Investigating the Relationship between Spines of Date palm and Totmaj in Couplet of Nizami Ganjavi

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ABSTRACT

Haft Paykar (the Seven Beauties) is one of the five poetical works of Nizami Ganjavi, who was one of the greatest poets of Iran in six century; the lyrics of Haft Paykar are in need of explanation and for this reason many articles and books have been written and published but up to now the below couplet was not rendered (explained) correctly by the literati and lyrics exponents of this gifted poet, since without having enough information about meaning, concept and relation between the words and compounds, it's impossible to know, what Nizami wanted to say by this couplet. In this article Totmtaj and its relation with skewer and also the relation between spines of date palm and skewer (Totmaj skewer) was explained as well, then by the use of obtained information a correct meaning for this couplet was given.

When the spines of date palm grew up and their long pointed tips curve out; it is better to make skewer (Totmaj chopstick) to eat Totmaj with

KEYWORDS: Nizami, Haft Paykar (the Seven Beauties), Totmaj, spine of date palm, Iranian traditional cuisine.

INTRODUCTION

Nizami Ganjavi is one of the greatest poets of Iran in six century; he is one of the prominent poets of Azerbaijani style who has left five exquisite poetical works, known as Panj Ganj (Quinary). He was master in creating novel images and excellent themes; thus in his collection of five stories, in addition to the sweetness of stories and literary arties; particularly similes, metaphors, idioms, parables and magnificent themes are also encountered. Therefore most of the Nezami’s couplets need to be explained and disambiguated for this reason many books and articles have been published. Haft Paykar (the Seven Beauties) is one of the five poetical works of Nizami which is dedicated to an account of the birth of Bahram Gur upon his mysteriously disappearing in a cave; Nizami starts his poem in praising Allah and his prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and after composing Mi’rajieh and the cause of the poems order, before starting the story praises the words and express some verses about wisdom among verses, which are written in the wisdom and admonition, this couplet can be seen:

ख़ारक़े नङ्के दोश नायक ये क़े साऱे सग़ीर नमाज़े

When the spines of date palm grew up and their long pointed tips curve out; it is better to make skewer (Totmaj chopstick) to eat Totmaj with (Servatian, Haft Paykar of Nizami Ganjavi, and P.86)

The exponents of nezami’s works due to lack of proper knowledge of how Totmaj relates to skewer (Totmaj skewer) and also the relation between spines of date palm and skewer (Totmaj skewer) were mistaken about the meaning of this couplet and explained it wrongly. (Nizami, letter of Haft Paykar, described and edited by Dastgerdi, p.39; Zanjani, Haft Paykar of Nizami Ganjavi, P.252 and Servatian, Haft Paykar of Nizami Ganjavi, P.409)

Since decoding and understanding the meaning of couplet and what Nizami wanted to say have an important role in Nizamiology (knowing Nizami) and Persian literature studies' perspective. The present article tries to describe Totmaj and its relation with skewer (Totmaj chopstick) and spines of date palm in order to disambiguate the meaning and concept of the words, compounds and their relation, give a clear meaning of this couplet and to fill the empty place of correct and complete definition of Totmaj in dictionaries and encyclopedias. On the other hand since cuisines are part of traditional cultural issues this article by introducing one of the ancient and traditional Persian cuisines; tries to take a step toward restoring these types of cuisines.

In this regard some literal and non-literal books are used in which the ingredients and way of cooking of Totmaj is mentioned, also the verses and sentences of the poets and authors are used as clear-cut instances to clarify what is Totmaj and how it is reflected in literary texts, for further research some internet sites are used as well.

1. Totmaj:
   In old and new dictionaries there are very brief description (one or two lines long) about Totmaj but none

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of them provide a complete definition of this cuisine and even in most cases, the mentioned ones are vague and sometimes inaccurate; for example, Nazemo Latba describes it as long, thin pieces of dough and in Ghias Allohat it means a kind of Turkish soup; In Anandraj it is written as a kind of āsh which is cooked with sumac (Dehkhoda, Dehkhoda dictionary below Totmaj). Also in Moein dictionary it is written as a kind of āsh which is cooked by flour (Moein, Moein dictionary below Totmaj).

The best and most comprehensive information about the way of baking Totmaj can be found in ‘Karnameh (record)’ booklet; this booklet is remained from the Safavid era and was written by Haji Mohammad Ali Bavrchy (chef) Baghdadi for one of the nobles and dignitaries of Shah Ismail Safavi era (907-930 AH). The second chapter of this booklet describes how to bake ‘Ardineh āshs (āshs which are cooked by flour)’ (Afshar, Karnameh (record) and Made Hayat, p.51-64); in this section, the author has mentioned name and cooking techniques of this type of āsh, as it is written in this booklet, the dough of these āshs were prepared in different sizes and forms, with paying attention to their names it can be found that these groups of cuisines are named according to their shape of dough whether they were small, big, broad or narrow; for instance ‘Sanghreizeh (pebbles)’ was a kind of āsh which prepared with small and round dough and ‘Band Gaba’ were those broad strips or ‘Reshteh’ was the one which was made by narrow threads of dough and its āsh named Ash-e Reshteh (āsh of Reshteh). Some of these āshs have Turkish names, since they are especial to Turks and Turkmens and they have brought them to Iran, some of these āshs are Omaj, Totmaj, Jush Barah … According to what is written in ‘Karnameh (record)’ booklet, Totmaj is one of the most famous āshs which are cooked by flour (Ardineh āshs) and like most of them is made of dough, Ghalieh and Gatogh.

Dough: firstly flour, salt and water are mixed and massaged to get a dough then a long and narrow rolling pin (Turkish: Oklava) is used to shape and flatten the dough, after the flatten dough is cut with a knife into square shape then boiled in water and salt or Doogh (mixture of water and yogurt) and finally is poured through a sieve.

Ghalieh: this cuisine is almost like other Ardineh āshs which are cooked by flour in which red-meat was chopped and then fried in the lamb tail fat, finally the required amount of water, boiled peas, onions and spices such as saffron, cinnamon, cumin and coriander were added.

Gatogh: it was a kind of condiment which was made of vinegar, Doshab 1 or a mixture of strained yoghurt with smashed garlic and mint powder and sometimes instead of yogurt, Kashk 2 was used (Afshar, Karnameh (record) and Made Hayat, p.61-63).

It was served in porcelain bowls in a way that first the cooked dough was poured in to the bowl then some Ghalieh was put on it then decorated by fried mint 3 or yogurt (ibid). This cuisine was originally a Turkmen cuisine (Golban, Bahar & Abad Farsi, and p.217) and nowadays in Turkmenistan there is a cuisine (with the same ingredients) named Belke which is considered as their common food (Bayramgul, 2011), also Totmaj (Totmac) is a cuisine of some cities in turkey (Zerrin, 2009). Within the traditional foods of Khorasani people (a city in east of Iran) there is a cuisine named Lakhtse (Laghshite) or Lakhshekh, which is thought to be the same as Totmaj (Akhavan-Sales, 2005). In Tarikh-e Beyhaqi which is one of the historical texts of the 5th century, the word Laghshite is also encountered: « [Amir Massoud Ghaznavi] said to bring Laghshte and Ghatogh which is cooked with meat and vegetable. It’s a kind of food which is made by cooked meat and vegetable. Each meal has its own time of eating: Boghra in Morning, Yakhni in Čâšt (middle of the day), Ghalieh in dinner, Kale Pache’ in Sahar (time before sunrise) » (Boshagh, koliyate Boshagh, 37).

1 grape extract that is made of boiled grape water
2 Kashk is a thick whitish liquid similar to whey (a dairy product) (Wikipedia).
3 Mint leaves are dried and its powder is fried in a bit of oil and used for decoration specially in Ash-e Reshteh
4 It is cooked like Totmaj but its dough's shape is circle one (Aghili, 2009).
5 It's a kind of food which is made by cooked meat and vegetable.
6 the middle hour between sunrise and the meridian (Wikipedia)
7 khash (dishes) kind of dish made of cow's feet, tongue, brain.
Another poet named Sufi Muhammad Heravi (9th century) who was one of Boshagh's imitators and contemporaries, has written some lyrics describing foods and also in his poems refers to eating Boghra in the morning:

*Eating Boghra (which is full of meat) in the morning is joyful; [God] please have mercy on me till I get up and eat of what you have bestowed upon me (delicious meal), (Sufi, book of Sufi lyrics, 118).*

Boshagh in his lyrics has mentioned the ingredients of Totmaj namely lamb tail fat, Ghalieh, vinegar, garlic, Kashk.

Lamb tail fat makes Totmaj to look shiny (when oil stands on it) and delicious in plate or bowl; a ladle of garlic and Kashk of Totmaj is that much valuable that does not fit in the 9th heaven (Boshagh, koliyate Boshagh, 56).

While the Mozafar8 is covered by the powder of sugar; we are interested in clay-like Totmaj (ibid, 165)

8 It's a kind of pilau which attain its golden color by being stirred with too much saffron

"And love offers at night a delicious dish of Totmaj to the lover which it has cooked. 'Now say bismi llah!' (i.e. start eating!) When I drank from his Totmj, he put me down like vinegar, I made my face bi...

Also Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Balkhī in a ghazal of Dīvān-e Šhams-e Tabrīzī speaks about Totmaj9,

9 Each of these couplets has its mystical concepts which will be discussed in other articles and these couplets are justly for the evidences for Totmaj and skewer.
The eyes of your enemy poked on the thorn like the way Totmaj is on the skewer (Dehkhoda, Dehkhoda's Dictionary below Totmaj)

In Aniso-Talibin has written that: «everyone had a bowl of Toptmaj and I wished to have a one skewer of it» (ibid).

In some types of palm trees on the bottom side of the main stem, stems are separated and there, are some spines which our ancestors used them as a tool for eating some types of Ardineh āshs and the mean of Totmaj skewer or skewer in other Ardineh āshs such as Boghra are these spines of palm tree, as reflected in the lyrics of some Persian literary poets like Boshagh. Boshagh Atameh has composed a Manzomeh named« Mozafar and Boghra»; in this story Boghra was one of the khan's of Khorasan who goes to war with Mozafar a Sultan from Shiraz; the weapon of Boghra in this war was a spear made of spine from date palm and a pestle (used for smashing the garlic). (Boshagh, koliyate Boshagh, p.78)

Also Boshagh in another couplet associated the skewer of Borek (another name for Boghra in Boshagh's works) with the spine:

When I poked the skewer in to the Borek it suddenly fell down into the plate; since petal (Gol Bargh11) can't tolerate the sharp tip of thorns (ibid, p.106)

3. Meaning of Couplet:

The obtained information shows that the meaning of the Nizami's couplet is as follows, when the spine of date palm separates from palm it doesn’t have any value and just can be used for eating Totmaj, actually Nizami uses this couplet as an allegory for previous couplets, since in those couplets poet speaks about the unfaithfulness of the world and recommends human to avoid greed and avarice, also speaks about uselessness of human body, in this couplet he gives an example about the transient nature of worldly glory and says as long as the spine was on the palm tree it had its dignity and glory (superficial and mundane values) but later, due to the passing nature of time after sometimes the spine separates from the palm and lost its dignity and glory and just became a skewer of Totmj (invaluable) therefore this world is not reliable and any kind of splendor never last forever.

One of the characteristics of Nizami is that whenever a attracted his attention, he tried to explain different aspects of it in several successive couplets; e.g. in Makhzanol Asrar after narrating the story of eating wheat by Adam (AS) in several successive couplets speaks about the its oval shape, groove and its white kernel (Zanjani, Life, works and description of Nizami Ganjavi’s Makhzanol Asrar, p.290-291), thus in the next couplet he again speaks about Totmaj and uses the term «Totmaj leaf » to explain the thin and sliced dough of Totmaj that looks like flower petal.

Yes to those who are gluttonous; the leaf of Totmaj is better than petal (Servatian, Haft Paykar of Nizami Ganjavi, and P.86)

By the above couplet Nizami meant that for the ones who have a big belly, thin and small slices of Totmaj dough are more valuable and delicious than the pleas of flower, after this couplet poet speaks about the disadvantages of overeating.

Also in the below couplet Ahmad ibn Manucher similizes the Totmaj dough, which is boiled in the Doogh, to a petal of flower floating on the water of camphor.

Like a petal of flower on the water of camphor; it is bread for Khoresht and by itself is a kind of bread (Chatayi, Qasida describing Totmaj Ahmad ibn Manucher Shast Kolah in Molasadra war, p. 29)

5. Conclusion

At the end besides achieving what poet meant by his couplet, it is obvious that some words of Persian ancient texts were not completely rendered in dictionaries and are still in the need of further research and discussion, and also the history of Iranian meals, that used to be common but today there is no sign of them or are considered as the cuisines of other cities, should be researched and investigated comprehensively because food is part of the traditional culture of each nation and restoring their history is important in terms of cultural studies. So more attention should be paid on early Persian poetry and prose texts since they are one of the most important sources that enables the access to cultural information especially to those information which are related to Iran's past communities.

10 Narrative Poetry
11 Gol Bargh was another name for Boghra
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