

Original Research Article

A Structured Analysis of the Themes in the Lacquered Scale Box Paintings, Depicting the Court of Solomon (PBUH), Belonging to the Early Qajar Period, Preserved in the British MuseumElaheh Panjehbashi¹ 

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Abstract

Introduction: Lacquered boxes, known as Qapan boxes due to their practical use during the Qajar period, were functional items painted and adorned with various themes. Custom functional boxes were of higher quality and importance and were made to order for the royal court. One of these exquisitely painted boxes is preserved in the British Museum. The main subject of the painting spans the length of the rectangle, depicting the Court of Solomon (PBUH), while the secondary subject is the width of the box, illustrating a royal hunting scene. This box is one of the rare and intact examples belonging to the early Qajar period, and its identification can serve as a complete and rare specimen to understand this art in the Qajar period. The question of the present research is, «What themes have been painted in different sections inside and outside this box, and how are the themes of the images related to each other?» The present study aims to examine the structure of the painted scale box with the theme of the Court of Solomon (PBUH), which includes the structure and themes worked on both inside and outside and familiarizes us with this type of box and its practical aspect.

Research Method: This research is qualitative and descriptive-analytical, utilizing library (documentary) methods for data collection. The statistical population of the present study is a mirrored box numbered 192705251 in the British Museum, belonging to the Qajar period. Data was collected using library methods and tools such as note-taking and downloading internet versions of images. The purposeful sampling method was chosen by examining the lacquered painted scale box depicting the Court of Solomon (PBUH).

Findings: The present study's findings indicate that this painted box demonstrates the integration of artistic achievements and life, introducing religious themes as the main subjects depicted on the box. The paintings on this box share stylistic similarities with other aspects of the box but differ in terms of content, having been selected and executed with consideration of the box's functional aspect. The semantic relationship of the themes inside and outside the box differs, but they share the same artistic style. In this box, three themes are observed: On the lid of the box, the religious theme of the Court of Solomon, on the sides of the box, the cultural theme of hunting during the Qajar period, and inside the box, the mystical theme of Flower and Bird and the decorative elements of Iranian art.

Conclusion: The art of Qajar court painting has influenced the themes used in various parts of the box. The systematic design and the use of images for the box, the use of hunting motifs for the box's horizontal and vertical borders, and the use of traditional Iranian motifs for the box's interior divisions are among these intentionally selected themes, clearly reflecting the art of the Qajar period.

Keywords

Qajar, Scale Box, Lacquered, Painting, the Court of Solomon (PBUH)

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Introduction and Problem Definition

During the Qajar period, Lacquered boxes featuring the Qajar king and scenes of hunting and battles, among other themes, were common. The lacquer paintings on these boxes were purposeful and detailed, belonging to this period's diverse categories of lacquer works. The mirrored scale box, numbered 192705251 in the British Museum, belonging to the Qajar period, is of the lacquered scale box type discussed in this research and is preserved in the British Museum. In this study, it is a type of lacquered painted box kept in the British Museum. This box is scarce and intact, with a functional use as a scale and toolbox, and all its parts contain paintings and decorations. The theme on the main lid of the box is the Court of Solomon (PBUH), which is depicted in detail and very laboriously. Inside the box is a mirror; fortunately, it has remained entirely intact. Around the mirror are paintings of flowers and birds, and inside the box are various tools and two small scales, which have a complete division of space and are very orderly. Two other painted lacquered boxes with weights and two small scales can also be seen inside. The present study aims to study the structure of a painted scale box with the theme of the Court of Solomon (PBUH), which includes the structure and themes that are worked on inside and outside and familiarizes us with the structure of these boxes and their functional aspects. The questions of the present study are, «What themes are painted in different parts of the inside and outside of this box?» and «What is the relationship between the themes of the images on the outside and inside?» In examining the necessity and importance of lacquered boxes, it should be said that they have cultural and artistic significance and are worthy of investigation regarding the method of production, design, painting style, motifs, and symbols. These boxes represent the cultural and creative characteristics of the period of Fath-Ali Shah Qajar and are essential in this regard. This box in the British Museum is vital due to its diverse themes, which have not been discussed and studied.

Research Method

The present study is descriptive-analytical and qualitative and is based on examining painted lacquered toolboxes with three scales, all painted parts. The statistical population of the present study is a mirrored box numbered 192705251 in the British Museum, belonging to the Qajar period. Data collection was carried out using the library method, note-taking, and retrieving online versions of images. The purposeful sampling method was selected by examining the painted lacquered scale box with the theme of the Court of Solomon (PBUH). The reason for choosing this box is that it contains three different themes in a single box. The box in question is first introduced in the present study, and then its themes are discussed and analyzed.

Research Background

So far, several studies have explored lacquered works during the Qajar period. Most research has focused on the description of the appearance of the images of the works, and this subject has not been considered from an artistic perspective and based on the reading and connection of the themes. Accordingly, the necessity of the present research and its innovative aspect are determined. In this regard, «Khalili» (2007), in a book entitled «Lacquered Works», which is the works in Khalili's personal collection, has discussed and examined the lacquered works of the Qajar period and discussed the diversity of lacquered works. In a book entitled «A Survey of Persian Art», «Pope» (2008) referred to wooden boxes and introduced them as surgical boxes. In a book entitled «The Art of Pen Boxes», «Boroumand» (1987) referred to lacquered works and pictorial pen boxes, but lacquered

boxes and their thematic analysis were not discussed in this book. In an article entitled «Study of Painted Lacquered Qapan Boxes in the First Qajar Period», «Panjehbashi» (2021) introduced five painted lacquered boxes, which he named under the title of Qapan boxes, and also introduced the box discussed in this study. Still, he was satisfied with its appearance and introduction and did not outline its thematic analysis or pay attention to it. In an article entitled «Illustration of Lacquered Paintings (Papier-mâché) in the Qajar Period with an Iconographic Approach», «Mahmoudi» (2019) examined lacquered works of the Qajar period and discussed and examined them from a semantic perspective, without paying attention to themes. In an article entitled «The Influence of Christian Missionaries on the Paintings of Pen Cases of the Nasrid Era», «Lale Shatri and Jafari Dehkordi» (2016) examined lacquered works of this period and examined the influence of Christianity and its themes on pen boxes. «Shamisa, Khajeh Ahmad Attari, and Mir Jafari» (2016) have examined toolboxes and their guilds in an article entitled «A Study of the Form and Function of Steel Tools of Qajar Guilds», but in this case, they have also focused on the inside of the boxes and their tools. «Bakhtiari» (2011) has addressed the subject of Flowers and Birds in applied arts in his thesis entitled «Flowers and Birds in the Applied Arts of Iran (Late Safavid Era to Early Qajar Period)» but has not made the slightest reference to these toolboxes.

Characteristics of Lacquer Painting in Early Qajar Period Works

«Lak or Laka», which is called «Lak» in Persian, is known by the same name in various Persian cultures (Dekhoda, 1998, 19546). «... The term oily (Roghani) originally referred to Roghanas and refers to the Runas (madder) plant. From the root of this plant, a red substance called Alzarin is obtained, which was used in Iranian dyeing, and lacquer workers obtained a beautiful and transparent red color from it» (Mahmoudi, 2019). Lacquer art has a continuous connection with painting and flourished during the Qajar period. It was done by painting on mirror frames, pen boxes, covers, etc (Bakhtiari, 2011, 55). Considering the pen box in the Khalili collection, which has similarities with covers from the Timurid period, the history of this art goes back to the Timurid period (Boroumand, 1987, 32). During the Qajar period, the production of lacquered crafts began in Shiraz and then continued in Tehran as one of the artistic hubs, and artists were attracted to the court (Khalili, 2007, 221). Free from Westernization, Iranian artists adopted the distinctive visual features of European painting schools and, by carefully combining them with Iranian painting art, created original works, in such a way that this method became a common tradition in later periods and was approved by artists and art patrons (Lale Shatri & Jafari Dehkordi, 2016). Some painters of this period turned to lacquer arts and pen-box making (Canbay, 2012, 115). By examining lacquer art in Iran and its historical background, it becomes clear that this art has a long history, and its flourishing occurred in the continuation of the Safavid period in the Qajar period.

Introducing the Painted Scale Box with the Theme of the Court of Solomon (PBUH), Preserved in the British Museum

The mirror box of Solomon is a lacquered box with a painting on wood, measuring 37×64.5×16 cm, and is currently kept in the British Museum under the number 192705251. No artist's mark is visible on this box. The box on the main lid has a motif of the Court of Solomon (PBUH), who is seated on a throne in the center of the image. According to the museum's explanation, «This box is one of the Iranian lacquered works that were used in Iran in the 18th to 19th centuries, and this technique reached its artistic peak during the Qajar

period. The painted lacquered box in question, which dates back to around 1840, shows on the main lid, the Prophet Solomon (PBUH) sitting on a throne, surrounded by courtiers, jinn, animals, and demons, and on the sides of the box, a hunting scene of the Qajar princes is shown. Inside the box is a movable wooden tray containing engraved steel tools and weights. The inside of the box is patinated and decorated with hot gold on the bottom. The tool inside the box is a movable iron scale in a wooden tray with a base for adjustment. Its two shelves are hung with strings of purple silk and metal thread. Two other smaller similar scales, each with a set of tools, are placed in smaller rectangular lacquered boxes decorated with Flowers and Birds and Persian motifs and arrangements» (Figs 1-4).



Fig 1. Mirror box with the theme of the Court of Solomon (PBUH).
Source: British Museum.



Fig 2. Front view of a mirror box with the theme of the Court of Solomon (PBUH) with the lid closed. Source: British Museum.



Fig 3. Side view of a mirror box with the theme of the Court of Solomon (PBUH). Source: British Museum.



Fig 4. View of a mirror box with the theme of the Court of Solomon (PBUH) from the front with the original open scales. Source: British Museum.

Table 1. Introduction to the Painted Scale Box of the Early Qajar Period in the British Museum. Source: Author.



Subject	Scale box with the theme of the Court of Solomon (PBUH)
Technique	Lacquered painting
Material	Wood, gold, steel
Dominant meaning feature	Combining Art and Life: Scale Tool Box
Artist	Unknown
Dimensions	37×64.5×16 cm
Place of storage	British Museum, Museum number: 1927,0525.1
Time	Around 1840

Study of the Content on the Box

1. Religious, the Court of Solomon (PBUH): «Iconography» or «figuration» of religious figures with Shiite themes has probably become common in Iran since the late Buyid period. It mostly has Ashura themes and images of Imam Ali (AS)» (Shayestehfar, 2007). Prophet Solomon (PBUH) had a government that no one after him has been worthy of. By God’s permission, he has had dominion over humans, birds, devils, and demons. In the Holy Quran, verses 12-13 of Surah Saba, a part of the greatness and vast facilities of the Court of Prophet Solomon (PBUH) is narrated and it says: «... And We subjected to Solomon the wind, which in the morning covered the path of a month and in the evening the path of a month, and We made flowing for him a fountain of (molten) copper, and a group of jinn worked before him by the permission of his Lord. And every one of them who disobeyed Our command, We made him taste the punishment of the blazing fire. And they prepared for Solomon (PBUH) whatever he desired: temples, statues, large vessels of food like pools and fixed pots that could not be carried because of their size. And We said to them: «The family of David, be grateful for all these blessings, but few of the servants are grateful...» (Surah Saba, verses 12-13). «The blessed name of Prophet Solomon (PBUH) appears in seven surahs and seventeen times in the Quran, and he is mentioned in forty-seven verses» (Rasoulzadeh, 2010). «Prophet Solomon (PBUH) is the son of Prophet David (PBUH), and in the sources, his mother, Bint Sheba, is Batsha, the same wife of Uriah, who was killed in battle, and David chose her as his wife, and Prophet Solomon was born» (Jamali & Marasi, 2012, 119). The Quran mentions Prophet Solomon (PBUH) as the son and heir of Prophet David (PBUH): «... and We gave Solomon to David» (Surah Naml, verse 30). «... and Solomon inherited from David» (Surah Naml, verse 16). «Prophet Solomon (PBUH) is the heir of Prophet David (PBUH), and God has bestowed valuable gifts on David (PBUH)» (Rasoulzadeh, 2010). «The fame of Prophet Solomon (PBUH), among the followers of Abrahamic religions, is due to the presence of his name in the Holy Bible and the Holy Quran. The Quran and the Holy Bible have mentioned Prophet Solomon (PBUH) in many instances, narrated the history of his life, and praised him. The pure and holy life of Prophet Solomon (PBUH) has been distorted in parts of the Holy Bible» (Rasoulzadeh, 2010). «The image that the Old Testament portrays of Prophet Solomon (PBUH) is a glorious and majestic monarchy in various dimensions. The life of Prophet Solomon (PBUH) is seen as a competition for the throne and abandoning the principles in the Old Testament. At the same time, the Quran considers Prophet Solomon (PBUH) among the divine prophets» (Rasoulzadeh, 2010). In the Torah, «Solomon’s wisdom exceeded that of the wise men of the East and the scholars of Egypt. He spoke three thousand proverbs and wrote one thousand and five songs. Solomon knew well about animals, birds, reptiles, and fish. He also knew and spoke about all plants, from the cypress tree to the small hyssop bush that

grew in the cleft of the wall. Having heard of his wisdom, kings from all over the world sent envoys to his court to benefit from his wisdom» (Hawkes, 1928, 235). In the Quran and many religious books, there are extensive references to the name of Prophet Solomon (PBUH), and the Court of that Prophet and his involvement in various sciences have been discussed and examined. «In the Quran, God has explicitly spoken of the word 'knowledge' about Prophet Solomon (PBUH) and described his wise behavior. In the exegetical texts, this knowledge has been introduced as various sciences», including: prophethood, knowledge, religion, the laws of the Sharia, the science of judgment, the logic of birds (Razi, 2006, 383), and the science of understanding and truth (Meybodi, 1982, 196). The Court of Prophet Solomon (PBUH) and the display of countless animals and figures in a small box are examples of the skills used by the artist, which are admirable.



Fig 5. Front view of the main theme of the mirror box with the theme of the Court of Prophet Solomon (PBUH).
Source: British Museum.

2. The Throne of Prophet Solomon (PBUH): One of the issues mentioned about Prophet Solomon (PBUH) in his court as one of the strange things is his throne, which is seen as the main feature in the main image on the lid. In the description of this throne, it is mentioned in various sources as follows: «The devils made a bed of gold and silk for Prophet Solomon (PBUH), the length and width of which were one Farsakh by one Farsakh, and around it were thirty thousand chairs of gold and silver, where the prophets sat on golden chairs and the scholars on silver chairs, and the rest of the people were around it, and the courtiers, devils, and jinn stood around it, and birds cast shadows over their heads» (Attar Neyshaburi, 1977, 299). «One of the magnificent features of the Court of Prophet Solomon (PBUH) was his throne, which housed all the servants and beasts, jinn, humans and fairies, and the wind carried it wherever Prophet Solomon ruled». «...and he had a special throne made of silver, four Parasang by four Parasang, and he ordered that a chair of red gold be placed on that throne, and the chairs were made of gold and some of silver were placed around the throne. Every day, you sat in the court, and Asif sat before him on a golden chair; four thousand scholars, the most learned of the Israelite, sat on those chairs on a golden chair. Four thousand scholars of the Israelite sat on those chairs in order; as you had said and said, until those four thousand people of the Bani Israel stood, you made four thousand angels stand behind them, and four thousand demons stood behind them; then you made Solomon judge among the people...» (Neyshaburi, 1980, 283). «Asif ibn Barkhiya was a close figure to Prophet Solomon (PBUH). There is no mention of Asif in the Quran, but his name has been mentioned many times in chronicles, stories, and commentaries. Asif's fame and his important role in this story is that he brought the throne of Bilqis to Prophet Solomon (PBUH) in the blink of an eye, which is referred to as Asif's glory» (Surabadi, 1986, 291). «The mysticism of Asif is considered to be a confirmation of the dignity of the saints and

its legitimacy» (Hajveiri, 1979, 291; Jam, 1966, 7; Qashiri, 1982, 629; Jami, 1957, 22). «Given these cases, Asif is mentioned as the vizier of Prophet Solomon (PBUH)» (Davari, 2013). Prophet Solomon (PBUH) is sitting on a throne similar to the throne of Fath-Ali Shah and is surrounded by his court and jinn. This was repeated many times for the Shah during the Qajar period; Asif, who is mentioned as the vizier of Prophet Solomon (PBUH), is also seen on a chair similar to the Qajar chair, and in front of him is Rostam, who is depicted in the form of the image of Fath-Ali Shah Qajar.



Fig 6. «Peacock Throne», enamel frames in jewel, inlaid with stones. Source: Iranian Jewelry Museum.

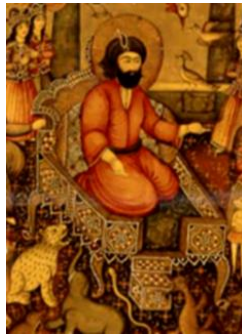


Fig 7. Part of Fig 5, Solomon is depicted on a throne similar to the peacock throne. Source: British Museum.



Fig 8. Part of the book cover depicting Fath-Ali Shah and his sons, 19th century, Malaysian Islamic Art Collection. Source: Nayal Barakat, & Khademi, 2019, 11.



Fig 9. Inlaid chair, Qajar period, Tehran, Iran, 19th century, private collection. Source: <http://orientbazar.eu>



Fig 10. Part of Fig 5, a chair used similar to a chair from the Qajar period. Source: British Museum.



Fig 11. Artist: Attributed to Mehr Ali, Fath-Ali Shah Qajar Seated on a Chair, Date: about 1800-1806, Oil on canvas, Dimensions: 227.5×131 cm, Louvre Museum, Islamic Department. Source: Diba & Ekhtiar, 1998, 182.



Fig 12. Part of Fig 5, a similar portrait of Fath-Ali Shah Qajar. Source: British Museum.

3. The court of Prophet Solomon (PBUH) and Demons: The court of Prophet Solomon (PBUH), due to his knowledge, was the court of demons, fairies, jinn, and numerous animals. As the original image on the box shows, the presence of the court is also clearly visible. «The court of Prophet Solomon (PBUH) refers to the court of demons and fairies who stand on his right and left hands and obey his commands» (Ronaghi, Halabi, & Ghoshashti, 2018). «The depiction of demons in the book «Aja'ib al-Makhlūqat» is often accompanied by descriptions that they have a half-human and animal body with horns and a tail, sometimes a human face and sometimes an animal face like an elephant. They appear to have a large build, hairy bodies with long nails, and a majesty greater than that of a human. Horned humans with animal hooves and feet have turned these depictions into a model for illustrators» (Asgari & Zare'zadeh, 2020, 193). «Among other miracles of Prophet Solomon (PBUH) was his control over the demons and the fairies and his taking them into his service. Interestingly, almost all the verses in the Quran about the life of Prophet Solomon (PBUH) refer to his relationship with the demons» (Surahs of the Prophets, 82; Saba, 13-14; Naml, 17, 37, 38 & Baqarah, 102). Demons, as supernatural beings, form part of the culture of every society and are part of the worldview, beliefs, and ideas of every nation and people, which are related to the struggle between the forces of evil and the forces of good. In Mo'in Encyclopedic Dictionary, a demon is synonymous with Iblis and Satan, an imaginary creature, very stout and ugly, with horns and a tail (Mo'in, 2002, Vol. 1, 713). In Avestan and Pahlavi texts, two categories of Heavenly and humanoid demons are mentioned in Mazandaran (Akbari Mafakher, 2012). The Oxford Dictionary defines demons as malevolent, powerful, and destructive spirits (Oxford, 2011, 396). «Nasu» was initially a name for a female demon, but later it was used as a synonym for demons (Amouzgar, 2004, 38). This word is called Daeva in Avesta, Dev in Pahlavi, and Div in Persian. It is used in Greek as Zeus, in Latin as Deus, in French as Dieu, in English as Deity, and in Irish as Dia (Afifi, 1995, 522). According to what is mentioned in Iranian folklore, a demon is a supernatural being depicted with a specific form and appearance and has numerous functions. The source and origin of such beliefs is Ferdowsi's Shahnameh, especially where it deals with the characteristics of the white demon (Matini, 1984). Demons were human beings who, at a certain stage of human life, had their own specific way of life and beliefs. Based on the stories of Shahnameh and ancient Iranian legends that are as old as the history of human life, the habitat of the demons can be determined. The White Demon, one of the most famous demons, lived in a cave in Mazandaran, and according to the oldest legends of Iran, the demons' residence was in the heart of caves or

on the top of a mountain or in abandoned fortresses (Yaqout, 2001, 34). The Demons of ancient Iranian religious books and the demons of ancient epics and legends have the same root and foundation, and the ideas that have become popular about the demons in recent times are due to the material found in religious and ancient Iranian books. Today, there is no doubt that the heroes of Iranian martial tales were giant and powerful people who, since they believed in a different religion, were called demons by the Avesta (Tabatabaie, 1964, 45). The word demon also has a negative meaning; in Iran, because demons had evolved into anti-gods, they were considered in Persian literature as a symbol of ugliness, filth, horror, and cowardice (Saadat, 2017). In other Persian narratives, the jinn sometimes replaces the demon, but the demon continues to exist alongside the jinn; with the arrival of the Arabs in Iran, the jinn and the demon became synonymous and became a general concept and the origin of all supernatural beings. In parallel with the narratives in which the demon has a defining meaning, other beings also arise from it, and in some early Islamic narratives, the jinn plays the role of the demon. It is clear that a kind of combination between Iranian and Arabic concepts has emerged, the origin of which is the semantic proximity of jinn and demon (Ebrahimi, 2013). The twelfth Yasna, which is considered an ancient part of the Avesta, begins with these words: «I curse the demon», and this phrase is repeated in the following stanzas (Azimipour, 2013, 19). The confrontation between the forces of good and evil, the division of the world into two realms of light and darkness, the belief in the constant conflict between the divine and demonic phenomena, has been a common belief among all ethnic groups and nations, especially in Iran, a struggle that continues as long as the world exists, and the final victory in it is with the front of light (Zomorodi & Nazari, 2011). Demons are large and muscular, and their physical attributes include strength, power, and height (Naghshbandi, Kazzazi, & Dawoodiabadi, 2016). Considering comparing the images of demons, jinn, and angels in Qajar period paintings, artists of this period tried to be committed to visual patterns and, rather than engaging in creative designs in visual structure, to be loyal to past artistic conventions and covenants. As shown in Fig 13, the magnification and surrounding of jinns and angels, and the use of authority, are borrowed from the visual rules defined in the Qajar period.



Fig 13. Artist: Unknown, Date: Early Qajar period, Title: Dervish Curtain, Technique: Oil painting on silk canvas, Dimensions: 733×210 cm, Location: Astan Quds Museum. Source: Astan Quds Razavi Museum Archives.

4. Demons Depiction: One of the main themes in the court of Solomon was the representation of the connection between the Prophet and the presence of the demons in the court scene, which can also be seen in Fig 13. «The demons are depicted as large-bodied and muscular, powerful, capable, and tall» (Naghshbandi et al., 2016). The demons of Mazandaran, mentioned in the Avesta, were considered by Ferdowsi to be among the Iranians' most dangerous and daring enemies. Despite ruling over the demons and other

animals, Jamshid never thought of attacking the demons of Mazandaran. The only king who laid siege to Mazandaran was Kay Kāvus, but this boldness came at a high price: the Persian army was defeated, and the demons captured Kay Kāvus himself. Later, Rostam went to war with the leader of the demons of Mazandaran, the White Demon, and after killing him, he rescued Kay Kāvus (Tabatabaie, 1964). Rostam's superiority over the white demon is shown in the seventh book of the Shahnameh (the thirteenth scene of the narrative). Still, the change in the image of the offspring from human to demon is among the transformations that have occurred over time and in the compositions of this work (Asadpour, 2020). The image of the demon in Iranian culture is not entirely frightening and vague (Barati, 2022, 47). Demons have horns, and having horns causes fear and terror in the hearts of their enemies. They probably made horns for themselves from animal horns to cause fear and terror. It is also mentioned that Rostam used the bowl of the white demon's head as a war helmet (Naghshbandi et al., 2016). Rostam's Battle Dress in Literature states that Rostam wore a dress that was tightly tied around his waist to fight the Akvan (Babr-e Bayan). The Babr-e Bayan (Palangina) is Rostam's special and ritual dress that protected him from enemy blows. It was made from the skin of a dragon, probably named after the tiger. Wearing this dress was because he was preparing himself for a battle with a demon in the guise of a grave (Aryanejad, 2008). In the show, demons were depicted as terrifying figures with negative features and a ghostly face in a way that combined human and animal, naked with a red Qajar skirt and a plain or spotted gray, white, or brown body. As in the image of the battle of Rostam and the White Demon, Rostam is depicted in the guise of Fath-Ali Shah Qajar. The soldiers behind Asif are all sitting on chairs and have a Quran on their backs, which may refer to the companions of Hazrat Asif, the divinity of the reign of Solomon (PBUH), and the mention of Solomon's name in the Quran. Various animals with detailed designs are seen under the feet of the people in the image.



Fig 14. Artist: Unknown, Date: Unknown, Title: Battle of Rostam Zal and the White Demon, Technique: Lacquer painting on plaster, Dimensions: 43×62 cm, Location: Wellcome Library, London, Work number: 582819.I. Source: <https://wellcomecollection.org>.

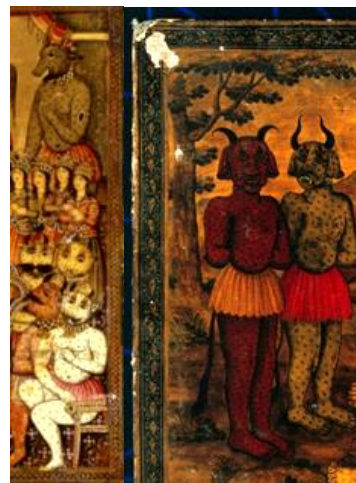


Fig 15. Part of Figs 5-14, in a similar view to demon. Source: <https://wellcomecollection.org>.

5. Ginn Depiction: In the depiction of jinn in the box image, in the court of Prophet Solomon (PBUH), the artist did not intend a terrifying figure with negative features like a demon but a more subtle one. The jinn are depicted in a way that is a combination of a human with an almost terrifying face, but more pleasant and fearless than a demon, naked and wearing a red Qajar skirt. From a visual perspective, the jinn motif has a visual affinity with Fig 13, which can be seen in Figs 5 to 15.



Fig 16. Part of Figs 5-13, in a similar representation of a jinn with hands on chest, naked in a skirt, with a human figure. Source: Astan Quds Razavi Museum.




6. Angel Depiction: In depicting angels on the box, a conventional pattern is repeated, and angels with Qajar crowns and robes, adorned with jewels, are described in order and a row, with their hands on their chests. The angels are inspired by the clothing and appearance of women of this period, but they have wings. The opposing body positions and hands facing the chest are influenced by Qajar painting. These can be seen in comparison with Figs 5, 8, and 13.



Fig 17. Part of Figs 5-12, in a similar display of angels and attendants in Qajar clothing and crowns, hands clasped. Source: Astan Quds Razavi Museum.

7. Birds in the court of Prophet Solomon (PBUH): «Baha al-Din Khorramshahi» considered «the bird of Prophet Solomon to be the same as the Hoopoe that delivered the letter of Prophet Solomon to Bilqis, the Queen of Sheba. He also stated, «Hafiz mentioned the bird of Prophet Solomon only once, but the Hoopoe many times» (Khorramshahi, 2001, Vol. 2, 930-931). «The Anqa or Simorgh is considered one of the birds close to and intimate with Prophet Solomon, so much so that Prophet Solomon sometimes consulted it, and even his objection to predestination is an indication of this closeness» (Mojarad, 2017, 71). In most of the paintings of the court of Prophet Solomon (PBUH), the Hoopoe has been emphasized, but in this painting, due to its dimensions, more attention and emphasis has been paid to the Simorgh. The birds discussed are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Identifying birds in the image. Source: Author.

Birds' Name	Simurgh	Anqa	Hoopoe
Image			
Description	With great and distinct awe, it cast a shadow over the head of Solomon (PBUH)	Anqa in flight in pairs	Hoopoe Single

Regarding the motifs used in the margin of the main image, the box lid and its interior have aesthetic aspects and plant motifs that have been given due attention and are used in a frame with a coherent design for the main image on the lid. Iranian decorative motifs are used in it and add to the quality and beauty of the image. These motifs are influenced by Iranian art and are repeated with fixed elements, emphasizing the quality of decorative motifs and color schemes of images in the Qajar period.



Fig 18. Side view of the box showing details. Source: British Museum.



Fig 19. View of the side margin in the box showing details. Source: British Museum.

Studying the Content of the Images on the Margin of the Box

1. Cultural, Royal Hunting: What emerges from studying the hunting image on the box's margin is that it is different and unrelated to the subject at first glance, whereas, like Fath-Ali Shah in the form of Rostam on the box lid, it is a symbol of royal power. The clarity of the formation of principles in the visual tradition of hunting without changes in generalities is emphasized, and it also shows the deep connection between the historical approach to hunting and the interest in this subject in the ancient and Qajar periods; it is also clear that the image was used in the Qajar period according to the subject, and as can be seen in the analysis of the images of this box, the images of length and width and inside the box have a stylistic connection. They are designed to be semantically unrelated, but the art of court iconography influences the images, and attention has been paid to its aesthetic aspects. The similarity of the design in all parts of the box with the hunting theme and the royal hunting works of Fath-Ali Shah Qajar in another box (Fig 20) shows that this was combined with the influence of the hunting tradition in ancient Iran and the display of royal splendor in the Qajar period and was used on the margins of wooden boxes. The regular design and the use of artistic principles of the Qajar period in a qualitative way are also evident in the Qajar example under discussion (Fig 5). The fixed elements in the image with the same theme are among these and refer to the bravery and power of the Qajar kings and princes.



Fig 20. Large wooden box painted in papier-mâché style, depicting Fath-Ali Shah hunting, artist: unknown, dimensions: 42 cm, sold at Bonhams Auction, lot number 2920. Source: British Museum.



Fig 21. Representation of the hunting motif on the margin of the museum box in Fig 5, Part of the work in alignment with the hunting motif on the body of the box in Fig 20. Source: British Museum.



Fig 22. Side view with a lion hunt theme. Source: British Museum.



Fig 23. Front view of the box (Width) with the hunting theme. Source: British Museum.



Fig 24. View of the back of a box (Length) with a hunting theme. Source: British Museum.



Fig 25. Front view of the box (Width) with the hunting theme. Source: British Museum.



Fig 26. Front view of the box (Width) with the hunting theme. Source: British Museum.

Internal Division of the Box with Sections for Tools

The best and most beautiful practical tools of the Qajar period guilds can be seen in the painted wooden and papier-mâché tool boxes of this period;. However, the structure of such boxes is derived from European wooden tool boxes; the form of the tools and their arrangement has a unique pattern. The two main uses of these boxes are: Scale boxes and tool boxes, of course the number of tools in them is small and includes compasses, clamps, saws, hammers, balances, knives, files, scissors, flags, etc. that are embedded in these boxes (Shamisa, Khajeh Ahmad Attari, & Mir Jafari, 2016, 104). The large number of these toolboxes makes it difficult to attribute them to a specific class; However, in other issues, besides the industrial arts, Pope has also introduced these boxes as surgical toolboxes (Pope, 2008, 2012). Special attention to the relationship between form and function in tools and the emphasis on the purity of form and the extraordinary skill of the craftsman in recognizing form without ever forgetting the consumer aspect is a sign of the ability and technical knowledge of the toolmakers of this period (Shamisa, Khajeh Ahmad Attari, &

Mir Jafari, 2016, 111). The study of these toolboxes during the Qajar period shows that they were functional and were used qualitatively to carry tools and weights. The entire interior and exterior are painted and decorated, combining science and art. These boxes are made in the style of lacquered painting on wood, and rare examples are available in museums in Iran and the world (Panjehbashi, 2021). Steel tools of the Qajar period were required to be strong and durable due to their use and function. The form of the tools is unique because it follows the function and has abstract, geometric, plant, and animal types (Shamisa, Khajeh Ahmad Attari, & Mir Jafari, 2016, 100). In Figs 27 to 33, the division inside the steel toolbox is visible, where the space is depicted in a very orderly manner by the steel tools, and the entire box space is used functionally. The space in between is also decorated with a green background and yellow flowers in the form of coherent decorative arrays. This box illustrates the connection between art and life.



Fig 27. Interior view of the box with tool compartments. Source: British Museum.



Fig 28. Interior view of the box with tool compartments. Source: British Museum.



Fig 29. Top view of the inside of the box with the scales, weights, and instruments divided into sections, reflected in a standing mirror. Source: British Museum.



Fig 30. Top view of the inside of the box with the scales, weights and instruments divided into sections, reflected in a standing mirror. Source: British Museum.



Fig 31. View of the division of three toolboxes, two small boxes inside the main box. Source: British Museum.



Fig 32. View of the leveling hook and the optimal division of space inside the box. Source: British Museum.



Fig 33. View of the weights and the optimal division of space inside the box. Source: British Museum.






Fig 34. View of the hinge of the box and the decorative borders inside the box with a Flower and Bird motif. Source: British Museum.

Analytical Study of the Diverse Themes of Different Parts of the Work

The lacquered wooden box, preserved in the British Museum, at first glance, only shows the external features of the Qajar painting style in different parts. Still, upon closer inspection, the box images can show three distinct themes that are apparently unrelated but are intrinsically interconnected. These coherent images demonstrate the interdependence of art and life in the applied arts of the Qajar period. This box has coherent decorations in the image on the box, the longitudinal and transverse borders, and inside the box. These paintings are consistent and aligned with the thoughts and goals of court iconography painting during the Fath-Ali Shah period. Its main characteristic is the regular, coherent, and orderly decoration in all box parts. Thematic characteristics, in different parts, are all arranged by the functional aspect of the box. A study of the themes inside and outside the box shows that these themes are not directly related to each other, but attention has been paid to them internally. Considering the practicality of the box and its different parts, the themes have been selected and combined, considering the functional aspect of the box. Table 3 examines the evolution of the functional elements of the toolbox with different themes. On the Fath-Ali Shah box, Rostam is depicted as one of the companions of Solomon (PBUH) in his court, implicitly referring to his power. At the same time, on the longitudinal margin, the royal hunt and princes are a display of power.

Table 3. Themes and Visual Characteristics of Painted Boxes in the Qajar Period. Source: Author.

	<p>Theme On the box</p> <p>Title The Court of Solomon (PBUH)</p> <p>Dominant meaning feature Religious connection</p> <p>Individuals Hazrat Sulayman Khidr or Asif Nabi (PBUH), Fath-Ali Shah in the form of Rostam and his entourage</p> <p>Visual proportions It has a very compact space in displaying numerous people and figures of angels, demons, jinns, and animals.</p> <p>Characteristics of Qajar art Include</p>
	<p>Theme Transverse and longitudinal margins</p> <p>Title Royal hunt</p> <p>Dominant meaning feature A display of the splendor of the royal court</p> <p>Individuals Prince hunting</p> <p>Visual proportions Include</p> <p>Characteristics of Qajar art Include</p>
	<p>Theme Inside the box</p> <p>Title Flower and Bird</p> <p>Dominant meaning feature Mystical space</p> <p>Individuals Flower and Bird</p> <p>Visual proportions Include</p> <p>Characteristics of Qajar art Include</p>

The painting box in question is decorated with religious and decorative paintings from the Qajar period, which can be seen in the interior and exterior of the box structure. By studying the themes used, it can be concluded that it emphasizes religious aspects, nationalism, and decoration, and the dominant style of Qajar paintings can be seen in the central image on the box, the side margins, and inside the box. The themes of this box have a variety of appearances in terms of content, and decorations based on geometric and visual form have been used inside the box. According to what has been stated, it is clear that the images used, although not similar in content, are similar in style and show various aspects of the art of court iconography of the Qajar period. Attention has been paid to the multiple achievements of Qajar painting in all three sections. For a more detailed examination, Table 4 discusses the general form and format of the images, the characteristics and dominant features, the proportion and content of the images, and the aesthetics from the perspective of visual principles and rules to make a more detailed comparison in this category.

Table 4. Comparison of the Themes in Different Sections of a Painted Box from the Qajar period.
Source: Author.

	<p>Theme</p> <p>Meaning dominance</p> <p>Overall image format</p> <p>Content and theme compatibility</p> <p>Aesthetics of the Qajar period</p> <p>Characteristics of Qajar art</p>	<p>On the box, religious</p> <p>The Court of Prophet Solomon, an allegory of the court of Fath-Ali Shah</p> <p>The Court of Prophet Solomon, Horizontal</p> <p>Include, directly</p> <p>In style and content, influenced by the court iconography of the Qajar period</p> <p>Include</p>
	<p>Theme</p> <p>Meaning dominance</p> <p>Overall image format</p> <p>Content and theme compatibility</p> <p>Aesthetics of the Qajar period</p> <p>Visual diversity</p>	<p>Box Margin, Courage and Pride</p> <p>Hunting, a show of power</p> <p>A display of the splendor of the royal court</p> <p>Include, directly</p> <p>In style, content, and form influenced by the decorative art of the Qajar period</p> <p>Include</p>
	<p>Theme</p> <p>Meaning dominance</p> <p>Overall image format</p> <p>Content and theme compatibility</p> <p>Aesthetics of the Qajar period</p> <p>Visual diversity</p>	<p>Inside the decorative box</p> <p>Flowers and Birds, mystical theme</p> <p>Vertical, Flower and Bird decorations</p> <p>Include, indirectly</p> <p>In style, content, and form, it is influenced by the floral art of the Qajar period.</p> <p>Include</p>

Conclusion

The present study examined the thematic configuration in the outer and inner parts of the preserved box in the British Museum. The image on the main lid of the box, entitled The Court of Prophet Solomon (PBUH), was examined as a representative of religious content, the theme of royal hunting was discussed as a representative of cultural content, and the theme of Flowers and Birds was examined as a representative of mystical content, and their relationship with each other was determined. These themes were discussed in terms of their application in different parts of the box, and their relationship was determined indirectly. What emerged from the analysis of the research findings and their visual characteristics is that these three themes align with the research subject and, like other parts of Qajar art, have visual unity, but this did not happen directly. Despite the apparent difference, the theme is derived from the principles of Qajar period painting. It represents the fusion of religion, culture, and mysticism categories in an applied object. It is clear that the painters of the Qajar period, considering their time, consciously selected these topics by merging them on the visual codes of their period, and paid attention to the religious, cultural, and mystical content of the themes and applied them to different parts of the box. In light of what has

been said, it can be concluded that the art of Qajar court iconography influenced the themes used in different parts of the box. The systematic design and use of images for the box lid, the use of hunting motifs for the transverse and longitudinal margins of the box, and the use of traditional Iranian motifs for the interior of the box's divisions in a qualitative manner are among these cases of purposeful selection of themes and show a clear reflection of the art of the Qajar period.

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