

An Assessment of the Value of "Image" in the Art of Fath-Ali Shah Qajar's Era

Abstract

A glance at the history of creating pictorial representations in the past societies indicates that prior to the invention of the photography and printing industry, the world around us was indeed suffering from the lack proper illustrations. Hence, the earlier societies should have also been in scarcity in terms of images since replication was impossible then.

With the invention of photography camera and the subsequent boom in printing industry as the main factors in facilitating the reproduction of image, happened and spread after the reign of Fath-Ali Shah Qajar (1212-1250 SH / 1834-1797 AD); however, if we compare the legacy of image production remaining from the era of Fath-Ali Shah's reign with those of the preceding years, we find out a fundamental change in the volume of image production and its application.

Of course, in this article, 'image' means the human figure and in particular the king's physiognomy, which is portrayed wearing various materials and tools. However, such iconography also contains images of chiefs, chieftains, governors and princes, and even from time to time, the image of maidservants and dancers, but their presence is secondary to that of the king.

The images follow common aesthetic patterns, including calm faces with monobrows, languish eyes, bud-shaped mouths with beauty marks around the lips, with fit bodies and narrow waists, armed with all kinds of weapons such as dagger, mace, sword... (for men) and adorned with aristocratic jewelry and garments and expressionless countenance looking at distant landscapes.

The more precise application of these patterns, which are deeply rooted in Iran's culture and literature, in Fath-Ali Shah's image is due to the fact that hundreds of images of this handsome King have remained with almost ever the same portrait unaffected by the passage of time. These images are created using diverse tools, in different sizes with various applications. Some are on canvases or on the walls of palaces and mansions in large scales on while others are on penholders, containers and coins, even on jewelry and ornaments in very small sizes.

Undoubtedly, such number of images have been carried out by artists of different professional expertise and have enjoyed the all-out support of the government and the King as its top authority. The diversity of images signifies a great management and wise interaction with painters.

This paper intends to answer this main question that what purpose the government, and the King as its leader, sought in supporting the production and spreading of such images within the society. Evidently, more questions also arise that how the primary pattern of such images or royal representation was created and what were their specific features?

In addition to elucidation of the aesthetic features and the theoretical foundations of the creation of these images, this study seeks to shed light on the hidden intentions of the government for dispersing such images.

The research findings indicated that the newly established Qajar Government was aware of the necessity of propaganda for the consolidation and expansion of social influence on one hand and the importance of developing favorable interaction

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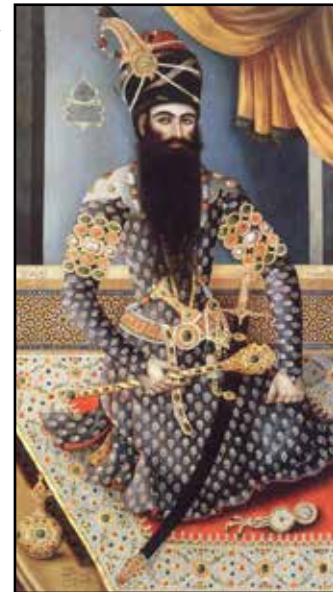
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with the artists and supporting them on the other, promotes the artists' and the society's understanding of the image. Thus different types of pictures are produced with a variety of interpretations and applications.

Apparently, the artists, while maintaining good relations with the head of the state, achieved a fresh understanding of the potential functions and hidden values of image, insofar as they might have 'discovered' its true value. Therefore, using Shah's icon as a sign of national unity and its propagation in various ways and modes, they used image in an unprecedented manner which included utilizing image as a ceremonial or royal gift; a model of beauty and fashion; a sign of the quality of goods as well as ritual and religious icons.

The discovery of the values of image resulted in the emergence of, during Fath-Ali Shah's rule, the first pictorial coins after the advent of Islam in Iran, the first bas-reliefs and even the first pictorial gravestones of the Islamic era. This research has employed descriptive-analytic method of research with the data collected through analyzing library resources and findings of field studies.

Keywords: Image, Fath-Ali Shah, Iconography, Qajar Painting.

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