

# From story to History

## Storytelling objects in Cultural Institute of Bonyad Museums of Iran (CIBM)



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- **Introduction**

Cultural institute of Bonyad museums consists of 10 storages which keep and preserve cultural, artistic, historical and archeological museum objects and artifacts. These objects are narrators of folklore, epic, fiction, national and religious literature or narrators of ceremonies and cultural background of Iranians. Each of these objects contains of hidden traditional story, cultural and historical background of Iranian nations. Most of these traditions, customs and stories, are kept, memorized and verbally and orally transferred. Tales which were painted in paintings in local and tribal style or used in the frame of arms and armors. Those are narrators of epics or religious literature or warlike stories. They have rooted for thousands of years in Iranian literature especially on Shahnameh by Ferdosi.

- **Storytelling objects and artifacts of collection department of CIBM**

Among different objects in CIBM collections, there are some with Iranian cultural, historical, and epic and fictional background, which we can find them through paintings, arms and armors.

In this article we are focusing on traditional paintings so called “ **Ghahveh Khaneie** “ and also on one of the historical armors which is important because of its story. The methodology of documentation of these kinds of objects will be introduced as well.

- **A glance to Traditional Paintings of CIBM paintings collections “Parde Ghahveh Khaneie “**

Ghahveh Khaneie paintings are visual narrators of literature, battles and national and religious epics in Iran. These combination of visual, dramatic, musical and artistic objects were narrated by one or two storytellers in public or traditional gathering and local teahouses. The background of this kinds of paintings refers to Safavid period (1501- 1722 A.C). The importance of these illustration is the story they express and narrate. It is not clear that these stories indicate the real history of Iran. But it's obvious that paintings are telling the myths, battles and anecdotes that have interwoven with people life in this country. Thus it is not clear that the story of these paintings had been historical events which now narrated by paintings or vice versa. Was it a true history that became story by verbal and oral transferring



and had a real facts and references? Or it was just the story which again became a part of anecdotes.



Painting collection of CIBM: King Tahmasb meets king Homayoun from India in a banquet. (Qajar period)

Generally, documentation method in CIBM is based on essential and important object's information such as size, weight, shape, origin, date of creation and so more. Meanwhile the collection management has another policy for objects with multi functional, cultural, historical concept and lots of stories on them. Therefore in addition to accomplish the documentation standard and its routine activities for recording the physical, historical, and cultural information, collection department has specific policy for recording the intangible heritage which carried and narrated by object.

In facts these methods are finding an appropriate way, with or without technology and by traditional or new methods, to extract the stories and epics of objects.

- **Collection department method for documenting the narrating paintings**

The narrating paintings in collection department have different subjects like, religion, epics, banquets, battles and so on. If the subject is religion, the oldest mourning stories in the Muslims' world will be narrated. This kind of storytelling about this subjects called Taaziye and it is one of the recorded intangible heritage of Iran.

On the other hand, some of these artworks are based on Shahnameh stories, which is one of the oldest and greatest poem book in Iran

Long time ago, these paintings had been used as media. They designed to be performed in public and their narrators who called **Naqal** in Persian language, were creative, improviser and talented actors who educated people by this epics, anecdotes and stories verbally. They have also been learned and became an artist in the same way with verbal education. This kind of storytelling is one of the recorded intangible heritage in Iran as well .This is one of the oldest dramatic and performance of romances, epics and anecdotes which since long time ago have performed in villages and cities until now. **Naqals** and storytellers have performed their stories in Tea houses by showing and presenting those mentioned paintings. These kinds of storytelling is performed now a days as well. Although their performances became more occasional or just for their preservation, perform in ceremonies .Thus they lost their educational or social role as medium in society.

- **Documentation Method for Dramatic illustration or Pardeh qahveh khanei:**

We understood that it is necessary to find out painting's hidden stories and information in order to preserve and record their narrations for special presentation and exhibitions. Thus these anecdotes on paintings even became more important than the general information in their formal documentation.

Collection management's method for documenting one of these special illustration is as following:

- Acquisition the object in CIBM; recording the object's entry in CIBM and painting collection.

- Numbering the object; by CIBM coding system
- Filling the forms such as object ID
- Photography
- Preparing conservation forms; by gathering information about physical object condition and determining priority of conservation situation.



Before conservation: Battle of Neynava and related stories (Qajar period- 1814 A.C)

- Conservation progress; the painting restored by a specialized expert team during 8 months.

Completing the objects profile; adding researches and studies about storytelling illustrations.



Painting collection of CIBM: After conservation: Battle of Neynava and related stories (Qajar period- 1814 A.C)



- **What have the collection management done in order to extract and interpret the unseen stories**

Gathering the general information of the objects is a routine activity in museums, and mostly these collected information uses in labeling and cataloging. But from CIBM point of view the activities that guide museum people to the stories and messages hidden in the object is more important and essential. These activities mediate and interpret the stories by gathering and presenting them to the audiences. This could only happen just by preserving the object's traditional function that indicate the unseen stories on the object and identifies them.



Naqal master Torabi narrates painting stories dramatically

All these activities about identifying the stories and conserving the object presented in an exhibition.

- **Activities in order to gather the stories**
  - Preparing traditional dramatic condition based on the original painting's function.
  - Employee a **Naqal** in order to narrate the painting based on his experience and verbal knowledge

- Interpreting and storytelling for audience
- Recording the event and the narration
- Documenting and filming the storytelling and exhibition
- Integrating all the information in object's file

It is obvious that CIBM used **Naqali** which is one of the Iran's recorded intangible heritage, in documenting a tangible heritage. This was an interactive impression which lead us to document both intangible and tangible heritage based on an object.



Naqal master Torabi narrating the painting in an exhibition of CIBM-2011

- **Noh-Daal Rifle:**

Noh-Daal rifle is one of the objects in rifle collection which has been reserved in Arms and Armors treasury in collection department. This rifle expresses the history of one of the warriors of Bakhtiari, which is a very famous tribe in central Iran. This object had belonged to the one of the epic heroes of Bakhtiyari culture who had been killed unfairly and very tragically in a battle, so, this rifle is familiar

for all Bakhtiari's people. And since this rifle belonged to a famous person, after the death of its owner began a quarrel to possess it.



Arms and Armors collection of CIBM: Noh Dal Rifle of Aa- alidad khader sorkh

This Hero named Aa' alidad khader sorkh and mentioned in many songs and poems.

The object is kind of long rifle which gifted by one of the ottoman kings to one of the greatest man of bakhtiari tribe, and then after many years it heired to Aa'alidad.

As we noted before in collection department of CIBM, narrations and fictions about objects extracted from them. In the case of the rifle, after an accomplishment of primary research and examination, a native researcher as a consultant along expert of arms and armors collection, began to work to identify this object, because there were many doubts about its background and characteristic. Since this researcher- Dr. Ardeshir Salehpour- had grown up in Bakhtiari tribe, he had been familiar from childhood with lullabies, tales and songs related to this rifle and its owner. According to his native interest and research characteristic, he was looking for the rifle since the death of its owner. He studied written and verbal sources about following owners and could identify some of them.

After his cooperation with CIBM, and during many sessions, this object, its inscribed poems and concepts were identified and examined. Thus it was cleared and confirmed that to whom has belonged this rifle originally, which had been mentioned before in lullabies, tales and native songs.



Arms and Armors collection of CIBM: Noh Dal rifle- Inscriptions on object



- **Documenting Noh Dal rifle according to its background:**

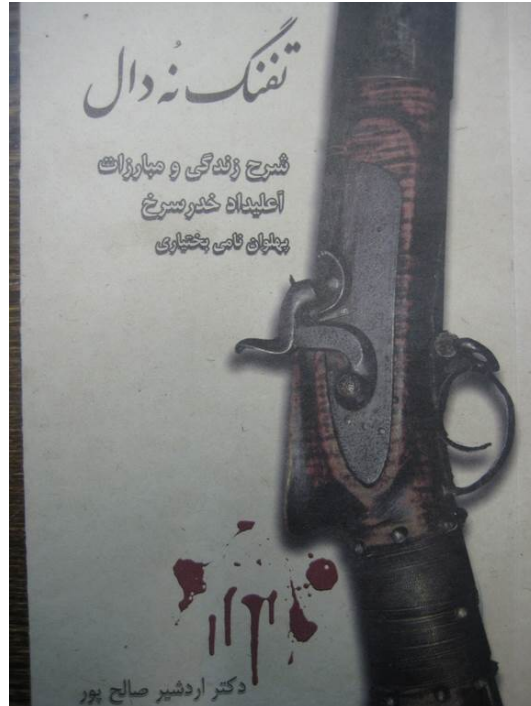
At first the documenting process of this object was accomplished as other objects and art works. Process which consisted of

-numbering, accession, object ID, locating, and so on.

After those process the below activities can be considered as main part of this object documentation:

- Many fictions, lullabies and documentary and feature films about the famous owner of the rifle, Aa'alidad, gathered by contribution of Dr. Ardeshir Saleh pour, an ethnographic researcher of this region.

- The collected verbal and written narrations became to a fiction book in the genre of epic/historical which narrated by rifle. This book has been written by the virtue of poems about object, inscribed documents on it, information and evidence which extracted by researcher himself.



Cover of The book by Dr. Ardeshir Saleh pour:

“Noh Dal rifle, about life and battles of Aa- alidad khader sorkh”

In the meanwhile, researcher used historical literature and epic music of bakhtiari tribe which in general and particular considered as verbal and historical memory of this tribe. He placed the rifle as a reflecting mirror of culture of Bakhtiari tribe champions.

- Finally, profile of the rifle was completed by registration and reservation of all documents, evidence and fictional /historical book.

- An exhibition held by the contribution of national museum of Iran in which besides showing rifle, related lullabies, anthems, tales and object inscriptions presented.

All of these activities helped to reserve verbal heritage and introduced it more.

Now all of research, dramatic and performative documents are reserved along rifle in Arms and Armors collection.

- **Epilogue**

In collections department of CIBM, objects with fictional background and particular narration, according to documents and observations, will be identified. In this place, narrators of this objects, storytellers, researchers and any instruments will be used to clarify these narrations.

This method is very important to us, because the stories of these objects and art works often accomplish the historical background which through ages had not been clarified, or not considered for lack of documentation and evidences. These objects with their hidden stories, bear witnesses to refine the lost puzzles of the history of Iran.