



## Woman in Culture and Arts

### Investigating the Appearance of Iranian Women during the Safavid Era Based on Cultural Iconography (Case study: Travelogues of Sanson and Tavernier)

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#### Article Info

##### Article type:

Research Article

##### Article history:

Received: 13 June 2023

Received in revised form: 17 July 2023

Accepted: 8 May 2024

Published online: 30 March 2025

#### ABSTRACT

##### Introduction

Imagery is a kind of cultural exchange that occurs between individuals, societies, and nations. Its objective is to allow individuals to perceive themselves from a different perspective and to recognize the representation of their own culture in another's literature or another's culture in their own literature. The objective of this research is to examine the identity of court and common women during the Safavid period and to examine the cultural, social, economic, and political activities of these women in relation to the travelogues of Tavernier and Sanson. These travelogues compare the stereotypical images and mentality of tourists with official-historical documents, which are based on the knowledge of iconography and adapted using a descriptive-analytical method. The research findings reveal the authentic portrayal of Iranian women's identity during the Safavid era, as opposed to the stereotyped representations of Tavernier and Sanson.

##### Research Method

In order to offer a comprehensive comprehension of Iranian culture, it is necessary to examine cultural identity from both the inside (oneself) and the outside (others) and to employ a mixed approach that encompasses these two perspectives. Therefore, the travelogues of Tavernier and Sanson have depicted the identity of Iranian women during the Safavid period. The research on the characteristics of Iranian women during the Safavid period and their stereotypical images has been explained in response to the two main questions using cultural imagery in a descriptive-analytical approach. The questions pertain to the portrayal of Iranian women during the Safavid era by Tavernier and Sanson. In these travelogues, what prejudices have arisen as a result of mental stereotypes?

##### Research Findings

This study investigates the identity and appearance of Iranian women during the reign of King Suleiman I in the actual images and mental stereotypes of Tavernier and Sanson's travelogue and the period of Shah Abbas II in Tavernier's travelogue, both from the perspective of cultural imagery. Furthermore, it has revealed the authentic representation of Iranian women's identity during the Safavid era, especially during the reign of King Suleiman I, as opposed to the stereotyped representations of Tavernier and Sanson. Additionally, it has altered the perspective of visitors.

##### Women's Literacy and Skills

Sanson has generalized this approach in a stereotypical view to common Iranian women, and court women have enjoyed freedom of action in certain aspects, such as education and learning, hunting and riding, dancing and painting, as well as providing dowry, within the

##### Keywords:

Iconography,  
Iranian Woman's Identity,  
Sanson's Travelogue,  
Safavid Era,  
Tavernier's Travelogue.

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framework of Shah's laws. The activities of court women have been more extensively described by travelogue writers, while the entertainment of ordinary women has been distinct from that of court women. Sanson has devoted less attention to urban and rural women in his travelogue. Sanson defies this stereotype by applying the skills of court women to common women, despite the fact that the general women of society are concealed in a collective and stereotyped belief system and lack the ability to engage in activities and skills.

#### **Iranian Women's Clothing**

Safavid period women's clothing, which was regulated by the decrees of Islam and the government, was a reflection of their social class and identity. The laws of the political system were applied to the clothing of court women, and the fundamental principle of clothing was women's self-restraint in the face of the impermissible gaze and their freedom of action in selecting the shape and components. Clothes have been restricted in terms of color and size.

#### **Social and political influence of women**

Shah Suleiman I harbored a strong affection for women, which resulted in the influence of court women on his personality and decision-making. Although women excel in social, political, and scientific capacities, the patriarchal character of the Safavid era impedes their social engagement.

#### **The position of women in the observance of Sharia**

Drinking wine is forbidden in Islam, and Iranian women during the reign of King Suleiman I have preserved their religious beliefs until the end of their lives, demonstrating their morality and adherence to religious principles, as well as their strength and courage in the face of an order that is in opposition to their beliefs.

#### **Muslim Women and the Ritual of Marriage**

The majority of women during the Safavid period were married through mediators and subsequently married in accordance with the man's desires. The girl was chosen through reports. Although the man did not meet his wife until the wedding, the mother or sister's testimony was the preferred document, and the husband bore responsibility for the woman's decision-making after the marriage. As a result, the institution of marriage was a suitable accomplishment for women, as their presence in society was uncommon. Also, Tavernier observed the temporary union of these women with men.

#### **Non-Muslim women and the ritual of marriage**

Minorities who resided in Iran during the Safavid era were married in accordance with their religious beliefs. Tavernier did not devote sufficient attention to the Zoroastrians' marriage ritual, but he accepted and generalized the information he had heard, as he noted the polygamy prevalent among Zoroastrians. Polygamy was not practiced in Zoroastrianism. Tavernier also attributes Catholicism's request for exemption to Zoroastrianism, as Catholics are prohibited from marrying first- and second-degree relatives without the Pope's consent. Armenian mothers reached a consensus among themselves regarding the matrimony of their offspring. The marriage of Muslims and Armenians has been consistent in terms of general principles, as both marriage rituals are deemed appropriate from a young age, and child marriage was prevalent among Armenians during the Safavid period.

#### **Conclusion**

This study has examined the identity of women in the travelogues of Tavernier and Sanson during the reign of Shah Suleiman I, utilizing cultural iconography. Despite their favorable

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perception of Iranian women, they occasionally favor their own culture with a superficial perspective and criticize Iranian women. This is due to the fact that the historical documents that establish the identity of Iranian women are in direct opposition to the images depicted in these travelogues. The identity of Iranian women has been influenced by patriarchal laws, as demonstrated by prior research. Although the court women were more dynamic and were less influenced by this norm as a result of their court status, the skill-learning position was a characteristic of court women. However, the travel writers generalized this and attributed it to the general women of the society based on mental stereotypes. Despite the fact that some court women, such as the mother of the monarch, broke down this barrier and intervened in the country's decisions, religious sharia and patriarchal laws have been effective in the formation of women's identity. Men have also prevented women from participating in political and social affairs.

**Conflict of Interest**

This article is free of any conflicts of interest.

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**Cite this article:** Namdari, N., & Beygzadeh, Kh. (2025). Investigating the appearance of Iranian women in the Safavid era based on cultural iconography (Case study: Travelogues of Sanson and Tavernier). *Woman in Culture and Art*, 17(1), 99-115.

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.22059/jwica.2023.359649.1919>



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Publisher: The University of Tehran Press.

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.22059/jwica.2023.359649.1919>

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