

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.

خارکز نخل دور شد تاجش بیه که سازند سیخ تنماجش

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), Totmtaj, 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:

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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 Alloghat 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 'Sanghrizeh (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, Doshab¹ or a mixture of strained yoghurt with smashed garlic and mint powder and sometimes instead of yogurt, Kashk² 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 mint³ or yogurt (ibid). This cuisine was originally a Turkmen cuisine (Golban, Bahar & Adab 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 (*Tutmac*) 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 Lakhsh (Laghsh) or Lakhshk, 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 Laghshte is also encountered: « [Amir Massoud Ghaznavi] said to bring Laghshte and Reshteh and it was very delicious» (Beyhaqi, 1996, p.270)

Sometimes Totmaj can be seen in some poetry and prose texts of Persian literature, for instance Malek o-Sho'arā Bahār (literally: the king of poets) one of the best contemporary Persian poets and scholars, in one of his articles has written a Qasida describing Totmaj which is probably belongs to Shams Al-din Ahmad ibn Manucher Shast Kolah who was one of the poets of 6th century, Qasida begins on a cold winter morning when lover goes to the home of poet and asks him to make Totmaj for her, along the Qasida the steps of making this food and its ingredients are described by poet in a poetic way and full of similes and it is also mentioned that this food was innovated by Turanian (Chatayi, Qasida describing Totmaj Ahmad ibn Manucher Shast Kolah in Molasadra war, p.27-29).

This poem and other literary evidences show that most of the Ardineh āshs were eaten in the morning especially in winter e.g. Boshagh Atameh was one of the poets and authors of 9th century, who through describing foods in his works has created a unique work of poetry and prose, also with in his lyrics he has mentioned that some of the Ardineh āshs such as Boghra⁴ were eaten in the morning, the below couplet is one of them:

هر طعمی در زمانی لنت دیگر دهد صبح بغرا، چاشت یخنی، قلبه شب، کپیا سحر

Each meal has its own time of eating; Boghra in Morning, Yakhni⁵ in Āst (middle of the day)⁶, Ghalieh in dinner, Kale Pache⁷ 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 (dish) 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:

خوش است صحنک بغرای پر ز قیمة صباح گشای این در دولت به رویم ای قنّاح
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.

از روغن دنبه گشت روشن در صحن و قدح ضمیر تتماج...
در لاک نهم فلک ننگند یک کفچه ز کشک و سیر تتماج
Lamb tail fat makes Totmaj to look shiny (when oil stands on it) and delicious in plate or bowel; a ladle of garlic and Kashk of Totmaj is that much valuable that does not fit in the 9th heaven (Boshagh, koliyate Boshagh, 56).

دیوار مزعفر همه اندوده گچ قند ما سرکه صفت در پی تتماج. چو خشتیم
While the Mozafar⁸ is covered by the powder of saffron; we are interested in clay-like Totmaj (ibid, 165)
وصف تتماج پر از قلیه چه شاید گفتن که به هر برگ نیشته است هزاران اسرار
But how it's possible to portray the full -meat Totmaj since in each leaf has written thousands of secrets (ibid, 14)

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

شبی عشق فریبنده بیامد جانب بنده که بسم الله که تتماجی برای تو پزیدستم...
چو نوشیدم ز تتماجش، فرو کوبید چون سیرم چو طرّلق روترش کردم کز آن شیرین بریدستم
"And love offers at night a delicious dish of Totmaj to the lover which it has cooked. 'Now say bismillah!' (i.e. start eating!) When I drank from his Totmaj, he put me down like vinegar, I made my face bitter like pickles (Tuzluq) since I became separated from the sweet one" (Schimmel, 1993)

به دست من به جز سیخی از آن تتماج او نامد ولی چون سیخ سر نیزم در آنچ مستفیدستم
So just a skewer of Totmaj remained for me; but I am as sharp as the tip of skewer since I got what I wanted (Molavi, Koliyate Shams, p.434).

Molavi has also spoken about the water of Totmaj which has remained in the bowel and given to dogs, probably he meant the water or Doogh in which the Totmaj was cooked and after serving the remained water or Doogh was poured out

آب تتماجی نریزی در تغار تا سگی چندی نباشد طعمه خوار
You won't give the water of Totmaj to dogs if they don't eat it (ibid, vol3, chapter 6, p.367)

also in one of the stories of Jawāmi ul-Hikāyāt written by Afi Tojmaj and the use of garlic in it can be seen :« the envious man invited Vaez to his own house and made a Totmaj for him and poured too much garlic in it and insisted Vaez to eat as much as he can» (Aufi, Jawāmi ul-Hikāyāt, vol1, p.37)

2. Way of Eating Totmaj:

In the past, Iranian people used to eat their foods (mostly such as cooked rice and various kinds of meat-dishes) with three fingers of his right hand. Eating with right hand considered as the Tradition of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) (Ghazali, Kimiya-e-Sa'adat, vol.1, p.285) and eating with more than three fingers was considered rude (Nasir al-Din Tusi, Akhlaq-i-Nasri, p.233). Washing the hands before and after eating food was among the traditions (Hamidi al-Din Balkhi, Magamat-I-Hamidi) and (Ghazali, Kimiya -e- Sa'adat, vol.1, and p.284). In this regard, the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) has been narrated which some of them are in the Adabo al-Mozayefin va Zado al-Akelin book (Mahmoud Ben Mohamed, Adabo al-Mozayefin va Zado al-Akelin, p.51). So before start eating, Maid used to bring pitcher, basin (ewer) and a towel; and after eating the food the fatty (dirty) hands were washed with the same method (The eating habits of the Iranian in Safavid and Qajar era see Kaempfer, Kaempfer's itinerary, p.273-275; Serena, Madame Carla Serena travelogue, p.232-233; Pollock, Pollock's itinerary, p.96; and Chardin, Travels in Persia, p.265). In the past for cleaning food fat off their hands Oshnan was used as soap (Ghazali, Kimiya -e- Sa'adat, vol.1, and p.287) but in most of the Ardineh āshs, especially in Totmaj probably because of the slippery dough it was impossible to eat them with hand therefore it was necessary to eat it with a special tool; for this purpose, our ancestors used a small wooden skewers and since the poetry and prose texts of Persian literature contain a lot of information about past communities of Iran, especially in cultural matters, the skewer of Totmaj can be seen in the lyrics of some poets, e.g. Suzani:

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

⁹ Each of these couplets has its mystical concepts which will be discussed in other articles and these couplets are just the evidences for Totmaj and skewer.

چشم اعدای تو خلیده به خار هم بر آن سان که سیخ در تتماج

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 al-Talibin has written that: «everyone had a bowel of Toptomaj 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 Manzomeh¹⁰ 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:

سیخ بر بورک زدم در حال در صحن اوفتاد برگ گل سر تیزی خار مغیلان بر نتافت

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 Totmaj (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.

آری آن را که در شکم دهلیست برگ تتماج به ز برگ گل است

Yes to those who are glutinous; 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 simlizes the Totmaj dough, which is boiled in the Doogh, to a petal of flower floating on the water of camphor.

چون برگ گل اندر آب کافور هم نان خورش آمده است و هم نان

(چترایی، قصیده تتماج احمد بن منوچهر شصت کله در جُنْگ ملا صدرا، ص 29)

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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