

# The Role of Paper in the Copy Identification of Safavid Era Shahnamehs of Tabriz Doctrine

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**Abstract**—To investigate and explain the history of each copy, we must refer to its past because it highlights parts of the civilization of people among which this copy has been codified. In this paper, eight Ferdowsi's Shahnameh of Safavid era of Tabriz doctrine available in Iranian libraries and museums are studied. Undoubtedly, it can be said that Ferdowsi's Shahnameh is one of the most important books that has been transcribed many times in different eras because it explains the Iranian champions' prowess and it includes the history of Iran from Pishdadian to Sasanian dynasty. In addition, it has been attractive for governors and artists. The research methodology of this article is based on the analytical-descriptive arguments. The research hypothesis is based on papers used in Shahnameh writing in Safavid era of Tabriz doctrine were mostly Isfahanian papers existed. At that time, Isfahanian paper was unique in terms of quality, clarity, flatness of the sheets, volume, shape, softness and elegance, strength, and smoothness. This paper was mostly used to prepare the courtier and exquisite copies. This shows that the prepared copies in Safavid era of Tabriz doctrine were very important because the artists and people who ordered and were out of the court have ordered Isfahanian paper for writing their books.

**Keywords**—Shahnameh, Safavid era, Tabriz doctrine.

## I. INTRODUCTION

IN identification of manuscripts, the catalogers of east regions -especially Iranian regions- have paid attention to the determination of the type of paper which had been used. After recognition and production of paper, first Chinese and then Muslims and Iranian quickly substitute paper for other sheets such as papyrus and parchment and therefore the production of different types of paper had spread to different regions and cities of Iran as well as other Islamic countries. In many old sources, such as Ibn Nadim (late 10<sup>th</sup> century), there are numerous references to the widespread industry of papermaking in different Islamic regions. This information indicates that the ways of papermaking and quality of papers were different. By the establishment of papermaking workshops in most cities of Iran, the book illumination also became popular, and we can find a perfect book illuminations in Timurid and Safavid era. In this period, in different cities, many libraries were established for collecting books. Different religious, scientific and literary books have remained from that time, but their specifications and dates are not clear. Therefore, one way for determination of their dates of transcriptions is the study of the papers used in these copies. In this paper, the papers used in eight copies of Ferdowsi's

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Shahnameh in Safavid era of Tabriz doctrine are studied. Among them, there are also non-courtier copies. These copies had been formed between 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries which are available in Iranian libraries and museums. Shahnameh is one of the longest and most eloquent Persian poetical works with different themes such as epic, mythical, lyrical, and philosophical. Due to the high worldwide position of Ferdowsi's Shahnameh, shortly after its formation, the contents, the story, and the characters became noticeable to Iranian and non-Iranian researchers. Moreover, since there was the tradition of a painting of epic stories in ancient times, Shahnameh considered as the most important Iranian book for illustration. Especially after the domination of Mongols on Iran, Shahnameh noticed more by the artists, and in each era, it was written and painted by the most prominent artists.

The research methodology of this paper is based on the analytical-descriptive arguments. The research hypothesis indicates that papers used in Shahnameh writing in Safavid era of Tabriz doctrine were mostly Isfahanian papers. until today, most conducted research has studied the issues related to historiography or miniature painting of courtier and exquisite copies, and there is not much research on the papers used in those copies which ordered out of court. Based on conducted studies, no comprehensive research has been done on the papers used in mentioned Shahnameh up to now, but there are some papers which studied the formation and evolution process of paper. For example in a paper called "evolution process of papermaking" by H. Azimi- which was presented at Mirza Ahmad Neyrizi Master congress held by Fars foundation in Shiraz 2011, the preparation and production process of paper at its beginning had been studied and also the transfer of papermaking industry to Islamic and Iranian regions and its development and expansion to other countries and cities had been investigated too. In addition, the types of paper which mostly used in Islamic-Iranian copies had been analyzed. "Paper in identifying copies and manuscripts" is another paper by H. Azimi published in the 42<sup>nd</sup> issue of Mirror to Heritage Journal [1] in which different type of papers used in copies of Islamic era had been studied.

## II. HISTORY OF PAPERMAKING

From the beginning, three material used in making sheets: papyrus, parchment, and paper. Making sheets from papyrus was common in Egypt from medieval until the 8<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, from middle ages till the end of 12<sup>th</sup> century, papyrus sheets transferred from Egypt to other countries for writing [2]. Old Arabic sources used the name of "Egyptian Qratis" for "Egyptian papyrus" [3]. A complete book about papyrus is

a copy of *Al Jameh Fi Al Hadis* by Abdollah ben Ahab (born in 818 AD) which is kept in a library in Egypt under the reference number of 2123 [4]. After papyrus, parchment became common and used in Asia Minor. This material had been prepared in a way which was appropriate for writing [5]. The industry of manufacturing parchment transferred to Arabic region before Islam and with the emergence of Islam and propagation of Quran, parchment became more popular among Muslims [6]. There are many written books on parchments which are kept in national libraries of Paris and Iran.

The word for paper in Farsi language is “Kaqaz” which apparently first entered the Turkish language from Chinese and then from Turkish to Arabic and at last appeared in Farsi language. Paper is a kind of fibrous substance; it's a thin sheet which is made from an herbal material such as parchment, glue, wood, fabric and cotton [7]. Papermaking is known to have been traced back to China during the Han Dynasty. The primary papers called “khota.” In the past, the first step of making paper was the thin layer of silk fibers which was made from floating straws on the water, but this material was expensive, and the public couldn't afford it. That's why the silk paper hadn't been used extensively. After gaining lots of experiences in this field, Chinese were able to make cheap, smooth and appropriate papers for writing. It seems that the transfer of Chinese paper to Muslims had been done around the 8<sup>th</sup> century. The entrance of paper to Islamic world goes back to the revolution in Bukhara with command of Abomoslem Khorasani in 751 AD. Abomoslem Khorasani enslaved a number of Chinese people, and among them, there were some people who well knew papermaking. These slaves were taken to Samarkand, and for the first time, they hold papermaking workshop [8]-[10]. Soon the manufacturing of paper was spread around Islamic regions. Different old sources from the time of Ibn Nadim -10<sup>th</sup> century- till the time of Qalqashndi-15<sup>th</sup> century- all referred to the extensive paper manufacturing all around Islamic regions such as Baghdad, Nishapur, Levant, Isfahan, and Shushtar [4]. Available sources show that there were different methods for papermaking and also the quality of papers was different from each other.

### III. THE VARIETY OF PAPERS IN OLD TEXTS

The contemporary catalogers from East countries have introduced the sheets of manuscripts based on their general names which have mostly an empirical attitude. In manuscripts of the Islamic world, in accordance with the place of transcription, the availability of different papers for scribes, the scribes attitude about the text of the book and whether the book is exquisite or normal, different papers were used for that copy. In different historical texts, two characteristics were considered for the high-quality paper: the first one is the strength and durability of paper and the second one is the smoothness, flatness of sheets. The names of some papers which had been used in Persian and Arabic copies- from the 9<sup>th</sup> century till 19<sup>th</sup> century- were taken from the name of their production place [4]. In the next part of the

paper, the papers which had been used mostly in illumination and transcription is listed:

*Samarkand paper*: for the first time this paper was made by Chinese slaves who were in Samarkand in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, and therefore it is known as Samarkand paper. This paper is thick and flat, and there are no tiny pieces on them. From 9<sup>th</sup> century till 16<sup>th</sup> century this paper was used in valuable and academic books and the color was usually yellow-brown [11].

*Baghdad paper*: Qalqashndi said that this paper was a high quality, thick and soft paper with appropriate volume and a strong texture. It was better than Levant paper, and its color was yellow-brown [12].

*Bukhara paper*: a thin paper with a strong and smooth texture which was made in Transoxiana. Sometimes it is called Bukhara cashmere too. This paper was made simultaneously with Samarkand paper and was manufactured till 19<sup>th</sup> century for exquisite books [4].

*Levant paper*: it is a thick, strong, flat and smooth paper which its appearance is similar to Samarkand paper and was made in Levant. This paper was used for academic and authentic books and was famous from the beginning of papermaking in Islamic world [13].

*Khan Balq paper*: it is a thick, strong paper which was made in the region of Khan Balq -Today's Beijing- but it didn't have a consistent texture. It was used for academic and normal books as well as textbooks. This paper can be found in transcription copies of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was mostly in fawn [11].

*Khitan paper*: this paper was made in Khitan region where was at the northeast of china. It was thick, bright and clear and its texture was more consistent than Khan Balq paper with better quality in yellow-brown.

*Kashmir paper*: it was made in Kashmir. It was bright, flat with good thickness and quality. It was very much similar to Bukhara paper. For Iranian people, it was a high-quality paper.

*Dowlatabad paper*: it was made in India's Dowlatabad which was more flat, smooth and unmixed than Kashmir paper. It was one of the best papers in terms of quality. Exquisite and important contents were written on this paper. Some catalogers mistakenly consider this paper as Khan Balq paper. In the sources from before 17<sup>th</sup> century, there is no reference to this paper.

*Cashmere paper*: it was a high-quality paper which was made from thin and delicate cashmere in Isfahan. Due to its delicacy, it was strong and durable. This paper is in pistachio green and is completely recognizable. Some of the poetic collections which had calligraphy and illumination in Safavid and Qajar period had been written on this paper. Moreover, there are lots of Qajar manuscripts using this paper.

*Isfahan paper*: this paper was made in Isfahan with two different qualities in Safavid and Qajar period. The first type didn't have much thickness, and it hadn't a flat and smooth texture, and because of its low quality, sealing and pasting were used. It was used mostly for normal books and textbooks. The second type was a thick, strong paper with a flat, smooth, clean and good quality texture. The quality and texture of this paper was similar to Khitan paper and was used

in exquisite and illuminated books. For distinguishing it from the lower quality type, it was called Sepahani paper [4]. Isfahan and Sepahani papers were used mostly between 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Until the recent decades, the papermaking continued in Isfahan. In the book of "Virtues of Isfahan," it is mentioned that Isfahan paper was a high quality, flat, smooth and strong paper which was always distributed to other cities [14].

*Farangi paper*: with the emergence of the paper which was made by mechanical systems which sent by Europeans to India and Iran in 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the hand-made papers became less popular. It can be noted that, hand-made papers didn't make in Qajar period and in this period all manuscripts were written on Farangi paper. One of the features of this paper is that when we expose it to light, some parallel lines, geometric shapes and signs and Latin letters can be seen which were put within paper by mechanical machines [4].

#### IV. PAPER IN SAFAVID PERIOD

With the emergence of paper, illumination considerably developed and in most part of Iran, numerous workshops established for papermaking. The 15<sup>th</sup> century is a radiant period in Iran for bookmaking. The multicity of compilations, publication of books and paying attention to elegance and eloquence of manuscripts in the Timurid period were the reasons for paying particular attention to the industry of bookmaking. The inheritor of Timurid tradition was Safavid dynasty which was established in 1501 by Shāh Ismāil I. The first capital of this dynasty located in Tabriz. Illumination was always under the support and attention of courtiers and Safavid rulers, therefore, there are lots of copies left from this period that most of them and also the most important of them are Ferdowsi's Shahnamehs. Shahnameh is the longest and most eloquence of Persian poetic collection which includes different themes such as epic, mythical, lyrical, philosophical. Since Safavid dynasty was originally an Iranian dynasty and tried to develop and promote Iranian national culture, they had a particular attention to transcription of Shahnameh. Also since there was the tradition of painting the epic stories in ancient times, Shahnameh considered as the most important Iranian book for illustration. It was written and painted by the most prominent artists. Shahnameh always had a special position among rulers, and that's why till today we have exquisite and considerable works from Ferdowsi's Shahnameh. At the time of Shāh Tahmasp, the art of illumination reached the peak of perfection. Since both Shāh Ismāil and Shāh Tahmasp were fond of art and illumination, at their time lots of Shahnamehs were illustrated inside and outside of court and today, a number of them are available in libraries and museums in Iran other countries.

At this part of paper, eight Ferdowsi's Shahnamehs of Safavid era of Tabriz doctrine available in Iranian libraries and museums are studied, and after that, the paper type used in these copies is analyzed too.

These copies are kept in National Library of Iran, Golestan Palace, Community of cultural works and figures, National Museum of Iran, Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art and

Reza Abbasi Museum. The understudied Shahnamehs are from 1521 till 1600.

TABLE I  
LOCATION, SIZE, AND PAPER TYPE OF FERDOWSI'S SHAHNAMEHS OF SAFAVID ERA OF TABRIZ DOCTRINE

Pos	Copy reference no.	Date of transcription	Paper	Location/keeping place	Copy size	Copy format
1	F15367	1521	Yellow-brown Cashmere	National Library of Iran	21*32	Vaziri
2	2245	1522	Isfahan	Golestan Palace	32/8*20/8	Vaziri
3	F141	1527	Farangi	Community of cultural works and figures	35/5*22	Rahli
4	2247	1528	Isfahan	Golestan Palace	32/7*21/5	Vaziri
5	4361	1531	Chashmere	National Museum of Iran	47/5*32	Rahli
6	Shahnameh	1518-1527	Unknown (the paper of this Shahnameh is very thin, handmade, and similar to today bible paper)	Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art Reza Abbasi Museum	31*19	Soltani
7	5-10982	1522	Cashmere	National Library of Iran	32/7*20/5	Vaziri
8	5-17509	1600	Isfahan	National Library of Iran	33/5*18	Vaziri

As it can be seen in Table I, eight Ferdowsi's Shahnamehs of Safavid era of Tabriz doctrine had been written on three types of paper which are: Farangi, Cashmere, and Isfahan. Among these three paper, Isfahan paper had been used more. The size of papers was almost between 32.7\*20.8 and 33.5\*18 which is about the size of A4.

Due to shortage and deficiency of sources and researches on types, manufacturing methods, ingredients, and characteristics of Safavid papers, in this paper, the characteristics of high-quality papers for miniature painting and also the format have been studied in order to answer the research questions and hypothesis. There is no miniature in those Shahnamehs in which Farangi paper used, and the number of pages is less than 300. therefore, it seems that this type of paper didn't have a high quality. In Safavid period, book illumination developed and became very popular and the need for bookmaking increased. Due to this issue, numerous papermaking workshops established in different cities of Iran such as Isfahan, Khorasan, Qazvin, Nishapur, Tabriz, and Kerman. But among these cities, Isfahan had the better quality. Until the recent decades, the papermaking continued in Isfahan. In the book of "Virtues of Isfahan", Maforokhi mentioned that "at that time Isfahan paper was made with the same method of Rashidi paper", as the description of this paper, the translator of this book said: "in terms of strength, and smoothness, softness and elegance, shape, volume, flatness of the sheets, quality and clarity it was a unique paper and even the similar papers weren't available except in Isfahan" [14]. Based on conducted studies at that time three types of paper were made in Isfahan. The cashmere paper which was made of Cashmere

and Isfahan paper which had two quality: a high quality and poor one. In old sources, it is mentioned that because of the low quality of the other type, sealing and pasting was used in order to make books from it. It was used mostly for normal books and textbooks, so it seems that this lower quality paper wasn't used in transcription of Shahnameh and what we mean by Isfahan paper in the high-quality type which also called Sepahani paper. We can conclude that at Safavid era there were two types of high-quality papers: one of them was Cashmere paper which was made from a very thin and delicate cashmeres but it was strong and durable which mostly used in Qajar period and had a considerably high price. The other was Isfahan or Sepahani paper which was thin, soft and smooth. On page 175 of "paper in identifying copies and manuscripts," H. Azimi mentioned that what Iraj Afshar meant by Isfahan high-quality paper is probably Cashmere paper. However, Afshar's analysis were mostly based on old sources such as "Alfheest" by Ibn Nadim and other historical, Persian literary works.

Regardless of Afshar's hypothesis, Isfahan and Cashmere papers were best papers in Safavid era of Tabriz doctrine which used for illumination. Since Cashmere paper was expensive and too thin, it seems that it wasn't appropriate for Shahnameh's illumination or miniature painting but due to a reasonable price, flatness, smoothness and appropriate thickness of Isfahan paper (Sepahani) it mostly used for illumination and miniature painting for the whole page. For example, in the copy of 1522 which is kept in Golestan palace, there are four full-page miniatures. There are many miniatures and also full page images in these three Shahnameh which shows the high quality of papers.

#### V. CONCLUSION

Paper has a significant role in book illumination because by studying paper quality and type of each copy, catalogers can collect lots of information about the copy, the culture of the society, producers of the copy and the contents. That's why in the identification of manuscripts, the paper type used in a particular copy will be studied too. By the emergence and then development of book illumination, the paper became important in history, and in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, it reached the peak of perfection. At that time there were many workshops in different parts of Iran specialized for bookmaking, so there was a great attention to the industry of papermaking. Safavids were always supportive of book illumination so in Safavid period lots of Shahnamehs were made in and out of court and many of them are now in libraries and museums of Iran and other countries. In this paper, eight Ferdowsi's Shahnamehs of Safavid era of Tabriz doctrine available in Iranian libraries and museums are studied. The analysis shows that these Shahnamehs were written on Cashmere and Isfahan papers, but Isfahan paper has the biggest part. The reasons for using Isfahan paper for Shahnameh transcription are the high quality, flatness, and strength of this paper as well as the ability of painting full-screen miniatures and reasonable price. One can conclude that being practical and economic are the two main factors in the quality of Isfahan paper. These two

factors are still important and valuable in the publication of illustrated books.

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