

Persian translation of this paper entitled:
 سنجش امکان بهره‌گیری از روش اروین پانوفسکی در خوانش
 نماهای خانه‌های تاریخی ایران
 is also published in this issue of journal.

Original Research Article

Evaluating the Feasibility of Using Erwin Panofsky's Method in Reading the Facades of Persian Historic Houses*

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Received: 05/05/2020 ; revised: 14/06/2020 ; accepted: 19/08/2020 ; available online: 2021/01/20

Abstract

Problem statement: In researches based on the history of Persian architecture, historic resources that a researcher can rely on for extracting needed information and conducting such studies - except historic buildings themselves- are generally limited. Thus, getting to know, acquiring complete knowledge, and being skilled in the methodologies that can help to extract historical information from historic buildings through reading them, seem necessary. Among the methodologies known and used by researchers for reading historic works of art, Iconology of Erwin Panofsky is the one that seeks the meaning of the work as opposed to its form. This method which has three strata, although in Iran, has been used in historical-interpretive studies in the fields of miniature painting, carpet, or historical objects, less has been used in studies in the field of Persian historic architecture.

Research objective: This research primarily seeks to understand if Panofsky's iconology is generally applicable for the researches in the field of history of architecture as the research methodology; and secondly, investigates if the method is applicable specifically for studying facades of historic Persian houses, and evaluates the advantages and limitations of the method while being used in this specific field.

Research method: Having assured about the general applicability of iconology as a methodology for the history of architecture studies, through performing library research, we read a façade of a Qajar- Pahlavi house in Tabriz as a case study, according to three strata of the method.

Conclusion: The results indicate that applying Panofsky's Iconology to the history of architecture studies as the research methodology is prevalent. They also show that it is applicable especially for studying facades of Persian historic houses; however, the researcher might confront some limitations along with the advantages of using this method.

Keywords: *Iconology, reading, Erwin Panofsky's method, Facade, Historic houses.*

* This article is extracted from Somayeh Jalali-e Milani's Ph.D. thesis entitled "Understanding the Architectural Mentalities at Qajar Era about House Facade based upon Reading the Facades of Tabriz Sorkhab Zone Houses" which is being done under supervision of Dr. Ahad

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Introduction

“Architectural history is like other histories in that it is concerned with understanding and finding explanations for the past. Where it differs is like the evidence available and in the techniques that have been developed to evaluate that evidence” (Conway & Roanisch, 1994, 29). “Buildings themselves provide evidence of their history” (*ibid.*, 39). For historians, they have the status of historical documents that offer information which is like the written explanation of a historical event (Golijani Moghaddam, 2005, 61). However, sometimes understanding this evidence turns to a hard and complicated task (Conway & Roanisch, 1994, 39). Therefore various methodologies are put forward for historians to read such evidence. Adams (2016) introduced six methodologies that can be applied in art and architecture history studies: 1. Formalism and style 2. Iconography 3. Contextual approaches 4. Biography and autobiography 5. Semiotics 6. Psychoanalysis. Each of them can offer the historian a bunch of features and help to various meanings of a work of art get revealed. For instance, formalist approach in art historiography helps that a form be studied relying on particular principles, with no other factors involved, except mere aesthetical factors, while contextual approaches such as Marxist approach follows reading works of art and architecture associated with political and social contexts of them, and studying their interdependence (*ibid.*). However, in researches accomplished in the field of Persian historic architecture, little diversity can be noticed; and in cases in which approaches other than formalism have been applied, instances can be found, that have used the approach more or less unconsciously and without going through a cohesive and logical process (Nari Ghomi, 2015). Consequently, a question arises, that is, if the reason of these various approaches not being used in a methodical way, is being not applicable in the field of history of architecture, or whether the reason must be sought as a result of neglecting these approaches and ignoring their advantages.

One of the prevalent approaches used for reading works of art for understanding their meanings is

iconology, which has been proposed by Erwin Panofsky as an integrated and systematic methodology in format of three strata. Searching within Persian resources, we can find studies in the field of art history, which have been accomplished relying on this approach; however, on history of architecture, few can be discovered among them. Hence, specifically, this question arises: knowing that definitions on iconology have emphasized its applicability for visual arts (Van Straten, 1994, 12), isn't it applicable as a research methodology for the studies on the history of architecture?

As a part of the evidence on Persian historic architecture, building facades are comprising untold meanings that can be read to provide a better understanding of Persian historic architecture. Therefore this research pursues making sure about the general efficiency of the iconological approach in studies on architecture history, and then investigating the feasibility of applying this methodology to studies on house facades in Persian historic architecture to evaluate its advantages and limitations in this specific field.

It is assumed that facades in Persian historic architecture can be read through applying three strata of Panofsky's method so that their hidden meanings can be perceived; however, the purpose of applying this method is using the general structure of its three strata and it will be fulfilled through simulating their step by step procedure to attain an organized process in such studies.

Research questions

1. Is Erwin Panofsky's iconology as the research methodology applicable in the field of architecture history?
2. Can this methodology be applied specifically for studying and reading facades of Persian historic houses? What are the limitations and advantages of it?

Research method

This research was accomplished through using case study methodology. To fulfill the research objective,

after having reviewed Erwin Panofsky's viewpoints as the theoretical framework, at first we investigated the general applicability of his method in studies on history of architecture through performing a library research and reviewing non- Iranian studies associated with this particular field; and then for examining the applicability of iconological approach in studying Persian historic facades, we selected and read a façade of a Qajar-Pahlavi house in Sorkhab zone of Tabriz, according to the triple strata, proposed by Panofsky so that the opportunities and limitations of the approach can be appraised.

Research background

As already mentioned, among Persian studies conducted in the field of architecture, no study examining the applicability of iconology in this field or applying the method to studying a work of architecture was discovered. However, in other fields associated with art, various cases can be found. For example, Nasri (2012) investigated the method in art history studies, its capacities, and the criticisms brought up for it. Abdi (2012) fully described this methodology and then by applying this, studied some Persian miniature paintings. Also, Namvar Motlagh (2012) considered the method and its analytical background. Moreover, we can mention other studies investigating a work of art such as a miniature painting, texture, or other historic things, by Panofsky's methodology. For instance, Namazalizadeh and Mousavilar (2019) examined a specific miniature on Seljuk pottery with an iconological approach. What's more, Ghani and Mehrabi (2018) analyzed and interpreted a Bakhtiari Pictorial carpet using this method.

Theoretical framework

• An overview of Panofsky's Iconology

"Iconology is that branch of the history of art which concerns itself with the subject matter or meaning of works of art, as opposed to their form" (Panofsky, 1955, 26). From a general viewpoint, this branch is about studying symbolic and allegorical images and representation

(Namvar Motlagh, 2012). The term Icon² originates from the Greek language in which it means image. In this way, the term "Iconology" besides "Iconography", signifies a branch of knowledge that pursues explaining images (Nasri, 2012). Beginning researches on this field is ascribed to the studies of Cesare Ripa in the 16th century which was published in a book entitled *Iconologia*. This book was an encyclopedia containing artistic themes and allegorical indices that were collected for the use of artists and art lovers (Abdi, 2012). However, iconology, as a particular methodology for studies on the history of art, was proposed by Aby Warburg and Erwin Panofsky, within the research activities of Warburg school³. Warburg school researchers emphasized the necessity of using mythology, literature, and social and political history in the process of analyzing works of art (Nasri, 2012). One of the most leading of these researchers was Erwin Panofsky who established an iconological approach in the history of art studies. According to this method, he proposed three strata for reading works of art and understanding the meaning hidden in them: 1. Pre-iconographical description 2. Iconographical analysis 3. Iconological interpretation.

At the first stratum - pre-iconographical description- the researchers describe the work of art based on its tangible shape and forms, relying on their "practical experience". They can acquire "factual subject matter" through describing the colors, shapes, surfaces, and their special configuration, and attain "expressional subject matter" through describing concepts associated with emotional states such as anger, happiness, etc. that is perceived from the work of art. Panofsky put these two types of meaning in a group called "primary or natural meaning". During the process of perceiving this meaning, although the researchers need to apply their practical experience, in some cases for prevention from mistakes being occurred, they must rely on their knowledge about different styles applied in the distinct historical period – or other words, how objects and events were expressed- and use a corrective principle,

which Panofsky titles as “history of style” (Panofsky, 1955, 28- 33).

At the second stratum- iconographical analysis-the researchers seek hidden meanings in the work of art through understanding semantic conventions in it, and the cultural context in which the work of art has been created.

Through studying symbols and allegories that the artist has been aware of their meanings and used them deliberately in a work of art (Nasri, 2012, 13), the researchers try to achieve the “conventional or secondary meaning” of the work of art. The necessary condition for such analysis is having enough knowledge about symbolic and allegorical concepts that have been transferred through “literary sources or oral tradition”. This stratum is “the analysis of systematic associations of the motif and literary content” (Hasenmueller, 1978, 291). For correcting the possible mistakes of this level of reading, Panofsky suggests checking “history of types”, which means the researchers should study about the different ways through which specific concepts and themes in literary sources were expressed during varying historical conditions (Panofsky, 1955, 28-35).

At the third stratum -iconological interpretation-the researchers seek a category of hidden meanings associated with national and religious features or philosophical attitudes in a work of art which have been developed during various periods and different social classes, formed the worldview of the artist and reflected on the work of art by him/her unconsciously (Abdi, 2012). Panofsky called this category “intrinsic meaning or content”. In this level, the work of art is recognized as a reflection of symbolic values of an era or period, therefore the variations in the style of artistic expression of a subject in different periods are ascribed to the evolutions of basic attitudes of each period (Kippenberg, 1987). Thus for iconological interpretation, the researchers should apply a vast number of documents and evidence-based on other fields of study, and identify major intellectual, ideological, religious, and philosophical structures of the context in which the work of art has been

created. Consequently, the approach applied to this stratum is interdisciplinary (Mokhtarian, 2016). For correcting the possible mistakes in this stratum, Panofsky suggested studying “history of cultural symptoms or symbols”; which means the researcher should gain insight into the ways through which the concepts during different historical contexts have been represented in the shape of cultural symbols and symptoms (Panofsky, 1955, 38); (Table 1).

Iconology in studies based on the history of architecture: reviewing the studies accomplished in this field

Panofsky proposed his method on the history of renaissance and medieval art studies; therefore a question arises, that is, if his method is applicable for the studies on the history of architecture. Having a glance at the list of the books and articles written by Panofsky will resolve such a feeling of uncertainty, as among these books and articles there are items that have taken into account medieval and renaissance architecture. One example is a book section entitled Neoplatonic Movement and Michelangelo which has been published in 1939. In this essay, Panofsky tried to find a relationship between Michelangelo’s Neoplatonic viewpoints and his sculptures and architectural works through an iconographical analysis (Panofsky, 2018). Another example of Panofsky’s studies on history of architecture is a book entitled Abbot Sugar on the Abbey Church of St. Denis and its Treasures published in 1946. In this book Panofsky considered the influence of Sugar’s⁴ philosophical and theological viewpoints on the formation of church of St. Denis, and since the beginning of Gothic style was ascribed to the architecture of this church, Panofsky related Sugar’s viewpoints with the beginning of Gothic style, attempting to find correspondence between above-mentioned viewpoints and this style (Hosseini Dastjerdi, 2016). It should be mentioned that such approaches toward historiography -ascribing the beginning of an architectural style to viewpoints of a specific person- have been criticized in some ways. For example, Gadamer has considered it an example of the

Table1. Three Strata of Iconological Reading. Source: Panofsky, 1955.

Various Meanings Hidden in a Work of Art	Method of Attaining the Meaning	Equipment for Attaining the Meaning	Corrective Principles
Primary or Natural Meaning	Pre-Iconographical description	Applying practical experience	Referring to the history of style
Secondary or Conventional Meaning	Iconographical analysis	Applying knowledge of literary sources	Referring to history of types
Intrinsic Meaning of Content	Iconological interpretation	Applying the knowledge to essential tendencies of the human mind	Referring to history of symptoms or symbols

impact of Hegelian heritage on historiography which attempted to discover continuity in history (*ibid.*). Another noticeable study accomplished by Panofsky in the field of architecture is a book entitled Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism published in 1951. In this book he tried to find evidence for proving a theory which demonstrated a relationship between Gothic style architectural features and Medieval architects' thoughts nourished in scholasticism⁵. As a matter of fact, Panofsky in this book asserted that controlling principles and methods of procedure of scholasticism had been assimilated as mental habits by the architects and expressed by them in buildings. Certain essentials of the concomitant architectural style and structure had provided the visible and tangible equivalents of the philosophical ideas, forms and modes. So Panofsky tried to derive the principals and methods of scholasticism and explained the relationship between these principles and the ones used in the architecture of Gothic iconic buildings (Bober, 1953, 310). For example, he suggested 1. totality 2. arrangement according to a system of homologous parts and parts of parts 3. distinctness and deductive cogency as three requirements of the critical thinking equivalent with 1. sufficient enumeration 2. sufficient articulation and 3. sufficient interrelation in the architecture of Gothic churches (*ibid.*, 311). Such an approach had met some criticisms. For example, Holly (1985, 161-162) thought that Panofsky- without the slightest self-awareness- had equated worldview of the creator of the work of art with his understanding of philosophical doctrines "to be faithful to (his) theoretical views

(about iconology), he should have been interested primarily in how larger worldviews affect not only (the work of art) but philosophical doctrine as well. Among Panofsky's studies, some cases directly examine the facades of specific buildings. Two Façade Designs by Domenico Beccafumi and the Problem of Mannerism in Architecture is an example of such researches in which Panofsky tried to explain the manifestation of Mannerism in architecture and its reasons through an iconographic study (Panofsky, 1955). In addition to Panofsky's researches in history of art, it is said that his viewpoints have been expanded into the architectural studies by Krautheimer. In an article called An Introduction to Iconography of Medieval Architecture published in 1942, Khrautheimer- influenced by Panofsky and Warburg's viewpoints- pursued the capabilities and capacities of iconography through presenting a method for studying Medieval works of architecture (Mccurach, 2011). Moreover, another article can be mentioned here, entitled Medieval Architecture and Meaning: The Limits of Iconography written by Crossly and published in 1988, in which the author examined the application and limitations of iconography in studies based on Medieval architecture (Crossley, 1988); a point which represents the prevalence of taking advantage of this method in art history studies, years after being proposed by Warburg school researchers. Also another research entitled Value of Formal and Iconological Approaches for Conceptualization of Style Problem in Architecture should be mentioned, in which the author tried to examine the capacities of each of the

two approaches for describing architectural styles (Linda, 2015). Furthermore, taking advantage of this methodology is observable in the field of history of Islamic architecture. For example, Grabar in his book *The Art and Architecture of Islam 650-1250* presented a section called “the Iconography of Islamic Architecture”. Also in an article entitled *The Qubbat al-Khadra and the Iconography of Height in Early Islamic Architecture*, Bloom applied an iconographical approach⁶ (Bloom, 1993). A point that should be noticed in researches fulfilled by applying such a methodology, is the fact that, in these researches, usually the word iconography is used instead of iconology. Gombrich -as a researcher of Warburg school- defined the difference between iconography and iconology this way: “Iconology involves the reconstruction of an entire program and therefore encompasses more than a single text. It is contained within a context, which includes a cultural as well as an artistic setting” (Adams, 2016, 44). Panofsky himself termed iconology “iconography in deeper sense” (Nasri, 2012). Based on what discussed so far, it seems that both iconography and iconology have the applicability in history of art researches. While the iconographical studies in architecture generally notice the semantic conventions which architects have applied more or less consciously for the architecture of buildings, iconological studies consider the socio- cultural features of the building context, that is represented unconsciously in a work of architecture, through influencing architect’s mindset and worldview. Ultimately despite the criticisms brought up for Panofsky’s iconology, this method is still one of the prominent methodologies in the field of art history, which can assist the researcher understand at least some parts of meanings hidden in a work of art, through a lot of emphasis on the significance of deep and comprehensive studies on human texts and documents, and also because of presenting a reliable and secure method for interpretation.

Reading facades of Persian historic houses relying on Panofsky’s method

The following is an attempt to examine three levels

of meaning in façade of a Qajar-Pahlavi house, relying on Panofsky’s method, through following its proposed strata, step by step. For this purpose, a façade of Sharbat-Oqli House -located in the Sorkhab zone of Tabriz, and built during late Qajar to early Pahlavi period- has been chosen as a case study and has been described, analyzed and interpreted using an iconological approach. The house has belonged to Haj Majid Sharbat-Oqli who was a carpet trader and a guide for pilgrims of House of God in Mecca. It has two facades facing different north and south passages. Each of the facades includes an entrance from the passage into the house. The façade as the case study in this research is the south one relating to the part of the house which -as a long corridor shared with two other neighbors- provides the connection between inside the house and the passage. (Figs. 1&2)

A Pre-Iconographical description of façade in Persian historic architecture:

As already mentioned, the purpose of the pre-iconographical description for a work of architecture is to reach its primary or natural meaning by describing its tangible and expressional features, relying on practical experience and history of style (Panofsky, 2018).

So it should be examined which subjects can provide the practical experience required for the pre-iconographical description of Sharbat-Oqli House façade; how the natural meaning of this façade is achievable and how the history of style can come to help for avoiding mistakes.

In texts relating to theoretical foundations of architecture, some cases describe the elements and principles shaping a façade. These cases can constitute the practical experience of façade architecture and provide a framework for describing it. For example, Tavassoli (1997) has mentioned concepts such as order, unity, composition, visual stability, balance, scale, proportion, and harmony as principles that can be achieved through a proper placing of the elements of façade such as openings. As another example, Mozayeni (1994) proposed expressional



Fig. 1. Plan of Sharbat-Oqli House and the location of the façade as the case study in this article. Source: <https://eachto.ir/index.php/miras/banaha>.



Fig. 2. The façade facing toward north passage. Photo: Somayeh Jalali-e Milani, 2016.

criteria for designing a favorable façade such as excitement, diversity, identifiability, memorability, vitality, identity, imaginability, readability, flexibility, simplicity, clarity, the domination of a part of the form, adaptability with the environment, meaningfulness and informativeness. Hence, relying on the knowledge obtained from studying such topics- which shape the practical experience, a history of architecture researcher can have an iconographical

description about a specific façade. Then for describing the formal and experimental features of a Persian historic house façade, a framework including the elements and principles of façade architecture can be presented which organizes the practical experience and makes the description more feasible (Table. 2). To clarify the procedure, in the following, a part of pre-iconographical description of Sharbat- Oqli House façade will be presented:

Facade has a symmetric structure. A wall setback is observable in the middle, which has developed into a brick arch with a slight depth. At the upper part of the arch, there is a plaster molding consisting of herbal and animal shapes and under the molding a door has been placed exactly at the center of the facade. However other plaster moldings are seen on two sides of the arch with the shape of flower vases which provide the balance and symmetry reinforced by moldings with fewer details on lower parts of the facade. The composition of all of these elements leads to the observer’s understanding of the middle part as the main entrance of the building, which according to Panofsky can be presumed as a factual meaning of this façade; it is worth mentioning that this entrance is particularly more elaborate in comparison to the north entrance of Sharbat-Oqli House (Fig. 3).

To describe the expressional subject matter of a work of art, Panofsky suggests “the homelike and peaceful atmosphere of an interior” (Panofsky, 1955, 28) as an example that is specifically related to architecture. About facade of the Sharbat-Oqli House, an emphasis on vertical axis is observable due to the middle arch, vertical lines and stretched plaster moldings on two sides, although it has been balanced to some extent by horizontal lines of coping and plinth. This emphasis on vertical axis accompanied by the elaborate plaster ornaments can persuade the observer to describe this facade using expressions such as inviting, delicate and grandiose.

However, there is a noticeable point: There are two square surfaces at both sides of the façade, covered with a uniform texture of gravel (Fig. 4). This part is a case which our practical experience is insufficient

Table 2. Facade components in Persian Historic Houses, Which can be Examined for Pre-iconographic Description of a Facade. Source: authors.

Facade Components each component	The items that can be examined within
Color, Texture and Material	Examining materials, textures and colors selected for various parts of façade
Lines	Examining horizontal and vertical lines on façade such as skyline, ground line, floor separator lines and the lines separating different parts of the facade
Surfaces and Layers	Examining setbacks, protrusions, and porosities on façade, which constitute various surfaces and layers for a facade
Facade Composition	Examining the relation between entrances, windows, balconies, and other details of a façade such as ornaments
Ornaments	Examining the patterns applied for ornaments

for understanding the primary meaning. According to Panofsky’s method, for this purpose, some evidence related to this specific part- for instance other historic facades, old remaining photos of facades or written historical resources related to façade architecture- should be found. Furthermore, studying history of façade style in Persian architecture can prevent probable mistakes while describing this part of the façade.

An Iconographical analysis of house façade in Persian historic architecture

Panofsky presumes that it is essential for the researcher to be equipped with knowledge of literary sources to fulfill an iconographical analysis on a work of art (architecture). In fact, through relying on knowledge about the literary sources, based on the cultural context of the work of art, the researcher can perceive the conventional meaning hidden in objects. Because within the cultural context, the objects have gained conventional meanings over time, and these meanings have been reflected in literary sources, there is a possibility for these objects or meanings to keep or lose their functionalities in the current era. If their functionalities have been lost, referring to literary sources can make it possible to figure out their meanings. Then for performing an iconographical analysis on Sharbat-Oqli House façade, sufficient knowledge about its cultural context and conventional

meanings of its elements and details is required. Otherwise, what is presented as the secondary meaning of the façade would be just an analysis based on the researcher’s personal impression. Thus, in the following, a part of iconographical analysis of Sharbat-Oqli House façade is presented:

On both sides of entrance door, due to a setback on this part of façade and the extension of the plinths, two platforms have been created with medium depths. Researchers unfamiliar with Persian culture might perceive them just as ordinary platforms. But there is a possibility that they confront the term Pir-Neshin⁷ inside the texts associated with Persian historic architecture⁸; a term which indicates such platforms used –usually for old people- to sit, for refreshment, contemplation for a better perception of façade, and interaction with other people (Mahdavi-pour, Jafari & Saadati, 2013).. However, for getting assured about such functionality for the platforms, according to Panofsky’s recommendation in the second stratum, referring to Persian literary sources will be useful. After searching inside them, it turns out that no indication of this word can be found. Even in Persian dictionaries or specialized Persian Architecture dictionaries, the word wouldn’t be found. Sultanzade (1999, 94) stated that it was prevalent in some areas of Iran to call the platforms “Khajeh-Neshin”⁹ and Pirnia (2007, 377) named them “Pakhoreh”. Nevertheless, no address about the next two words can be found in literary sources either. But inside them, some cases can be noticed which indicate the behavior of sitting at the door of somebody’s house, and repetition of these cases reflected in various sources, related to different historical periods, implies the behavior being generalized in Persian culture as an action involving a specific meaning. The following poems are some examples of these cases:

*Chon Bedid ân Shâh-e mâ bar Dar neshaste Bandegân
Vân dar az Shekli ke Nomidi Dahad Moshtâq ra*
[When our king saw the slaves sitting at the door
In such a way that disappointed the enthusiasts]

(Molavi)

ar dar-e arbâb-e bi-morovvat-e donyâ

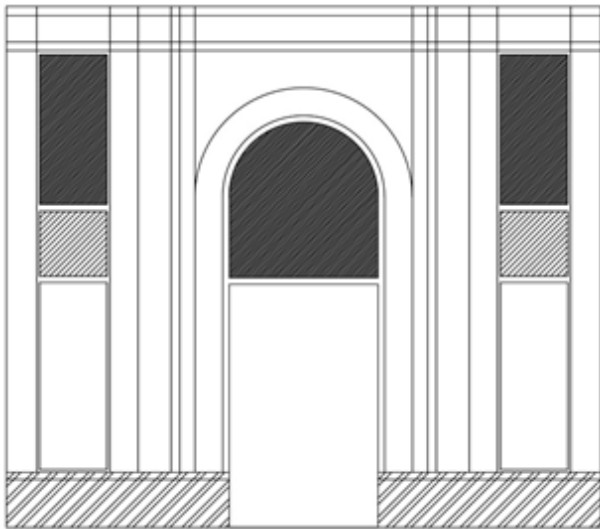


Fig. 3. The main structure of the façade and composition of its various elements to reach unity and visual stability. Source: Authors.



Fig.4. The gravels used on both sides of the façade of Sharbat-Oqli House in Tabriz. Photo: Somayeh Jalali-ye Milani, 2016.

Chand neshini ke khâje key be dar âyad [At the door of the hardhearted masters of the world
How long would you sit hoping the master come at the door]

(Hafez)

Nime-shabân neshaste jân bar dar-e khalvat-e delam.
Montazar-e sedâye pâ, mahd-kesh-e khiyâl râ [At midnight, my spirit has sat at the door of the solitude of my heart

Waiting for the foot sound of imagination].

(Vahshi-e-Bafghi)

Ey ze qam-e ferâq-e to, jân-e marâ shekâyati
Bar dar-e to neshaste-am, montazer-e enâyati [O the one because of whose separation grief, my spirit complains

I'm sitting at the door of your house, waiting for your attention]

(Araghi)

But another literary text, relating to recent historical periods, which has implied specifically the behavior of sitting at the platforms at both sides of the entrance door, is the following:

He with a piece of bread and cheese in his hand and me with bare hands, each of us sat on one of the entrance door platforms (Mostofi, 2006, 158).

I ask some questions from our servants sitting at the door (ibid., 227).

After making sure that the platforms at both sides of the entrance doors in Persian historic architecture involve a meaning related to the behavior of sitting, a question arises, that is, if the platforms at both sides of the entrance door in Sharbat-Oqli House have the same meaning. For answering this question, referring to history of types can be useful. In a study about the entrances of Tehran-based Qajar houses (Ramezan Jamaat & Neyestani, 2010) the entrance spaces of these houses have been classified into three types entitled traditional, integrated and European. The traditional entrance spaces include platforms at both sides of the door, functioning as a place for the inhabitants of the house, having short meetings with visitors, or for the passengers waiting or having a short rest. Integrated entrances –which have been designed and constructed under the influence of European architecture- may or may not have the platforms; but in case of having them, the platforms usually lack sufficient surfaces for sitting and seems that they have just been applied as an ornamental element or for maintaining the formal or spatial composition of the façade. Regarding the last type, in European entrances -architecture of which is completely adopted from European architecture- the platforms have been eliminated that indicate the changes taken

place in behavioral and architectural patterns and the influences of new urban pathways. Although the case studies in the mentioned research have been chosen from Tehran, however, since Tehran and Tabriz constitute a single cultural territory, the explained classification can be extended to the entrances of Tabriz houses, as a criterion, so that the entrance part of Sharbat-Oqli House can be considered a traditional case, because its platforms have the sufficient depth for sitting. Therefore, the mentioned platforms can be identified as a part of the façade involving a conventional meaning which represents a collection of mores, habits and actions around the behavior of sitting at the entrance door of the Persian historic houses.

An Iconological interpretation of house façade in Persian historic architecture

During the process of iconological interpretation of a work of art, those objects are noticed that achieving their meanings (intrinsic meaning) requires deep and extensive researches in various fields of study such as mythology, history of culture, social history, etc. Such studies are particularly related to –usually unconscious- beliefs, attitudes, desires, and wishes of the people among whom, the work of art has been created, and looks for discovering the meanings among them. Therefore, a part of the iconological interpretation for the façade of Sharbat-Oqli House can be like the following:

On the portal, above the entrance door, a remarkable plaster molding can be observed (Fig. 5). It seems that the pattern applied for this molding has a meaning beyond the natural subject matter; a notion which is clarified through referring to some sources related to mythology. The pattern consists of three different motifs: a grapevine with two peacocks and two gazelles at both sides of it. In myths of Mithraism, grape is the symbol of blood. In some ancient tales, grapevine is recognized as a symbol of queen and plantain as a symbol of king and their convolution as a symbol of the continuation of monarchy through royal blood (Zabeti Jahromi, 2013, 292). It is stated

that Iranians perceived grapevine as a symbol of immortality and kingship (Pourkhaleghi Chatroodi, 2002, 116). There was a notion stemmed from pre-Islamic Persian beliefs around the peacock motif, which entailed the idea that peacock has drunk water of life so that it has gotten an eternal life (Shahbazi Shiran, Maroufi Aghdam, Sattar Nejad, Tahmasebi, 2018, 249). In post-Islamic Persian beliefs, a new notion of peacock emerged entailing the idea that it has the role of mediator between Adam and Eve and Satan in heaven, so that was expelled from heaven with them. In Manteq-Ol-Teir¹⁰, peacock is a symbol of the people who worship heaven and wish to return to it. Moreover, in Divan-e Sanayi¹¹, Muhammad the Prophet has been mentioned as the peacock of celestial garden (Khazaie, 2007, 8). On the other hand, in ancient Persian culture, gazelle was a symbol of divine splendor. It is stated in Denkart¹² that royal splendor incarnated itself in gazelle figure and emerged toward Kavous¹³, and as he insisted on his rage, the gazelle escaped quickly. Also according to some old handwritten texts, the fifth body of Bahram¹⁴ was a figure of a gazelle, which could run quickly and nobody could reach it (Gholizadeh, 2012, 37). However, results of reviewing the studies about the meanings of mythical animals and plants and ornamental motifs used in Persian historic art and architecture indicate that the image consisting of an herbal pattern at the center and mythical animals such as peacock, gazelle, lion and mountain goat at both sides of it, has been repeated in various forms during different periods of history including pre-Islamic era to recent periods (Fig. 6). In this repeated image the herbal pattern is called “tree of life” and the animals at both sides are mentioned as the guardians of this tree.

Tree of life is the holiest tree among various nations and tribes. This tree has either grown in heaven or is in the center of the world. It is a symbol of fertility and returning to primary origin, and is recognized as the secret of holly power. The theme of life tree has stemmed from Mesopotamia and Iranians, Byzantines



Fig.5.Plaster molding on the Portal of Sharbat-Oqli House in Tabriz. Photo: Somayeh Jalali-ye Milani, 2016.



Fig.6.The motif of tree of life and peacocks on the Ctesiphon relief, Sassanid Era, Metropolitan Museum. Source: Mobini & Shafei, 2016.

and Arabs have taken it to far East (Pourkhaleghi Chatroodi, 2002, 96), In the culture of ancient Persia, snake (dragon) was known as a symbol of the devil which sought to dominate the tree of life, an occurrence that could lead to disasters such a drought. Accordingly, in images involving the tree of life, some guardians are appointed to protect the tree and its fruits, which are usually animals such as mountain

goat, peacock, gazelle, and sometimes legendary and combinatory animals like winged cows, winged lions, etc. (Khazaie, 2007, 9). The concept of the tree of life was modified after the arrival of Islam to Iran, due to some similar concepts in Quran, such as Toubra tree and Sedrat-Ol-Montaha; so that it could continue to be present in works of art and architecture. The pattern of a tree accompanied by two peacocks at its both sides has been applied frequently in Persian architectural ornaments, and also in design of other artistic things such as textiles, rugs, dishes, etc. This pattern has been applied on the portal of many of the mosques and religious places (Fig. 7). An explanation presented for this fact is, as peacock is known as a heavenly bird, applying its motif to the portal of mosques can signify offering welcome and guidance for the people entering it (ibid., 11). Also peacock can be perceived as the guardian of religious places in front of evil (Hillenbrand, 2000, 55). During Qajar era, using peacock motif increased. A coin remaining of this era, with a peacock pattern -that the name of Prophet of Islam has been minted on the body of the bird (Pope & Ackerman, 2008)- is a reminder of peacock concept as the symbol of Prophet Muhammad, already mentioned (Fig. 8). Furthermore, Peacock pattern accompanied by tree of life has also been applied in the art and architecture of this era; and the pattern is observable in the architecture of buildings with non-religious functionalities (Fig. 9). Therefore, after awareness about the meanings of the motifs applied in the plaster molding of the portal of Sharbat-Oqli House, a presumption is considered for the iconological interpretation of whole of this part: It seems that the portal in this façade consists of plaster ornaments which symbolically signify offering welcome and well-wish to passersby. In other words, the architect of the façade or the house owner – implicitly wishing to build an earthy paradise inside the walls of the house and praying to get disasters and evil away from it and the people entering inside, and also praying these people to be blessed- has resorted to creating such pattern on the façade. Furthermore, the fact that the owner was a well-known and wealthy

person, reinforces the idea that, he tended to wish blessing for the people entering his house, more or less by presenting his social status through this impressive molding on the portal of his house. However, it is possible that selecting the peacock motif had some associations with his job (guiding the pilgrims of House of God); concerning that peacock motif has been used as a symbol of Prophet Muhammad in Qajar era.

Nevertheless, there is a problem that confronts such an interpretation: while the image of tree of life and its guardians on the façade of Sharbat-Oqli House has different style features from other cases of this image remained from Safavid or Qajar era (See Fig. 7 & 8) the comparison of the image with the cases belonging to different historical periods, clarifies a similarity in form and style with the cases from pre-Islamic era, specially Sasanid period (Fig. 10). By studying social situation of Qajar and early Pahlavi, the reason of such similarity can be ascribed to the tendencies- generally among affluent classes- toward manifestations of ancient Persia (Haji Alilou, 2005); An issue which can be also traced in the works of art and architecture of this period has been the subject of several researches so far¹⁵. Therefore, it seems that the pattern of the plaster molding on the portal has been formed within such an intellectual space; a space which has affected –perhaps unconsciously- the attitudes and thoughts of the architect or the owner of the house. The noticeable point is that Panofsky himself perceives the iconological interpretation of works of art, as the process of discovering and interpreting symbolic values existing in them, that often are unknown for their creators themselves- and even can be different from what they intended to express (Panofsky, 1955, 31). Hence it can be suggested that, there is a possibility that the creator of the molding or the owner of the house has selected the pattern -with the content already explained- for the portal, under the unconscious influence of the prevailing intellectual space on society.

Obviously, the iconological interpretation of the molding on the façade of Sharbat-Oqli House is



Fig.7. The motif of Two peacocks and tree of life, Portal of Imam Mosque in Isfahan, Safavid period. Source: khazaei, 2007.



Fig. 8. Gold coins related to the Qajar period. Source: Pope & Ackerman, 2008, 1487.



Fig. 9. The motif of two peacocks and tree of life, in a part of the façade of Artists House of Isfahan, which was built at late Qajar period as a house. Photo: Somayeh Jalali-ye Milani, 2016.

not a mere mythological interpretation, but also an interpretation, considering a collection of factors such as social, economic, political or religious factors of the period in which the building has been constructed, or the tendencies of the builder and the owner of the house.

Final analysis

The [Table 3](#) presents a framework for reading the facades of historic houses based on Panofsky's proposed strata. According to this framework, the following points should be noticed:

1. Using an iconological approach in studies about the facades of historic houses provides the researcher an opportunity to get knowledge about conscious or unconscious thoughts, existing in architect's, builder's, owner's or every other involved person's mind, that has had an impact on façade design and construction process. It is obvious that these thoughts have been influenced themselves by architectural



Fig. 10.A molding with the pattern of a bird on grapevine in Chaltarkhan, Source: Mobini & Shafei, 2016, 56.

taught principles and cultural, social, economic and political features of the period and place that the façade belongs to.

2. Iconology as a method for reading historic facades isn't a method for formal or aesthetical analysis of the façade. Every formal and aesthetical analysis –according to this method- remains at the pre-iconographic level. The iconographical analysis and iconological interpretation start at the point that the details, elements, and patterns of the façade involving conventional or symbolic meanings are read for their meanings to be understood.

3. It seems that the first and second stratum of this method can be applied for describing, analyzing and understanding the meanings of those parts of the façade that have formal or special features alongside the details involving visual features, while the third stratum can just be applied for the parts that have two-dimensional features and usually are entitled ornaments.

4. Although Panofsky's methodology is applicable for studies on facades of Persian historic houses, it should be noted that the three strata of iconological approach can not necessarily be applied for all of the facades; since there are facades that can't be read after the first level, or their reading process stops on the second stratum and doesn't get to the third one.

5. Some critics, for instance, Gadamer, presume Panofsky's methodology not as historiography but as adoxography which means describing prevalent attitudes and ideologies of a particular period of history through studying the clues and evidence obtained from that period (Hosseini Dastjerdi, 2016, 154). According to these critiques, during the process of this method, the independence of the work of art is lost and the work is tied to literary sources and different fields of human sciences such as mythology (Nasri, 2012, 18). Consequently, this method for studying historic facades attaches the façade to texts out of it, grabs its semantic independence, and turns it to an inferior issue and a reflection of a place or a period of history, so that the façade itself turns into evidence for understanding the beliefs of an epoch.

Table 3. A Framework for Reading the Facades of Persian Historic Houses, Applying Panofsky's Iconology. Source: authors.

	Method of Reaching the Meaning of the Façade in Persian Historic Architecture	Equipment for Reaching the Meaning	Corrective Principles
Pre Iconographical Description of the Façade	Primary or natural meaning: Factual meaning of the façade: describing formal features of façade, such as colors, textures, materials, lines, forms, ornaments etc. and their interrelations which can be considered as composition principles of façade. Expressional meaning: including the expressional features of facade	Practical experience: Can be obtained through studying the texts including theoretical foundations of architecture	Referring to history of style: Studying façade styles in each historical period
Iconographical Analysis of Façade	Secondary or conventional meanings of the façade: Analyzing the facade shapes, forms and images that have found a conventional meaning within the socio-cultural context of the period that the façade has been built in, while there is a possibility that this meaning is forgotten now.	Using the knowledge of literary sources: To get knowledge about the socio-cultural context of the period in which the façade has been built, and about the conventional concepts of that period	Referring to history of types: studying façade types in each historical period
Iconological Interpretation of Façade	Intrinsic meaning or content: Interpretation of the motifs used on a façade, to achieve the prevalent attitudes and thoughts of the period that the façade has been built in, and the builder had unconsciously reflected them on the facade	the knowledge of essential tendencies of the human mind: To get knowledge about the prevalent attitudes, thoughts and tendencies of the period in which the façade has been built in	Referring to history of symptoms or symbols

However, it seems that since works of architecture aren't apart from their socio-cultural context, paying attention to their relationship with this context in studies on history of architecture can lead to a better understanding of their meanings. Moreover, some researchers have mentioned the findings of history of architecture researches, as a branch of knowledge in service of social history (Golijani Moghaddam, 2005).

6. One of the other critiques on Panofsky's method is: In most of the cases the distinction between an iconographical analysis and an iconological interpretation is unrecognizable (Nasri, 2012, 18). In this article, while the image of the molding on the portal is interpreted using an iconological approach, referring to literary sources is inevitable. Furthermore, it is not easy to make sure that the meanings found for the motifs are not conventional. That's why in some sources iconology has been mentioned as iconography in a deeper sense (Abdi, 2012).

7. Panofsky's method including three strata, each of which involving a clear and systematic procedure and correcting principles for reducing the possibility of mistakes in analysis and interpretation, is a suitable method for getting away from prejudgments and prevalent assumptions about various features of

façade- particularly house façade- in Persian historic architecture and can help the researcher to avoid the side effects of some discussed topics in this field that their accuracy hasn't been proved, but have turned into an evident and indisputable issue because of being repeated.

Conclusion

Iconology in art and architecture historiography is a methodology that helps the researcher –through reading the work of art or architecture- to perceive the hidden meanings of it and consequently reach a clearer understanding of these fields of history. Although this method has been applied in the various history of architecture researches, it has been less considered in researches about Persian historic architecture. The limitations that this methodology brings forward while reading works of art and architecture make the researcher cautious about applying it to studying historic works of architecture. Limitations including the fact that the iconological approach is a method for studying images involving symbolic and conventional meanings, while the works of architecture are ultimately three-dimensional phenomena consisting of mass and space. However, as investigated in this research, it seems that because of having a

systematic and organized structure, Erwin Panofsky's iconology can be useful at least in studying the parts with more visual features such as building façades, and specifically in studies on facades of Qajar and early Pahlavi houses -that usually involve symbolic meanings- while organizing the procedure of the study helps the researcher for a better understanding of hidden meanings in them and also a better understanding of this field of architecture history.

Endenote

1. The group of arts based on design, which addresses human's vision, and includes painting, sculpture, architecture and arts derived from them.
2. In the Cambridge dictionary (2019), the term icon has been defined as: 1. A small picture or symbol on a computer screen, 2. A very famous person or thing considered as representing a set of beliefs or a way of life,
3. A painting usually on wood, of Jesus Christ or of a person, considered holy. Art and religion researchers ascribe the term to two-dimensional representations of Jesus Christ.
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3. A painting usually on wood, of Jesus Christ or of a person, considered holy. Art and religion researchers ascribe the term to two-dimensional representations of Jesus Christ.
4. He was also a French abbot, politician, advisor to the king of France, church reformer and supporter of art (Hosseini Dastjerdi, 2016).
5. A system of critical thinking taught in Medieval universities pervasively
6. Although in these researches Panofsky's method and its three strata haven't been applied precisely, the overall approach used in them is derived from his method.
7. The term Pir means old man or woman, and Neshin means a place for sitting. So the term Pir-Neshin in Persian language means a place that old people can sit on.
8. For example, see: Alialhesabi, M., Gorbani, A. (2015). Reviewing the characteristics of the entrance as an articulation and visual privacy in adjacent public space Case study Laft port. Iran University of Science & Technology, 2 (4) :87-106
9. The term khajeh means a dignitary person
10. A Persian poetry book written by Attar-e Neyshabouri.
11. A Persian poetry book written by Sanayi-e Ghaznavi
12. A Zorostrian textbook.
13. A mythical king of ancient Iran
14. A mythical king of ancient Iran
15. For example, see: Kiyani (2009). Archaism Impacts on the Architecture of Pahlavi the First Era

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HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE

Jalali-ye Milani, S.; Nejad ebrahimi, A.; Beyti, H. & Vandshoari, A. (2021). Evaluating the Feasibility of Using Erwin Panofsky's Method in Reading the Facades of Persian Historic Houses. *Bagh-e Nazar*, 17(92), 97-112.

DOI: 10.22034/bagh.2020.229539.4535

URL: http://www.bagh-sj.com/article_117951_en.html

