



The Concept of City in Qajar Era in the Mirror of Matla Al-Shams Focusing on Mashhad

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Abstract: *Matla Al-Shams* by Mohammad-Hasan Khan Etemad-al-Saltana is one of the most important geographical books from Nāseri Era. The book contains extensive information about several cities and villages in Iran, including the 14th hegira century's holy city of Mashhad. The present article aims at the investigation and interpretation of an image portrayed of Mashhad by Mohammad-Hasan Khan Etemad-al-Saltana in his book "Matla Al-Shams". To do so, first of all, the importance of Mashhad from the perspective of Mohammad-Hasan Khan in the position of an author and as an individual belonging to Qajar era will be investigated based on the extant evidences. Next, the current research paper's writer tries decoding the significations of "holy Mashhad" in "Matla Al-Shams" and distinguishing their relationship with the holy shrine of Shiites' eighth Imam through interpretation of the proofs and materials existent in the book.

Keywords: *The concept of city, Mashhad, Qajar era, Iran Historical Architecture, Matla Al-Shams, Etemad-al-Saltana*

INTRODUCTION

Accompanied by his court fellows, Naser-al-Din Shah took a trip to Khorasan in 1879. Etemad-al-Saltana who was authoring a book called "Meraat al-boldan" at the time and used to record the geographical and historical information of the various localities in Iran seized the opportunity. In the foresaid trip, he, assisted by his assistants, collected part of the information he required objectively and released it in a new book named "Matla Al-Shams".

Matla Al-Shams was published in three volumes in 1922, 1923 and 1924 and it is dedicated to the explanation of the geographical places and spots through which he had passed along with the court fellows in a trip to Khorasan. Out of these three book volumes, one is related to the places and villages on the way to Khorasan. The second volume is completely devoted to Mashhad and the third volume is also a description of the geographical spots on the way back therefrom.

As put by Etemad-al-Saltana himself, he has done his best for recording and registering the precise statuses and states of the city of Mashhad and its descriptions (Etemad-al-Saltana, Mohammad-Hasan Khan, 1983). Also, it is believed by many of the experts that Etemad-al-Saltana has applied an unprecedented precision and attention in Matla Al-Shams to depict a vivid and expressive image of Iran's villages and cities for the readers (Khedrizadeh, 2000). Based thereon, it will be very useful if one tries taking a look at the image drawn by Etemad-al-Saltana of Mashhad and deals with its analysis and interpretation so that the dark and bright points thereof could be made clear. Thus, the

present article scrutinizes the city of Mashhad and Etemad-al-Saltana, himself. In doing so, there will be made use of his other writings like Etemad-al-Saltana's diaries and his book "Meraat al-boldan" so as to gain access to a more substantive and more robust description of the book "Matla Al-Shams" and Mashhad. The current research paper avoids repeating the information existing in Matla Al-Shams, especially about Mashhad unless otherwise is deemed necessary so the study is more concentrated on the information analysis and interpretation.

The Importance of Mashhad Description from the Perspective of Etemad-al-Saltana:

There are various and numerous reasons that can be put forth why the city of Mashhad was considered so dearly by Etemad-al-Saltana. In his diaries, Etemad-al-Saltana writes:

"It was Wednesday, 11th {in Shavval, 1921}: we were four hours behind the group and it was midnight that we set out on a trip to Mashhad from Qahqaha grassland. It was at the first light that my apparent eye and my internal eye, i.e. the eye and the heart, were lit up by the two suns. Both the holy shrine of the eighth Imam showed up and the world's instructor was seen giving a kiss to the sacred court of the eighth Imam in the first light by its rays. I ignored the sun, the world's instructor, and turned my back on it and leaped down from the horse back and kissed the ground before the sun of the suns. I rubbed my face on the ground and thanked the God for letting me visit the holy shrine after seventeen years. Then I got on the horse and marched towards the city (Etemad-al-Saltana, Mohammad-Hasan Khan, 1977).

Etemad-al-Saltana's leaflet of daily memories is the place wherein he has written his most honest ideas and notions (even severe critical words to Naser-al-Din Shah and his way of governance) and the expression of such an interestedness and zeal allover his diaries is unprecedented and hence normally away from any sort of hypocrisy. In this regard, it is envisaged natural to consider Etemad-al-Saltana eager in writing a work pertaining to the holy shrine in Mashhad along with his scientific works and many signs of his fervor will be presented in the sections to come.

- Mashhad, the Sunrise Spot (Matla Al-Shams):

One of the first reasons and signs of the writer's passionate feelings towards Mashhad is the selection of the name "Matla Al-Shams" for a collection a small part of which is connected to the city of Mashhad. Semantically, the name is expressive of the author's great deal of belonging to the book's subject.

On the other hand, considering the fact Etemad-al-Saltana is the writer of the book "Meraat al-boldan", there is raised the question as to why has not he published the information he has obtained from Khorasan under the same title and exposing the order and the scientific arrangement of his prior scientific book to criticism by not doing so? He writes in an introduction to his book "Matla Al-Shams": "In writing "Nāşeri Meraat al-boldan", the pen halted from running where the words with the initial "J" reached their last and it had to start writing the places and localities beginning with the letters "H" and "KH" and the largest state whose explication was to be written by the initial "KH" was Khorasan which was very famous in terms of the vastness and the broadness of the borders and the multiplicity of the lands and villages and {...} as well as its other privileges. {...}. Meanwhile gathering the intended documents and instruments {...}, luck showed its face to me {and Naser-al-Din Shah's mission commenced a trip to Khorasan} (Etemad-al-Saltana, Mohammad-Hasan Khan, 1983).

Therefore, Etemad-al-Saltana had been endeavoring to initiate a new volume of the book "Meraat al-boldan" and the question that was asked above seems to have become more serious now. In another place in the same introduction, Etemad-al-Saltana states that "{in the trip to Khorasan}, the author {...} had been provided with the chance to objectively observe during this trip that was going to be followed by good results the majority of mausoleums and lands and gifted places and clean pastures and visible positions and palm tree farms and tombs and schools and mosques and old and new charity edifices endowed to the holy Razavi Court that is a paradise from the gardens of heavens and surrounded and illuminated by the merciful lights of the God {...} and after kissing its pure soil which is the circumambulation locus of the heavenly enlightened hearts, he could be able to add his former

knowledge to the newly obtained insights {...} and due to the this reason and for his observation of the eastern state, the book was called "Matla Al-Shams" (Ibid, p.4).

Based thereon, it seems that the major reason behind such a change of name is the existence of the blissful holy shrine of Imam Reza (PBUH) in Mashhad.

In an introduction to the first volume of "Meraat al-boldan", Etemad-al-Saltana writes:

"The main objective in writing this book is explaining the history of the cities and the great events that had happened in the previous times and, in the meantime, writing the states of them if correct information could be found. {...} in fact, by doing so, I spirited and revived some of the cities and places that were dead and ruined and the passage of time had faded away their memories. I appended history too geography and annexed geography to history in the thought that this is a great service I could offer to the nation and government of Iran" (Etemad-al-Saltana, Mohammad-Hasan Khan, 1988).

It is accordingly evident that Etemad-al-Saltana's goal had been accurate and scientific recording and registering of Iran's cities and villages and that how important has been the statuses of them for him and, on the other hand, as stated by he himself, Matla Al-Shams has also been written parallel to his mission of authoring Meraat al-boldan hence qualified for the same scientific value.

Although Etemad-al-Saltana has attempted to keep his scientific approach to Meraat al-boldan and also to the first and the third volumes of Matla Al-Shams in the second volume of Matla Al-Shams (and, of course, his exactitude in observing and mentioning the fine points of the city is admirable), it seems that some of the materials presented in his second volume are especially added thereto on the credit of Imam Reza (PBUH)'s holy shrine in Mashhad and the author has endeavored to do his so-called best and in doing so, the scientific purity that is observed in other cases from Etemad-al-Saltana have been overshadowed. To put it differently, the difference between Meraat al-boldan and Matla Al-Shams not only lies in their names and the way the entries are arranged but also in their generalities and the perspective adopted by the author.

- **Mashhad, Etemad-al-Saltana's Bukhara:**

The second volume of Al-Shams is prefaced by a poem within the format of couplet bearing the theme of love to the city of Mashhad:

"It is called the rising place of sun the city with the existence of which the soul will not give value to the paradise"

"It is called the rising place of sun the city that is vast, pure, clean, trusted and creditable"

"It is the rising place of sun not for its being positioned on the east but because of its being circumambulation locus of the sun and the moon" (Etemad-al-Saltana, Mohammad-Hasan Khan, 1983).

The couplet is composed of twenty verses the last one of which is from Rumi's Mathnawi used by Etemad-al-Saltana to warrant his poem. The verse reads:

"Leave the candle of Mary lighted¹, for that ardent (lover) is going to Bukhara" (Ibid, p.3)

The verse has been stated in Mathnawi separating two narrations. One of them is the emergence of the holy spirit on Mary (may Allah hail on her) and the other is the story that is left half-told previously by Rumi and wishes to finish it now after the foresaid verse. The story is about a man who has been expelled from Bukhara (his favorite city) by vilification and wishes to return thereto after ten years and Rumi finishes his story following the aforesaid verse (Rumi, 2001).

The use of this verse in the end of the poem and in the beginning of the second volume of Matla Al-Shams is well justifiable. On the one hand, Etemad-al-Saltana is mentioning the narrations and stories of the other cities up to the end of the first volume and, on the other hand, he has not arrived at a point to begin mentioning of the narration of his desirable city. In other words, it can be imagined that the materials presented in the first and the third volumes of Matla Al-Shams are ancillary stories and narrations from Etemad-al-Saltana's viewpoint and it is now time for retelling the amorous story

¹ Plain meaning: Pause Mary's tale for now.

of Bukhara. Comparing Mashhad and Bukhara is well clear in the abovementioned poem at the prelude of the book:

“The garden of Mashhad is my Bukhara; the hard stones of this mountain are my fine silk”

“I go to Bukhara heedlessly; I lost myself upon arriving here”

“You are my Bukhara O’ pure soil; O’ the pure shelter that has been created by the God” (Etemad-al-Saltana, Mohammad-Hasan Khan, 1983)

This way and based on Etemad-al-Saltana’s attachment to Mashhad and the holy paradise of Imam Reza (PBUH) and as it is stated metaphorically in the poem “your thorn! I should seek mercy of the God by saying that. What thorn; it would have been faced with a flower if there was any”, it cannot be expected that the negative aspect of Mashhad could have been written in this book (or elsewhere) by Etemad-al-Saltana the same way that a lover cannot be expected to confess to the negative aspects of his beloved. It is as if he would have not seen such negative aspects at all. For example, in his descriptions of Mashhad, Etemad-al-Saltana begins with the followings: “the weather there was temperate and the water was abundant and the gardens and wood lots were many and the trees and fruits were multiple and its advantages and favors and sweetness were popular in such a manner that some of the fruits of this land, if not unobtainable in other territories and places and boundaries of the world, are most probably rare. The spirit and the serenity of Mashhad are to the extent that no similar of them can be found in any other places and apart from the natural and apparent issues that are not so much matching the spiritual and internal truths and minute points, the illuminated garden of His Highness Eighth Imam Ali Ibn Musa Al-Reza (may Allah bestow him thousands of regards and extolments) is like a gemstone for this honorable city and pure land that is ornamented with apparent beauty and the lights of grace are illuminating and shining from the source of emittance therein and, in fact, it is the total sum of all fame and container of all the sumptuous extolments and all the precious prices” (Ibid, pp.3-4).

It can be concluded in regard of Mashhad that Etemad-al-Saltana’s reliance on Mashhad and Imam Reza (PBUH)’s holy shrine has taken over his scientific aspect and, as it will be stated in the following parts, he has devoted a substantial part of the book not to the city of Mashhad but to the explication of the Imam's honorable Holy Shrine.

- Foreigners’ Invalidity:

Etemad-al-Saltana is an example of a scientific personality from Qajar Era and he is found bound to the scientific research methods common in that time in his authorships and literary works. It can be reckoned that his scientific perspectives have been somewhat influenced by his education in France and the numerous foreign books he has studied and translated. Therefore, one should not be surprised by his great many of references in Matla Al-Shams to the foreigners’ researches and studies. But, the notable point is his completely critical look at the foreigners’ researches and studies in such a way that, besides Iranian’s negligence, Etemad-al-Saltana mentions the imperfect and occasionally incorrect writings by the foreigners as one of his objectives in dealing with Mashhad.

{In regard of the explication and description of Mashhad}, nobody has so far given himself the right to do so and no one has been up to now capable of opening the door of perfect description of the city the way it deserves. That is because at the time that geography and its accessories have been in their prosperity and peak points amongst Arabs and Persians, the city did not have the credits it came up with later on and also when the city began development, geography started its recess and the travelers did not take a trip thereto to discover the buildings therein and the native scholars and the authors were not bestowed such a sustenance upon the transition from the old to modern era as it becomes clear from the expressions made by them and the foreign travelers with their ambitiousness in doing research were not permitted to enter the intended important places so that I could cite them to clarify the value of the book and the materials presented therein (Ibid, p.4).

For instance, Etemad-al-Saltana makes use of the Russian Nikolai Khanykov’s writings and believes that not only Khanykov has failed to offer a fair description of Mashhad but he has also made clear

mistakes. However, Khanykov's writings have been admired by Paris's geography assembly (to which Etemad-al-Saltana has also been a member) and Etemad-al-Saltana feels sorry about their having no mastery over Persian language to figure out how inferior his work is.

On the other hand, it seems that Etemad-al-Saltana finds himself in a competition which has to be won; for example, he compares the volume of the researches he has done about Mashhad with the volume of his other works and states that "we have, by the grace of the God, bestowed the honor of joining the Islam world and permitted to enter the holy Razavi garden and used our maximum precision and effort to visit and record various buildings therein and also read and written down the entire inscriptions and we have authored not a hundred verses but ten thousand verses regarding the geography, the history and the biographical evaluation of the city of Mashhad and we have left no place unvisited and even we have prepared a detailed list of the books in the honorable Razavi Library that has been succinctly mentioned by Monsieur Khanikov and we have jotted them down volume by volume {...}. If one looks at my work in an unbiased manner s/he will find it out that nobody has ever done anything like this before and that the most detailed explanation about Mashhad does not exceed a hundred or two hundred verses (Ibid, p.6)". {...}

It seems from the aforementioned materials that Etemad-al-Saltana has used part of his power on adding to the quantity of his book. For instance, he enters discussions on the famous graves in the holy shrine of Imam Reza. He even narrates the exact diaries by Shah Tahmasb Safavi and adds something from himself thereto that is neither related to Mashhad nor to the holy shrine of Imam Reza (PBUH) and accounts for about fifty pages of Matla Al-Shams ².

The History of Mashhad:

In Matla Al-Shams, Etemad-al-Saltana utilizes a specific method for describing the various geographical spots, including the cities. The method has been subjected to changes for Mashhad but it can still be generally recognized. As an example, in explaining the whereabouts of Tus accounting for a large part of the first volume of Matla Al-Shams, many of the points and hints presented are similar for both Mashhad and Tus some specimens of which are the background review, mentioning of the dates, recounting of the edifices and buildings, mentioning of the adventures of the city elders and others. But, on the other hand, the presence of the Holy Shrine of Imam Reza (PBUH) in Mashhad has overshadowed many of these sections that will be dealt with in an order below.

- Background Review: Old Oriental Scholars V. New Foreign Scholars:

As it was mentioned before, Etemad-al-Saltana has seminally studied the backgrounds in a complete manner before initiating the discussion and he has collected the materials written by the others about Mashhad as far as he could. He writes: "in explicating about the city of Mashhad, we begin with a presentation of what the geography scientists and the native and foreign travelers have stated following which we start our research by the assistance of the God almighty" (Ibid, p.8).

In this study, the majority of the geographers and the travelers and historians who have written some things about Mashhad in Arabic, Persian and Turkish belong to the middle ages. Their explanations are brief, succinct and very general. Etemad-al-Saltana mentions the names of such individuals as Eṣṭakrī, Ebn Ḥawqal, Zakariyya Ibn Mohammad Ebn Mahmoud Qazvīnī, Yaqut al-Hamawi, Ebn Battuta, Hamdallah Mustawfi, Mir Majd Al-Din Muhammad, Qazi Nurrollah Mar'ashi Shoushtary, Amin Ahmad Razi, Mirza Hassan Zonouzy, Farhad Mirza Mo'tamed Al-Dowlah, Kateb Chalabi, Abdulkarim Hendi, Reza Gholi Khan Amir Al-Sho'ara and quotes materials from them.

On the contrary, the foreigners named by Etemad-al-Saltana, as compared to the easterners, have written more precise and more comprehensive materials about Mashhad. Of course, Etemad-al-Saltana does not fear expressing the foreigners' faults and mistakes and mentions them in his book wherever he has found one. Forshire, Cirgen, Dr. Erl Riter, Monsieur Kenoli, Monsieur Ferrier and

² Of course, the exact mentioning of Shah Tahmasb's diaries and memories can be related to E'temād-al-Saltāna's fussiness in preservation of the historical works and remnants and it can also be conjectured that since E'temād-al-Saltāna has endeavored to publish Shah Tahmasb's diaries (as a rare document), he had been seeking for an excuse to present it in his works hence he has seized an opportunity like "Maṭla' al-šams".

Monsieur Khanykov are amongst the scholars whose names have been mentioned by Etemad-al-Saltana and materials have been quoted from them.

In between, the description recorded by Monsieur Fraser about Mashhad is lengthier and more complete than the others' explanations. The description incorporates the history of Mashhad's formation, its shape and map, the explication of the neighborhoods therein, form of the houses, the quality and quantity of the public buildings in there including the holy shrine and schools and others, an explanation of the population and residents of the city, their way of transaction and life and even the price of the goods and some parts on his own adventures in travelling to Mashhad and the way he had been treated by the people and the prominent figures of the city (Ibid, pp.14-37). It will be seen in the following section that the relatively detailed explanation by Monsieur Fraser about Mashhad cannot be compared with the explanation and description presented by Etemad-al-Saltana.

Etemad-al-Saltana writes in the end of the book that "the author says this was the entire utterances and statements by the geography scholars and Arab and Persian travelers and the foreign and Indian scientists and composers in explaining the statuses and states of the city of Mashhad. And, the research on the topics and the resolving of the problems and its minute and fine points based on concrete proofs and valid documents are as written below" (Ibid, p.49).

- **The History of Mashhad Formation or the History of Imam Reza (PBUH)'s Holy Shrine:**

Although Etemad-al-Saltana has found the roots and the history of Qajar Era's Mashhad in the city of Sanabad, the region's urban nature and its being a dwelling place is not much evident in the history he presents. In other words, Etemad-al-Saltana, meanwhile mentioning the history of Mashhad's formation, expresses the history of Imam Reza (PBUH)'s Holy Shrine formation and he writes in the end that "{...} the importance of the city is for the holy shrine of His Highness Imam Reza (may Allah hail on him) and it is quite likely that the city has been formed about the holy shrine; but, as for the change of its name and its complete status and prosperity, it is made perfectly clear based on deductions and efforts that the region's foundation was laid during Mirza Shahrokh Gourkany's sultanate" (Ibid, p.53).

He mentions the following about the way Mashhad has been formed:

"After the destruction of the lands in Khorasan during Amir Taimur's journeys and troop deployments, the king assigned his son, Shahrokh, to the governorship of Khorasan and he decided to reconstruct the destroyed lands, especially after the death of Amir Taimur and Samrqand rebel at which time Shahrokh, himself, was marching towards that direction and decided to first stabilize his occupied territories and then ride towards Samrqand. Anyway, it was in 1387 that he assigned Jalal Al-Din Firouz Shah to the repair of Harat's walls and towers and commissioned Khajeh Sayyed Mirza to Tus Edifice. Upon arriving at Tus, he witnessed that the city of Tus has been destroyed so drastically in Amir Taimur's pursues and fights and the survived people have gather around Sanabad's holy shrine and made themselves houses of mud. He ordered them to migrate from there and return to Tus and they disobeyed stating that this place is their refuting shelter. Therefore, receiving permission from Shahrokh, they drew fences about their houses and it was became a city known as Mashhad and Tus was left deserted all of a sudden (Ibid, pp.53-54).

The explanation, though being evidenced corresponding to Etemad-al-Saltana's claim, it fails specifying the contextual status of the village or the city that had been preexisting adjacent to the holy shrine of His Highness Reza (PBUH). Next, Etemad-al-Saltana speaks of the ideal status of Mashhad and insists on the spiritual effect of Imam Reza (PBUH)'s holy shrine on the material quality of Mashhad:

"And, with all the damages of Uzbek and Turkmen, the city (Mashhad)'s affluence was continuously increased and it soon found all its means of promotion readied after it was occasionally paused and stopped, if any, for a day or two and now this honorable city is in its peak of prosperity and booming and manifestation and the agricultural lands around it are all fruitful and exuberant and many farms are seen on every sides and the fertility of Khorasan's farms are well known to everyone and the

competency and talent of every of its parts are evident to all tribes of the nation and the fame of its great many of waters and the temperateness of its weather are dispersed everywhere and whoever who has not seen it by his or her own eyes has surely heard it and accepted it" (Ibid, p.54).

Therefore, Mashhad and its past contextual status and even its Qajar era's texture are under the shade of Imam Reza (PBUH)'s holy shrine and Etemad-al-Saltana does not see himself committed to explain it in details. This is while he has previously expressed in the introduction to the issue that his (and other Iranian scholars') superiority lies in his being allowed to enter the holy shrine of Imam Reza (unlike the foreigners) with no trouble and easily and study the buildings related thereto and record and register their features and states. According to what was mentioned and also considering Etemad-al-Saltana's interest in Imam Reza (PBUH)'s holy shrine, it is not odd that the reader finds a more frequent mentioning of Imam Reza's holy shrine than the other parts of the city of Mashhad.

Even, he gives more priority to the holy shrine in his arrangement of this book's chapters. Etemad-al-Saltana firstly gets involved in a detailed exposition of the holy shrine and then presents a brief explanation about the city while, logically, the explanation about the city (as a whole embracing the city) is superior to the explanation about the holy shrine.

Mashhad and its Texture:

After mentioning the study background and the city formation history, Etemad-al-Saltana deals with the Texture and the status thereof. Here again, before mentioning any other thing even presenting a general description of the city, he goes directly to the topic of Imam Reza (PBUH)'s holy shrine and its affiliated buildings and begins explanation about the city from there.

The explanations pertaining to Imam Reza (PBUH)'s holy shrine encompass various parts, including the position of the holy shrine in the city and the general description of the edifices therein, the form of the holy shrine's inscriptions, the form of the AHADITH and AYAT and eloquent words on the plinth tiles installed in the periphery of the holy shrine, the mentioning of the doors and gates of the holy shrine and the blessed veranda, the inscriptions on the aforementioned gates, Dar Al-Hefaz, Dar Al-Siyadah, blessed Tohidkhaneh, Allahverdi Khan's dome, Holy Shrine's dome, the ancient and new courtyard, Gowharshad Mosque, Sheikh Baha'ei's grave, the form of the lines and the plates installed on the buildings and edifices of the holy shrine serving the promotion of charitable affairs, mentioning of the graves existent in the holy veranda and mentioning the names of the proctors of the holy shrine. In every one of the abovementioned parts accounting for one third of the book volume, Etemad-al-Saltana's detailed look is observable. He has exercised a lot of fuss in making an inventory of the entire inscriptions, ornaments and details of the holy shrine and the edifices attached thereto. But, the reader cannot envision a general image of the explained buildings after reading all of these details. It seems as if Etemad-al-Saltana has thought that it is not his duty to describe and explain the architectural spaces and the spatial and contextual generalities of the buildings and he has only attempted to compile an encyclopedia of the extant details.

It is for sure that the adoption of such a perspective is not exclusive to the holy shrine and its associated buildings (and not even specific to the second volume of Matla Al-Shams and it can also be seen in the remaining writings by Etemad-al-Saltana about the rest of the places). After detailed explanations about the holy shrine, Etemad-al-Saltana deals with the city's geography. There are several issues that have been considered in the geography of Mashhad. The first topic is the city's surrounding walls: Mashhad's walls that were originally built by Shah Tahmasb Ibn Shah Esma'eil have not been built in a round format rather the surrounding walls have been constructed in such a manner that any tower can be shot by an arrow from another and this has been for the reason that the guards be able to repel the enemy from the other towers if a tower was captured. The city's castle, about 1 farsakh {=6.24 kilometers} in area, possesses a hundred and forty-one towers and the city's fortress that is

attached to the city and is considered part of it and located on the west side of the city and bordered on its two sides by the desert possesses eight towers” (Ibid, p.238).

Next, he speaks about the streets and their connection to the gates following the mentioning of the names of the large and small neighborhoods and then the names of the alleys and passageways are mentioned in a more detailed manner and then the names and the number of the bathrooms and caravansaries and schools. It is clear from these names that Etemad-al-Saltana has had a statistical approach to his research topic and has sufficed to the names and the numbers free of the city’s quality. In the next part, the geographical positioning, latitude and longitude, of Mashhad has been mentioned from two sources, one Iranian and one foreign and he deals in a part under the title of “closing part” with the names of the aqueducts and graveyards followed eventually by the estimated number of Mashhad’s population (more than 50 thousand people). Up to here, he does not provide any explanation regarding the people in Mashhad, their occupations, their culture and the other characteristics of them and he only gives an explanation quoting the foreigners about the people of Mashhad. The explanations regarding the type of the houses and buildings, except for the holy shrine’s buildings, are scarce.

If it is assumed that Etemad-al-Saltana has withdrawn from presenting detailed explanations about the various aspects of Mashhad due to the sufficiency of the previous explanations previously mentioned by westerners, he should have made it somehow clear and he should have declared which of the descriptions and explanations is corresponding to the realities of the then Mashhad. Moreover, his several decades of temporal distance to the foreign travelers and geographers who have had explanations to offer about Mashhad made it necessary for him to offer a novel description.

Next, Etemad-al-Saltana points to the inscriptions from other edifices like schools, caravansaries and mosques with no mentioning of the general status and spatial and contextual descriptions of the city. The next part is devoted to the blocks in Mashhad. In this statistical section, a general description of Mashhad’s blocks and their relationships to the city and other constituents has been presented.

Finally, based on his method of explaining the whereabouts of the cities, Etemad-al-Saltana mentions the histories and dates pertaining to Mashhad and gives descriptions about the states of Mashhad’s elders and scholars, including the scientists and artists. As a complementary part of his book, he mentions a short summary of His Highness Imam Reza (PBUH)’s adventures from imamate to martyrdom. In an introduction to this final part, Etemad-al-Saltana writes:

“It is said that every science is proud of its subject matter and the present authorship knows itself honored only because it is dedicated to the blessed body of Imam Abulhassan Ali Ibn Musa Al-Reza (may Allah hail on him) so, in respect to this propriety, though there are many pages of this blest books devoted to the blessed name and epithet of his highness, several lines are presented dealing with the special states of His Highness so that this commendatory book be ended by a touch on the holy name of that generous Imam” (Ibid, p.450).

This is per se justifying the sacrosanct aspect of the book’s subject as considered by Etemad-al-Saltana and the book is closed with a poem. The poem entitled “the author’s petition to the court of his highness Ali Ibn Musa Al-Reza (may Allah bestow him a thousand of extolment and regards) and changed into a prose by Mirza Muhammad Hussein known as Foroughi, the head of the government’s publication institution and the manager of royal translation office” (Ibid, p.467) has been placed in the end of the book and before mentioning the list of the books in the honorable holy shrine’s library and it is a petition by Etemad-al-Saltana to the court of the generous Imam with the objective of being dedicated to his highness. A map of Imam Reza (PBUH)’s holy shrine and tomb and the buildings and edifices connected thereto has also been drawn in the last page of the volume.

Considering all these evidences, it becomes clear to us that the writing of the book “Matla Al-Shams” was regarded as a sacred deed and a service to the court of His Highness Imam Reza (PBUH) by Etemad-al-Saltana hence, as it was mentioned repeatedly, the scientific aspect of the book has been

overshadowed by its spiritual aspect and it is well distinct from Etemad-al-Saltana's other authorships.

Epilogue:

Although the three volumes of the book "Matla Al-Shams" can be considered as a prominent and precise work in such fields as geography, history and architecture, it was seen that the second volume of the book is more related to Mashhad and its qualities and quantities than being a book. The book is more dealing with Imam Reza (PBUH)'s holy shrine and its other associated buildings. The writer is more concentrated on this part of the city and does not present a complete image of Mashhad.

On the other hand, Etemad-al-Saltana's scrutinizing approach in this book blocks the road to the readers' depiction of a complete and integral image of the city and the readers can only be assisted when they have a perfect image of the city and are in need of detailed and exact statistics and numbers. Based thereon, it is not easy to offer an interpretation of the image displayed by Etemad-al-Saltana of Mashhad because it falls short of exhibiting a general and overall map of the city.

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