establishing links to human thoughts and emotions is the application of criteria used by human to lead him to an exalting end. On one hand, literature uses its expression to recount a story for man which is realized before their eyes just as piece of artwork. On the other, architecture creates the very spaces for the emergence of that artwork; spaces that can be readable like a marvelous piece of literature.

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