

## Study on the Evolution of Historical Gates of the City of Tabriz (Case studies: Sorkhab and Gajil gates)

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### Abstract:

Given the importance of the city of Tabriz in terms of political and economic as well as placing on the way of Silk Road, need to secure the city and properties of traders, all caused that the rulers of that era would build towers and walls for this city in three historical periods in order to prevent the entry of foreigners, abusers and the spies into privacy of the city.

The gates that had been considered as threshold places for crossing and passage in the old city, are transformed physically by collapsing fences in the new city. But, their places are constantly reminding of collective memories of the citizens and can cause readability of the city and express the civic identity. In this paper an attempt has been made to study the evolution of historical gates and roles of those elements in old urban spaces and their places in contemporary architecture.

**Keywords:** Gate, Tabriz, Traditional Architecture, Contemporary Architecture.

### 1. Introduction:

The Gates were attributed to the strong and lofty buildings as well as urban spaces around them that were built in some spots of fort and battlement in the city. The history of creating neighborhoods with gates dates back to the early human settlement. The old cities had walls and gates in order to protect the residents and their properties; as it is said, the philosophy of plunder (defense) is one of the main reasons for the formation of primary residences (Habibi, 1999).

The city of Tabriz also had several ramparts and gates in the past that were used for different reasons of security and communication. This rampart had a total number of eight main gates and was constructed 241 years ago by the "Najafgholi Khan".

### 2. The Gate of City

The "gates" have been one of the physical elements of structure of the city to strengthen its symbolic and identic qualities. The Gate of the old city may be expressed as an "urban mark" in

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"symbolic network of the city", that is one of the main elements of the structure of the city. These main elements are the "identical" means and "turning points" along the city which are applicable with their special spatial organization in "creating subjective memories of the city and its readability". The symbolic and functional application of this symbolic element in the contemporary urban development, either in the form of restoring or repairing old gates or by formation and conceptual application of the element of gate, sometimes in details and sometimes as a window opened to the new horizons indicates the importance and possibility of using this element in the process of design and contemporizing urban development. Gateways can be defined through three aspects: semantic, historical and symbolic, and functional aspects.

### **2-1- Semantic Aspect:**

The traditional term of "gate" whether referring in urban development or in literature, implies a motion through a determined space which is done within a determined time. Gateway is the point of entry to a space enclosed by a wall or an open space surrounded by a fence. A gateway is the place of passage, passage through a state to another state and specifically passage from outside state to inside situation. In available resources, the original meaning relevant to the subject of gateway can be retrieved in this way: In Dehkhoda dictionary under the word "gate", it is written "the big door of the city, village, inn and so on, the grand door of entrance in town; place of entry to the town, castle, borough and village (Dehkhoda, 2002) and in Moein Dictionary it is described as "grand door" (Moein, 1981, 1515). Also we can see it in French dictionary defined as: "a special entry built in the past within the walls of the city to enter it." (Le Petit Robert), and also in English Dictionary we have: "An opening in a wall or fence for entrance or exit" (The American Heritage Dictionary).

Gates and book chapters both are known as "bob" and both are either the beginning or end of a journey (René Guénon, 2000, 18). Entrances and gates are the spatial effects of transition and connection and independently formed the transition and connection point in different types of connection of open spaces to covered and closed spaces (Tavasoli, 1997, 71). In general, four properties can be considered for the gates: the definition of space, space detection, direction and guidance.

### **2-2 Historical and Symbolic Aspect**

In the past, the gates of the city and the spaces around them were considered as sacred and worthy places. The ceremony of opening and passing through a gate, demanded a special tradition (Smith, 1977). The gate was also considered as an evidence on social status of the city (Pierre von Meiss, 2004, 182) and ancient cultures of the East established venues judgment over there. Therefore, the action of entry to one gate is a covenant with what is inside the city, and role of the gateway is guidance.

The gate is obviously considered symbolic references. Threshold and gate represent the tangible and immediate direction and solution for continuity of the space. A walled city is a reminder and a symbol of the cosmos and directions thereof (Ardalan, 2000, 15). In the ancient city of Iran the Sassanian flux such as Persian flux based on religious beliefs and influenced by

the worldviews are usually led to a fence that should have four gates to the four directions of the world for reminding the four directions and elements (Habibi, 2001, 31 & 55). In Islamic city, the gate takes special roles in scale of the important buildings, public open spaces, and finally in the scale of the city. In the architecture of the old Iranian cities, the gates and entry spaces to the buildings, especially religious buildings, had a very rich continuity and diversity (Tavassoli, 1997, 69). The spatial hierarchy and sequence is a lasting concept for transition from one space to another space.

### **2-3- Functional Aspect**

The Gateways can have different functional roles. Functional aspects of gateways can be divided into six categories: the role of communication, defense and security, economic, social, memorial and visual. Since the bodies of old gates of the contemporary city have been vanished with its past performance, among the remaining gates, whether in terms of physical or memorial, only the memorial and visual aspect of them can be specifically mentioned. In this case, the gate beyond a simple performance can be considered as "symbolic element" in the city (Smith, 1977). Thus, by correct positioning of the gates, especially the main gates, you can create an element with a certain aesthetic quality that in addition to creation of a pause space in terms of functional and making the sense of being surrounded, it would be considered as a valuable element in the urban landscape visually.

### **3. A Review of the City of Tabriz**

Tabriz can be considered one of the oldest cities in Iran that had been playing an important role in different historical periods as political and economic center of the country. Therefore, due to its importance, it had several gates that currently there has remained nothing from their effects except the ruins of the Baghmisheh Gate and Khiyaban Gate.

The city of Tabriz that is considered a coherent and systematic set like other traditional Iranian cities, has been formed based on its proximity or various components, and in the meantime, the paths have played an undeniable role in segregation or association of architectural and urban spaces. The historic section of Tabriz like many central cities of the country continuous had formed of introverted and continuous texture and its communication network had an organic and non-geometric form due to historical, social and environmental characteristics. The main thoroughfares that in some cases were run along other gate were built wide and secondary pathways and deadlocks were built narrow.

Development of the city of Tabriz has been occurred through the creation of Bazaars along the old octoploid gates. By covering the distances between the bazaars by residential units, the current appearance of the city has evolved over the past century and this appearance may be observed in old neighborhoods of the city, although new street designing has vanished that old and traditional texture. However, in the old alleys and streets the impacts of old architecture of the city even abandoned can clearly be observed.

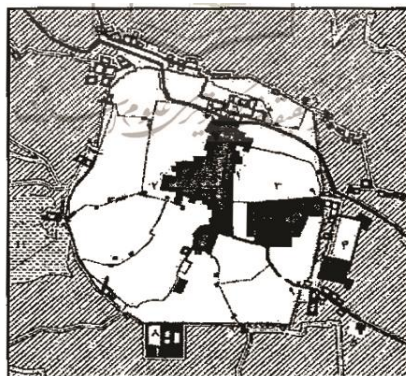


Figure 1- The city in Qajae Era together with important elements and major routes

#### 4. History of gate in the city of Tabriz

There was no castle and fence in Tabriz until the year 1726 AD. In 1780, ordered by Najafgholi Khan, a new castle was built in Tabriz and that was a fence consisting of eight gates as follows in details: First, the Khiyaban Gate, then the Chief door that is now called the Baghmasha, Sorkhab Gate with the same name of that parish, Shotorban Gate which is called Dorehchi, Istanbul Gate, Sard Gate which is called Gajil now, Mahad Mahin Gate and Nobar Gate that both were named same as the parish (Meimanat Nejad et al, 2010:22).

The gates of Ojan (Shervan), Sardrud, Sham Kazan and Sara Voroud that were created in the first half of the fourteenth century, were existed in 1640 as well. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries fundamental changes were made in the gate of Tabriz. In that period, Tabriz had some gates that linked the city to foreign lands and the surrounding areas, in such a way that if the caravans that wanted to enter the city they could only be entered through the gate (Onollahi, 2008: 195 & 196).



Figure 2- The Shotorban Gate, Tabriz, Iran  
(Source: Eugène Flandin itineraries, 1840 AD)

#### 5. Map and Defense Wall of the City of Tabriz

Unfortunately, the maps of the city of Tabriz and also map of other cities of Iran up to the 19th century are unknown, but, when Russian troops occupied Tabriz in 1827 AD, the map of Tabriz was discovered. On this map the name of different neighborhoods of the city with its

fortifications were written in Persian. At the same time, according to the command of the Russian military instructions, class Russian Surveyors of a named "Mamontov and Kololkov" prepared another map of the fortifications of city of Tabriz while localizing the gates. Map of the city of Tabriz, which was founded in 1827, was drawn based on the rules of mapping technique of that time and under the guidance of French engineer named "Chardin". Chardin who was invited by Prince Abbas Mirza, designed a number of military fortresses for him that map of Ardebil military fortress was implemented in the second decade of the 1820's.

According to the maps of 1827 AD, the city of Tabriz is located within the walls of defense, and in the south of the city, the citadel rampart is shown from the overall line of the walls of the city. Citadel in the structure of the city map has changed the situation again and again. This has been applied particularly at the beginning of the first decade of 1600 ordered by Shah Abbas. Unfortunately, the devastating earthquake on the one hand and on the other hand, the permanent wars caused the old ramparts and gates of Tabriz be destroyed. So that, according to the contents of history and geography of on Tabriz's citadel, after earthquake in 1193 (Arabic calendar) making a solid rampart around the city began. Construction of Tabriz rampart completed three years later and eight gates were built in eight directions for travelling within the city (Azizi, 86).

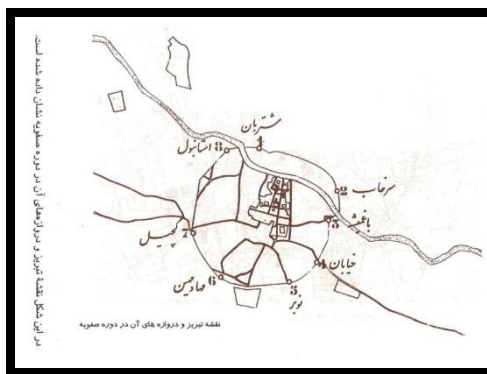


Figure 3: Map of Tabriz and its gates in the Safavids.

## 6. Introduction of Tabriz Gates

Studies conducted show that in ancient times the city of Tabriz has been surrounded by the defense walls having irregular access networks. That is, the paths started from one gate and reached the other gate (e.g. Gajil Gate to Nobar Gate), some other began from Baghmasha Gate and Khiyaban Gate, travelled all area of the city from east to the west and reached the Gajil Gate, although there are many ways in the structured map.

About gates of Tabriz in the book "The History and Geography of the Dar al-Saltaneh (citadel) of Tabriz" we read: After the earthquake in 242 years ago (Arabian calendar) constructing a solid rampart around the city began in 1193 that ended in 1196. That rampart consisted of eight gates that we have discussed them in Table 1. In the following years some bazaars have made rear to most of the gates, some of which are connected to the central bazaar.

Among the well-known bazaars of these gates, following bazaars can be named: Devechi Bazaar, Sorkhab Bazaar, Baghmisha Bazaar, Gajil Gate Bazaar, Istanbul Gate Bazaar (Niknam Laleh, Zoghi, 1992:82).

Row	Name of Building	Place of Construction	Location and Positioning in Map	Current Existence	
				Yes	No
1	Khiyaban Gate (Demirgapi)	Beginning of western entrance to the Ziba Bazaar (Rahli Bazaar)	-	*	
2	Istanbul Gate	-	North		*
3	Shotorban Gate (Devechi)	Devechi Neighborhood	North		*
4	Sorkhab Gate	Farhangsara Alley, Seghatoleslam St.	Northeast		*
5	Baghmisha (A'la) Gate	Rear to Alighapo Building	East	*	
6	Nobar Gate	Nobar Neighborhood	Southeast		*
7	Mahad Mohan Gate (Miar Miar)	Miar Miar Alley	Southwest		*
8	Sard (Gajil) Gate	Gajil Neighborhood	West		*

(Source: Author, Resource: Niknam Laleh and Zoghi, 1992:79)

### 7. Sorkhab Gate

The name of Sorkhab is an anagram adjective and substantive composed of "Sorkh+Ab (red+water)" and essentially means having the red color and water and this word has several meanings which have been defined in different dictionaries, such as: a kind of red duck. In the early period of "Mongol" there were ten gates without the name of Sorkhab and in the "Kazan" period from every seven gates one was named Sorkhab. But in the "Safavid" period, there was fourteen gates that Sorkhab is not considered among them.

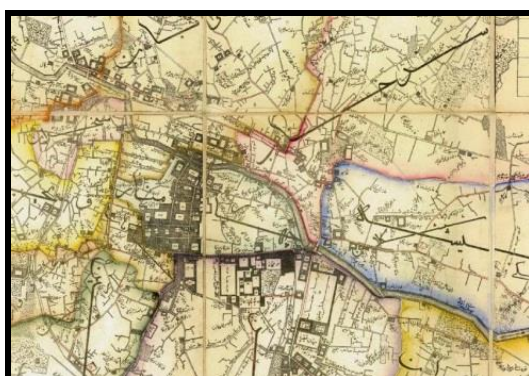


Figure 4- Sorkhab Gateway in Dar-al-Saltaneh Map

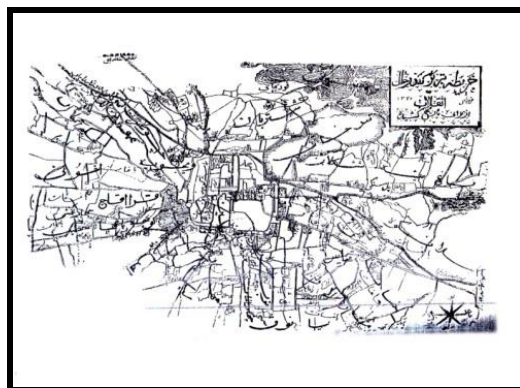


Figure 5- Sorkhab Gateway in Constitutional Period

## 8. Gajil Gate

In Nader Shah's era there was no stability and survival in security and trading situation of Tabriz, because the power that protects the security of the country was transported with Nader troops from a place to another place and consideration of world conquest was more raised. But, in Karim Khan's era a relative stability emerged in Tabriz. Great edifices were built in various parts of Tabriz and in 1193 (Arabian calendar) after the earthquake, they began to construct a strong rampart around the city that was completed in 1196 (Arabian calendar), and that rampart had eight gates that one of them was Sardrud or Gajil Gate.

### 8-1- Historical Trends of Gajil or Sardrud Gate from 1958 to the present

In the year 1958, according to the map, the gate had been located in the street where is currently named Jomhour Street, and it should be noted that as of 1958, no trace of the gate was left. The bazaar next to the gate that was famous as "tools-sale bazaar" in those years had a domed shaped roof similar to the current roof of Tabriz Bazaar and there was a bazaar opposite to the gate that has been known as Gajil Bazaar up to the present. This bazaar had no ceiling at that time and it was open-air. At the time, Gajil cemetery was turned into a Golestan Garden and most houses were brick-made (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Aerial photograph of the gate Gajil 1958

**8-1-1-Gajil Gate – Year 1975**

In 1975 vehicle traffic increased. Ceiling of “tools-sale bazaar” is still established and small changes in the roof of fruit market and also in the adjacent properties are seen. The bazaar remains the same. Situation of the gate is the same but the adjacent properties to the gate have been changed a little. In this year, major changes in the situation of streets have been formed which subsequently the gate was placed between two streets from the north to the current Felestin St., and from the south to the current Qonqa St. This street was not found in 1958 and formed over those years, that by the intersection of them with Main Street two squares were formed and the gate is between them.

**8-1-2- Gajil Gate – Year 1983**

From 1975 until 1983, the gate had little changes. The changes that are seen during those years are the changes to make the properties adjacent to the gate habitable. The major change in this distance is failure of the ceiling of “tools-sale bazaar”. In this year the ceiling of the bazaar is not seen and the roof seems to have been taken off. Also, some changes are seen in adjacent shops to the gate and ceiling of the Gajil Bazaar.

**8-1-3- Gajil Gate – Year 2001**

In year 2001, some changes are also seen in the process of estate settlement. The bazaar is seen roofed, the squares are built northern-southern. The streets have been arranged in terms of traffics. The adjacent properties have become more settled and the northern street has become developed. The current situation in evaluating the formation up to now makes it clear for us that, the Gajil Gate has remained the same as from year 1959 and the trend of changes has been formed only in buildings, bazaars and streets. But, no change has been made in appearance form of the gate.

**9. Baghmasha Gate**

The Baghmasha Gate is considered as one of the eight gates of the city of Tabriz that was in charge of many duties and performances such as military, security and economic. “Masha” in Azari language means forest and jungle. “Baagh” was originally “Bagh that means “God” in Persian. Therefore, the correct form of this name is “Baghmashe” means “God’s Woodlands” that is acceptable due to the "Gholleh" Altar. This gate that sometimes was entering point to the Baghmasha parish (one of the large parishes of Tabriz), and despite the passage of more than 250 years of his life it is still endured and has turned from the entrance of the city of Tabriz in previous decade to the entrance of Haramkhaneh Alley and stony buildings (Dash Building) in nowadays (Azizi Rad, 2007).

**10. Old Gates in the Contemporary City**

Previously, the gates of the city had been playing the role of threshold and the place for transition from outside to inside. Many social, economic and ritual activities were held beside these gates. About the security aspects of these communities it can be said that, architectural



symbols, such as gates and walls, cause many residents to feel more secure in their places of living (Low, 2003). So that, the main paths of the city were generally started from a gate and ended by another gate. During the development of the city and destroying the historic fence, the main paths still remained and instead of fence and many main paths, main street layout took place. These streets still act as transport links between the old and new texture of the city and have a special locational position. As in many parts of the gate in yesterday, square and the intersection are created.

With the destruction of the walls of the city in new developments and expansion of the suburbs to the outside the historic textures, body of some gates and some of their names went vanished, as of in different historical periods some gates of the city have been emerged with body and some with different names in one body. But, what remained was their place as milestones in the communication range of old and new textures that has always been of particular importance.

### 11. Conclusion

The main structure of the city and maintaining it, keeps the memory of the city. However, with the passage of time, the names of the characters, time and formation of events may change, but the origin still remains. Location of the gate as the association hinge of the old and new texture of the city, at the turning point to enter the old texture has always had special manifestation. This place as a milestone in the border of old and new texture of the city, can regain its role in the modern sense as the past and that is creation of a type of regularity and spatial quality that will cause reintroduction of territory and promotion of texture identity. Hence, any intervention of urban development in this area, in order to improve the quality of elements and urban spaces, is a starting point is to inspire a new spirit to the historical core in relation with new urban development. Urban design with the aim of restoring the concept of gate and maintaining the cultural-historical continuity of the city, would create a sort of "spatial-social stability" in which urban spaces will re-find their meaning in time dimension and construct places that will become places for occurring different social activities and formation of collective memories. It is important to note that, in this case we are dealing with the space not the body. In other words, making the body contemporary together with zeitgeist that makes culture is the main objective. Subsequently, the city may be enriched and varied and perhaps it could be possible to crease the feeling of belonging to the city in citizens following the increasing impact which is raised out of different links of the citizens with different places of the city (Bacon, 1997, 17). However, it is noteworthy that the elements and symbols are not important necessarily and only physically, but also, there is the possibility that an element would recall a historical performance or event. In other words, in reclamation of these elements, the crystallization process occurs in different forms and collective memories retrieval becomes meaningful as well. In fact, with concepts embodied in symbols and signs, and with the bliss of figurative transformation realm, moving from one area to another area is easily possible. A peaceful and harmonious movement that requires a passage which allows us to maintain the hierarchy. This passage requires the symbolic language of allegory and signs.

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