

Chinese Influence in Persian Manuscript Illustrations

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Abstract

Historically illustrated Persian manuscripts, with several miniatures, clearly demonstrate foreign influences included Sasanian, Arab and significantly Chinese. This research briefly investigates presence of Chinoiserie motifs that are frequently applied by the Persian artists from 13th century to 15th century when Chinese influence was apparent in Persian illustrated manuscript. Investigation will be justified by highlighting various influences and continuation of Chinese influence in Persian manuscripts paintings from Mongols to Safavids. After Mongol conquest, Persian illustrated manuscripts have perceptible Chinese influence and many motifs derivative from Chinese arts, popularly known as Chinoiserie motifs were adapted by the Persian artists into their arts. On Persian manuscript painting Chinese influence was noticed in various manuscripts such as *Manafi al Hayawan*, *Shahname*, *Jami al Tavarikh*, and *Mirajnama* which were illustrated during the reign of the Il-Khanids, Timurids and Safavids. During these periods Persia was in direct contact with China via trade routes through Central Asia. Persian paintings unquestionably reflect a spiritual intelligence beyond reason. Persians through their artistic talent created such an art that is highly aesthetical revealing natural beauties of this world as well as inspirational nature of spiritual world. Through mellow richness of artistic and poetic expressions these illustrations convey meanings that are beyond visual description.

Keywords: Manuscripts, Chinoiserie motifs, Blue and White porcelain, Chinese Prototype, Allegory.

Introduction

Chinoiserie motifs are frequently applied by the Persian artists from 13th century to 15th century when Chinese influence was apparent in Persian illustrated manuscript. It is perceived that from the Mongol conquest Persian illustrated manuscripts have perceptible Chinese influence and many motifs derivative from Chinese arts were adapted by the Persian artists into their arts. Execution of Chinese motifs and the meanings of their presence in Persian miniatures is a debatable topic. Chinese influence on Persian paintings passed on to Persian artists, through a variety of media, but only those facets that were compatible indigenously were imitated and modified. Chinese influence was primarily noticed in Persian manuscripts illustrated during the reign of the IlKhanids (Thirteenth century onwards), when artistic and literary activities were centred in Tabriz. Via trade routes Tabriz was in direct contact with China through Central Asia. Chinese porcelains were frequently used at Safavid court. A *waqf* donation of Chinese porcelains by Shah Abbas to Ardabil shrine records the presence of Chinese products used by Safavid rulers whose designs caused inspirations for Persian artists. After Mongols, Timurids

continued trade interactions with Ming Chinese and Timurid artists, who were working at the royal atelier, derived innumerable designs for book covers, textiles, saddles; metal works, manuscript borders from Chinese decorative arts such as textiles and ceramics.

This paper is extracted from my unpublished MPhil thesis titled "Persian Allegory of Chinoiserie Motifs" which is submitted to Higher Education Commission, Pakistan. A general format has been followed for this paper while keeping chronological order in mind to deliver relevant information that can benefit other researchers.

Chinese Influence in Persian Manuscript Illustrations

Art has always been instrumental in stimulating the faith of the nations. Persian art is an astonishing combination of symbols of timeless and immortal atmosphere which are combined with innovation as aesthetics in Persian manuscript paintings. Paintings and other visual arts have always been means of communication bringing forth the relation of faith with the traditions of the region and cultural practices.

Literature - Arabic and Persian - in the classical era of Islam, was a major source of inspiration for the arts. In mood and subject matter, though, a great amount of it was highly secular particularly in the case of Persian

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lyrical poetry; where spiritual thoughts and attitudes can be noticed. ^[1] Poetry always had an impact on the symbolism of mystical writing and literature provided with inspiration on various arts. Literary subjects motivated artists working in many different Medias like ceramics, wall painting, metal work, even textiles, and from the 12th century onward, book illustration became a noteworthy artistic activity in Iran.

The recorded History of Iranian paintings by different researchers dates back to 7,000 years. There are varied points of views by different scholars regarding the roots of Iranian paintings. Some researchers are of the view that paintings in Iran dates back to the Achaemenid era. To find out the roots of this art one needs to go back to the Stone Age. In archaeological journey comprehensive cave paintings were revealed in Lurestan (Mirmalas and Dousha). Animals and hunting scenes were the most commonly painted subjects. In addition other murals found on the mound of Fahlian Fars are the oldest example of this art in Iran. Looking at the bronze of Lurestan and carvings of the Achaemenid, we can easily discover the uniqueness of Persian miniatures. The images on the drinking vessels of gold from Hassanlou and Kelardash and Marlik in northern Iran not only describe stories, classics, and myths but also correspond to the art of painting in the first millennium B.C. and the history of Iran. ^[2]

Some other art experts consider that paintings in Iran are just restricted to miniatures and book illumination. This is because most of the murals have been damaged and it is only through the miniatures the Iranian painting can be appreciated. Visual arts including miniature during Sasanian era initiated a new stage of development. Apart from the endurance of Egyptian book painting no miniature has come down to us from the period before about 1200. ^[3]

The visual art of Sasanian period can be divided into two parts. The art of western Iran which was in contact with Byzantine art covers styles which have a long history in this land. This style after being influenced from the Far East in later period became known as the Iranian school of miniature or Herat style. The Iranian eastern school of painting is distinguishable from that of Mani. In the discoveries made in Tourfan in Turkistan, credentials were found in Mani's religion, which contained some valuable paintings. The Manicheans used gilding for their religious books. They added precious metals for showing light in their works. Perhaps, as influenced from Manicheans art of books, this has been the reason of Iranians extensive use of gold and silver in their miniatures. Mani's religious books were illuminated and for this reason the art of book illumination in Iran, land of Mani, reached its peak of novelty and evolution. ^[4]

To document post-Islamic Iranian miniatures we can start from Abbasid era. In Baghdad, the Abbasi or Baghdad school of painting is the first Islamic school of painting. Caliphs of Baghdad financed expensive manuscripts of texts translated from the Greek or from the Pahlavi (Middle Persian, a form of language in Sasanian times), on such useful subjects such as astronomy and medicines. Other manuscripts reproduced Arabic versions of Pahlavi animal fables whose intention was didactic, ethical and infect deadly serious, regardless of their entertaining form. Illustrated books were luxury products and commissioning them was a royal privilege. ^[5] A number of Iranian and Nestorian Christian artists, illuminated books such as *Kalila and Dimna* and Hariri's *Muqamat*, which are apparent depiction of the influence of Sasanian art. ^[6]

A specific stylization of Greek drapery, appear in the illustrations of splendid Baghdadi manuscript of *Muqamat*. (Plate.1) It is proven that early historical orientation to book illustration in the eastern Islamic lands suggests links with pre-existing tradition of the region. For example, it is claimed that a tradition of the ancient Indian animal legend known as *Kalila wa Dimna* was illustrated for the Samanid ruler Nasr Ibn Ahmed at Samarqand during the ninth century by historian *Mas'udi*, a Chinese artist which contained portraits of the Sasanian kings. A book of 'fixed star', was fashioned in the Iranian province of Fars, during eleventh century, contains some notable illustrations of the constellation. ^[7] The *Muqamat* (assemblies) of al Hariri of Basra (1054-1122), is incredible for brilliant use of the Arabic language, to give an account of the adventures of its cunning hero, Abu Zaid. Over a period of a century and a half, a tremendous change came and illustrations of a variety of manuscripts intended to portray the stories of urban environment in which they were supposed to have taken place. (Plate.2)

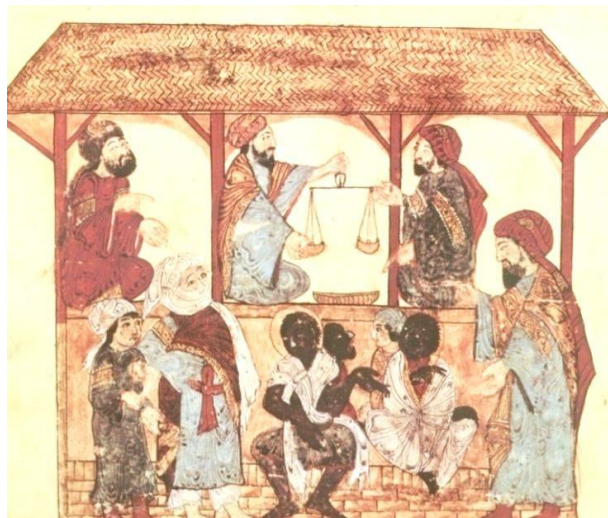


Plate.1 The slave-market at Zabid in Yemen, illustration from the *Maqamat*, dated 635/1237

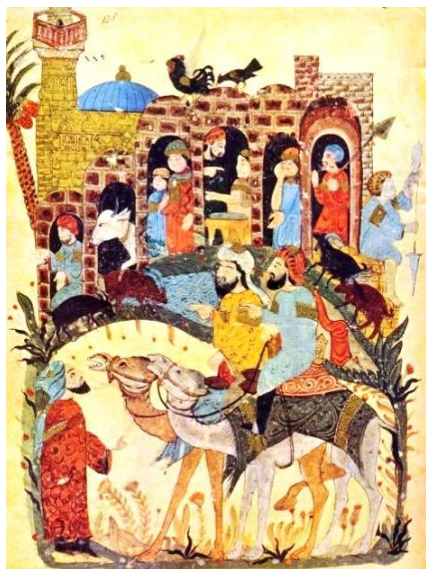


Plate.2 Travellers arrive at the village, Adventures of Abu Zaid, Hariri’s *Muqamat*, VII/13th century.

One of the very first books translated from middle Persian was *Kalila wa Dimna* after the Islamic conquest of Sasanian Empire and the establishment of the caliphate’s seat of government in previous Sasanian Iraq in the mid eighth century. [8] Most of the manuscript illustrations represent a dramatic mood and a highly symbolic representation. Indian animal fables *Kalila wa Dimna*, translated from Persian into Arabic in the 8th century by Ibn al Muqaffa, are in fact a ‘Mirror of Princes’ used for the ethical and political learning of rulers. It contained wonderful stories, which are illustrated in Persian as well as Arabic manuscripts. (Plate.3) As a concluding paradigm, one must state Persian lyrical poetry, particularly the beautiful romances known as the *Khamsa* (Quintet) composed by the poet Nizami (d. 1209). From the end of the 14th century, these were often illustrated, as well as the poems of the Persian poet Hafiz (d. 1389). Several examples of illustrations exist that are provided for the moralizing stories of the mystic poet Sa’di (1219-1292). Immeasurable distinctions exist between these texts and the ways they were illustrated. [9]



Plate.3 Two miniatures from *Kalila wa Dimna*, stupid fish caught in the net and *Dimna* talking to the lion, from an Arabic manuscript of the VII/13th century

Manuscript paintings in Persia endure many developments due to different native and foreign influences. For at least half a century Baghdad remained a centre of a school of book painting and many examples that still survive, clearly represent Sasanian and Arabic character. Specifically the manuscripts left from the first centuries of Islam give an almost clear depiction of the art of the Sasanian period and old fashioned visual style of the first Baghdad school was swept away by the late thirteenth century with a tidal wave of decorative motifs of Buddhist and Taoist origin. [10]

Illustrated manuscripts had a slower start in the situation of Persian culture, dating from around the middle of the thirteenth century. It was possibly made in Konya, the capital of the Seljuk of Anatolia but not in Persia. [11] Hellenistic and Byzantine art of bookmaking in Manichean convents could have been the roots of Seljuk School of painting. Glazed illuminated potteries and tiles are a good resources for a lucid reflection regarding miniatures of this era. For the formation of designs on the potteries, a thin delicate pen would be used to apply with same care as when illuminating books. [12]

Images in these manuscript illustrations are based on centuries of tradition in the depiction of reality with an amalgamation of understanding of beauty and harmony. Persians artists formed their own rules, devices and forms for the personification of aesthetics and conception. Murals from medieval era and surviving pieces of monumental paintings from Seljuk can give clarity about the basis of this magnificent art that involves Chinese inspirational designs and motifs but have their origin in Persia and describe pure Persian allegory.

From the early 13th century, miniature paintings have survived in far greater numbers, when manuscript production appears to have flourished in the Middle East in particular at Mosel, Diyarbakir and Baghdad. Favourite subjects for illustration included *Kalila wa Dimna*, the *Maqamat* ('Assemblies') of Al-Hariri, and the volume on plants from Dioscorides' *De Materia Medica*. [13] (Plate.4) Illustrated manuscripts *Kalila wa Dimna* and the *Maqamat* were also produced under Mamluks.



Plate.4 Illustration of botanical plants. Dioscorides’ *De Materia Medica*, II/8th century

Much of Asia was ruled by various offspring of Genghis Khan, the great Mongol conqueror, from the early 13th century. Unlike the Great Khans, the descendants of Genghis Khan, who ruled China at the Yuan dynasty from 1279 until 1368 and some other descendants who were ruling in western Asia ultimately accepted Islam, notably the Golden Horde accepted Islam in southern Russia, Chaghatayids in Khwarazmia, and Ilkhanids in Iran. Like the Great Khans these Mongol dynasties also remained in power until the late 14th century. A number of fine examples of Islamic art and architecture produced under the patronage of Chaghatayids in Khwarazmia, and Ilkhanids included elements from many ethnicities like Islamic, Iranian, Central Asian, Chinese, and even European.^[14]

Tradition of manuscript illustration became a noteworthy Persian genre in thirteenth century with obvious Chinese manipulation after invasion of Mongol in 1258. Iranian culture influenced and stimulated attention of the Mongol kings to art. They themselves became great supporters of art, especially illustrated manuscript painting. Nevertheless it is believed that that the murals, glazed and enamel tiles of the Seljuk era were the roots of Mongol and Timurid painting.^[15] Like other Mongol rulers of China and Central Asia, the Ilkhanids in Iran dedicated themselves to the patronage of the arts under an impressive court.^[16] Parthian Iran was the route for the trade of Chinese silk and other Far Eastern merchandise. Overland route to China was controlled by Parthians. Chinese silk reached Rome and Roman merchandise reached China all the way through Parthian and Sasanian.^[17]

All through the Ilkhanid period, particularly during the reign of Ghazan Khan (1295-1304), Oljeitu (1304-16) and Abu Sa'id (1316-35) miniature painting achieved an amazing degree of refinement. Ilkhanid were responsible for the patronage of a larger body of historical writings. The Persian national epic, Firdawsī's *Shahname* ('Book of Kings'), was also well-liked, and several lively illustrated copies of it have been accredited to the period 1300-1340. Two of the greatest illustrated manuscripts produced under Ilkhanid patronage are the *Jami al Tavarikh* (Compendium of Chronicles), written and illustrated for the great Ilkhanid vizier Rashid al Din in 1314, and the 'Demotte' or 'Great Mongol' *Shahname* of c.1335, named after the dealer who originally divided this manuscript.^[18] In a bilingual literary atmosphere Persian classic epic *Shahname* (King's Book) was composed by the Persian poet Firdausi (d. 1020). It consists of heroic and mainly mythical history of Iran from the time of formation to the beginning of Islam. Its stories of kings, battles, feasts, and love provided themselves to illustrations. The driving idea behind *Shahname* was to convey a message to the rulers to absorb and reproduce a style of heroic behavior, conquering governance and representation of royal justice which was set by idealized princes of ancient Persia.

After Sultan Mahmud, every Turkish, Iranian, or Indo-Muslim ruler wished to possess his own copy of Firdawsī's 'Book of the Kings' completed with figurative illuminations. During thirteenth and fourteenth centuries *Shahname* was illustrated repeatedly in Ilkhanid period due to Mongols taste for classics. Art of the book reached its zenith at the Ilkhanid court with a copy of *Shahname* (Book of Kings), which was probably produced towards the end of the sovereignty of Uljaytu's son Abu Sa'id (r. 1316-35). Only 60 of its approximately 190 original miniatures survived.^[19]

The art of the books was the most important of all the arts produced under Ilkhanids. Illuminated and illustrated books had been produced for centuries in the Islamic world, but following the Mongol conquest in Iran they became bigger and more numerous as we have many examples of them that survived today. These books were a unit of transcription, illustration, illumination, and even binding, combined in a harmonious whole.^[20] In the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries unquestionably the Mongols were the chief political power in Iran. Due to these circumstances at the end of the thirteenth century perceptibly a Mongol style of painting began to emerge.^[21] Tabriz was the centre of literary and artistic activities under Mongols, which was in contact with China through trade routes. Chinese painters worked in Ilkhanid's court and were open to the elements of Chinese art works. Animals painted in Mongol manuscripts were observed more carefully, and skies were designed with curly white clouds, like twisted garland represent Chinese influence. For the analysis of stylistic features of Persian painting one can pursue the period of contemporary ceramics, more specifically Chinese blue and white porcelain. New motifs were introduced to Muslim artists, the depiction of pictorial scenes in Mongol manuscript illustrations, including different motifs like lotuses, peonies, cloud bands, dragons, and water with surf and phoenixes are known as *Chinoiserie* motifs. Ceramics are the most enduring of all decorative arts of China. Chinese porcelains have been valued for its variety of shapes, ornamental decorations, refinement and whiteness of body material. Gold and silver pottery from Yuan period 1279-1368 is rare, perhaps melted down; however, available records of Yuan pottery are blue and white porcelain. Narrative figure painting on blue and white porcelain of fourteenth and fifteenth century was a popular style that also influenced courtly art. Some ceramics from Mongol Iran also share affinities with those made in Central Asia. The main type of pottery associated with the Ilkhanids is the under-glaze-painted ware often called 'Sultanabad' after the city on the road from Hamadan to Isfahan where many pieces were found in modern times.

Besides ornamental value of Chinese motifs they also convey specific meanings. To value and appreciate presence of these motifs in Persian manuscript paintings, one needs to know the meanings behind the motif decoration which is derivative from Chinese blue and

white porcelain and applied in Persian subjects. Motifs, decorating Chinese ceramics are numerous but *Chinoiserie* motifs are popularly known and covering diverse subjects from nature, history, legends, romance to symbolical ornaments.

Along with the traditional representation of animals, one can find animals of Chinese style in the manuscript of Ibn Bukhtishu, who composed his Bestiary, the *Manafi al Hayawan*, in 1297 or 1299 at Maragha, describing a wide range of species from humans to insects. Manuscript's ninety- four illustrations produced are a mixture of influences from Arab book painting, Persian ceramics, and Chinese brush painting. Two manuscript paintings from *Manafi al Hayawan* are painted with strong Arab character with Chinese brush work. In both illustrations animals are standing on same grassy ground and background is filled with typical tree and birds that is frequently seen in Arab paintings. In both illustrations bodies of the animals are drawn in Chinese manner more calligraphically with strong line. (Plate.5-6)



Plate.5 Two elephants, *Manafi' al-Hayawan* (Usefulness of Animals), by Ibn Bakhtishu, 1295. The Morgan Library and Museum, NY



Plate.6 Lion and Lioness, from the Bestiary of Ibn Bakhtishu, Maragha, 1298

Later in thirteenth century manuscript paintings following the Chinese model landscapes, display a stereotype character, with rounded hills and diverse viewpoint of space. Chinese sky *tai* like a undulating and wavy ribbon was a conventional appearance of a common natural phenomena. Persian painters had conventionally appreciated the multitude of the picture space with a large number of motifs determined in the frontal plane, but in this period they learned to place their figures more effectively in space from Chinese. The devices of superimpose several planes and placing motifs and figures in overlapping rows in these manuscript pages, was modified from Chinese style of producing spatial depth. (Plate.7)

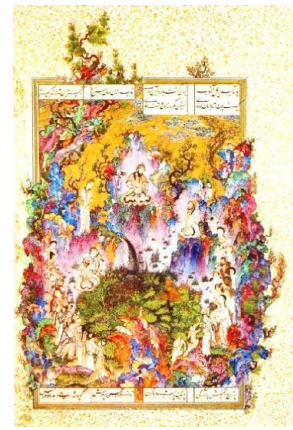


Plate.7 The court of Gayumars, Shah Tahmasp's *Shahnama* of Firdawsi, Tabriz, 1522-5

Persian manuscripts also include many vertical compositions and horizontal layout of Chinese hand scrolls were also taken up. Figures were arranged horizontally and in lateral suggestion, often breaking through the frame, suggesting an extension of the picture space. Another device of allowing the frame to cut off parts of figures, motifs or animals, as seen in 'A mare followed by a stallion', from *Manafay al Hayawan*, 1297-1299, Maragha, had long been known in China was also adopted in Persia. (Plate.8)

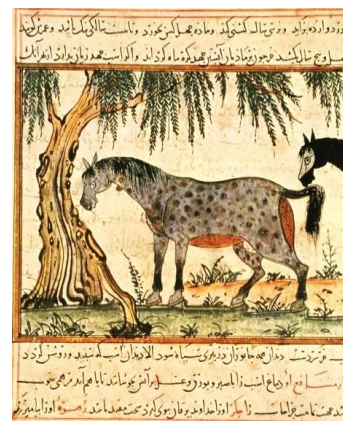


Plate.8 A mare followed by a stallion, from *Manafay al Hayawan*, Maragha, 1297-1299

Ghazan Khan commissioned Rashid al-Din, his able minister, to write a continuation of Juvani's history of Mongol tribe and its invasions. Rashid al Din prepared a history named *Jami al tavarikh* (Collection of Chronicles). He developed a workshop of artists, scribes, scholars and book binder and compiled four volumes. This history was completed in 1307, three years after the death of Ghazan Khan. [22]

Illustrations of *Jami al Tavarikh* represent mature Mongol style of painting and it has horizontal format except one, which is of a Chinese Emperor. Colour palette of the Jami illustration is unique. Green, red, blue and orange are customary whereas use of silver on warm cream paper surface shimmered effectively that has been stained over centuries. (Plate. 9) The *Jami al Tavarikh* is a large format manuscript (the pages measure some 43x30cm), with horizontal illustrations. Landscapes generally contain only animals drawn in detail that show a highly developed level of observation. Elements of the setting often reflect or emphasize contributing to the expressiveness of the image. [23] A multi-volume history of the world covering the sovereignty of Ghazan and his forbears, the non-Mongol Eurasian peoples, the pedigree of ruling houses, and natural features. The most eminent illustration to survive is from an Arabic copy which was made about 1315. The surviving remains structure about one-half of second volume about the Eurasian peoples. Initially it was consisted of some three hundred folios (written surface 37x25 centimetres, 15x10 inches) and 35 lines of text on each page, with 110 illustrations and 80 portraits of Chinese emperors. [24]

Islamic Iran. A painting from an existing manuscript confirms, four of these candlesticks surrounding a bier scene. [25]

The Demotte *Shahname* is also a very large manuscript and unquestionably the first and the richest that survived from medieval Iran. These illustrations are the multifaceted compositions in which figures are portrayed in rich and intense colours. Setting show special recession and are with more detail than those of the *Jami al Tavarikh*. Miniatures produced under the Inju'id of Shiraz (1335-53), compared to those in the Demotte *Shahname*, are characterized by bright colours, variety of brushwork, unrealistic flowers in simple composition and *Chinoiserie* elements, similar to those on Sultanabad pottery, began to emerge with increasing occurrence at this time. [26] Strong Chinese influence is evident in two manuscript illustrations, The Sacred Tree of Buddha, and Jonah and the Whale, from *Jami al Tavarikh*, Tabriz, 1314, in the depiction of pesky tree formation in landscape and stylized scalloped shape water. (Plate. 10-11)

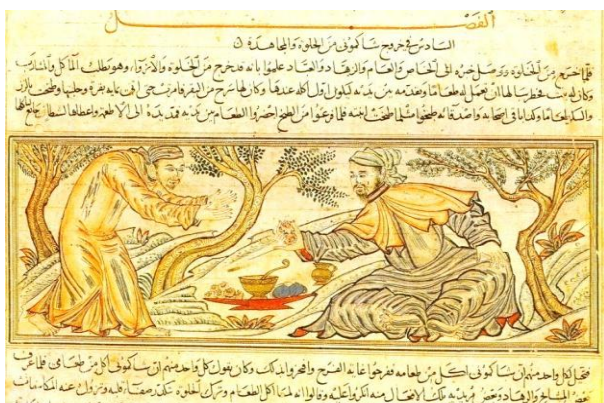


Plate.9 Sukyamuni (Buddha) offer fruits to the Devil. *Jami al Tavarikh*. Tabriz, 1314

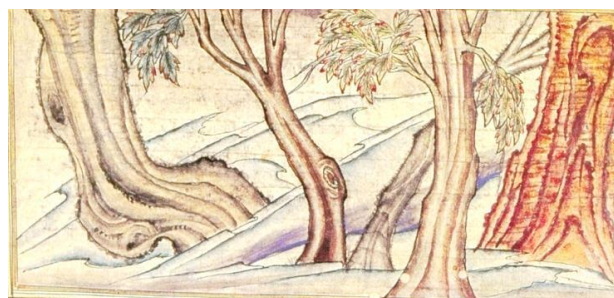


Plate.10 The Sacred Tree of Buddha, *Jami al Tavarikh*. Tabriz, 1314

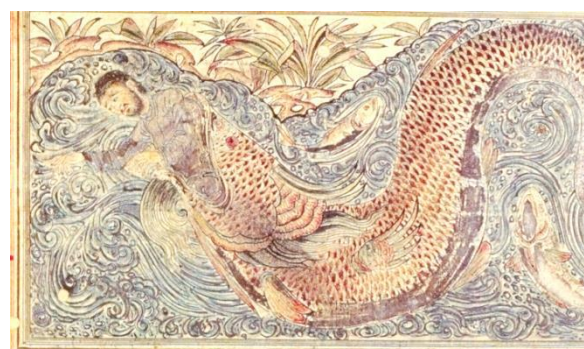


Plate.11 Jonah and the Whale, *Jami al Tavarikh*. Tabriz, 1314

Ilkhanids had a great taste for gold and silver as they were to the other Mongol rulers and many of these subjects are familiar types like pen boxes, bowls and candlesticks, but Ilkhanid pieces are often larger or more elaborately decorated with figures and vegetal motifs than earlier ones. Large candlesticks were meant to stand on floor. The size of the base of one such candlestick measures 13" (32.5 centimetres) high which was given to the shrine of the Sufi Bayazid Bistami by a vizier of Sultan Uljaytu in 1308-9 and it is the largest candlestick to survive from

After the Mongol conquest Baghdad had remained an important centre of book production, and later Shiraz was added, where from the beginning of the reign of *Uljaytu* in 1304, the Inju family governed on behalf of the Ilkhanids, exercising a degree of sovereignty accounted by *Abu Sa'id*. It is possible that one of the earliest Persian books *Kalila and Dimna*, dated to 707/1307-08, was produced under their patronage. [27] Ilkhanid dynasty divided into numerous martial dynasties after 1335. And under the Muzaffarids (1353-93), a high horizon line, and

a wealth of natural details in painted landscapes with rounded hills and figures with disproportionately large heads and the distinctive Muzaffarid Turban were added features. [28]

During the reign of Sultan Ahmad Jalayir (d. 1410) art of painting was constantly refined. Manuscripts of this period from Tabriz and Baghdad have large full-page illustrations painted in brilliant palette. In comparison with Ilkhanid manuscripts, early Jalayirid works represent the extensions of the illustration into the margin which became more evident under Sultan Ahmad. In a landscape of regular bunch of grass and flowers with high horizon lines, slender and elongated figures are placed further back in the picture space. One of the first illustrated manuscripts known to have been produced in his reign is a *Khamse* ('Five Tales') of Nizami dated 1386 and 1388 and a copy of the 'Three Poems' of Khwaju Kirmani (dated 1396) include the earliest known signed Persian miniature, by the artist Junayd, a pupil of Shams al-Din. It will not be out of context to say that the style of the great classical period of Persian miniature painting which continued for the next two centuries reached its perfection at the Jalayirid court. [29]

The Timurid dynasty was established by the new invasion of Timur from 1381 and brought an immaculate gesture of Chinese influence. Many Jalayirid painters were taken back to Samarqand following the campaigns of Timur in western Iran. Some painters found their way to Baghdad where Sultan Ahmad himself took refuge before fleeing to Egypt. 'Abd al-Hayy, a pupil of Shams al-Din and Sultan Ahmad's tutor in drawing continued to work for Sultan Ahmad in Baghdad. Timurid princes who were installed as governors at Shiraz, Isfahan, Herat, Baghdad and Tabriz called upon local artists of accomplished skills, who had served the Inju'id, Muzaffarid and Jalayirid court. [30]

Under Timur, Samarqand became a new cultural centre and libraries were established in Samarqand and Bukhara and lead a new golden age of book production. Timur's grandsons patronized the creation of Timurid School of painting. Iskander Sultan son of Ulugh Beg was the first great patron and later Ibrahim Sultan and Baysungur. Artists working for Iskandar Sultan in Shiraz, between 1409 and 1414, accomplished a perfect fusion of the Jalayirid and Muzaffarid style, which is primarily seen in two Anthologies of 1410-11. Typical rock formation and gold or deep-blue skies in these miniatures with delicate details, all indicate the great Timurid manuscripts produced at Herat. Nonetheless, Iskanadar's various attempts of revolution finally resulted in Shah Rukh removed from his governorship in 1414. [31] Baysungur placed all the best artists at his library in Herat till his premature death in 1433. Persian epic *Shahnama* was established under Baysungur's personal supervision. Timurid house could not produce notable clientele of art until the Sultan Husayn Bayqara's accession at Herat in 1468. He patronized Bihzad and Jami with his vizier Mir Ali Shir, who himself was a poet of distinction. Under

Shah Rukh, including several of the Timurid princes notably amongst whom were Ulugh Beg and Baysungur, gifts and presents were exchanged on a large scale to various embassies. [32]

The splendid manuscript copied and illustrated for Shah Rukh in Herat in 1436 was influenced by Chinese Buddhist art, recounting the Prophet's visionary journey, through the spheres and as far as Heaven and Hell. [33] The Timurid "*Mirajnama*" is an artefact of that time, which was a period of brilliant artists. Historical and religious factors recommend that 'Book of Ascension' must have been made within the circles of the Timurid court of Shah Rukh, who was keen to spread Islam beyond the borders of Timurid Empire and broadened relations with Ming China. An illustrated version of the *Mirajnama*, appears to have been a natural outgrowth of Shah Rukh's constant attempt to revive *Sunna* of the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H), as well as a product of his artists' interest in eastern works. [34] (Plate.12)



Plate.12The Angel Gabriel and Muhammad, (P.B.U.H) Riding His Horse *Buraq*, *Mirajnama*, Herat, 1436

Scenes depicting Muhammad (P.B.U.H) visiting Hell are astonishing, illustrated with their black grounds. The images always show Muhammad (P.B.U.H), his horse *Buraq*, and against a golden cloud on the right is depicted Gabriel and the artist used his greatest imagination on left side where the sinners suffering a variety of chastisement for their wrongdoings. [35] Sanctified persons are no longer singled out with a round halo but with a ring of flame rising from the back in the Chinese and central Asian fashion. [36] Halo known in Persians as *farr* 'light of glory' was believed in Sasanian era to originate from the king's person. Later halo in the form of disc was a typical representation of Islamic rulers till fourteenth century and appeared as a modified form by Chinese in the form of pointed tongues of flame around saintly figures. [37] Illustration from *Shahnameh* of Shah Tahmasp, 1436, Herat, showing Muhammad, Ali, Hasan and Hussain, with flame like haloes. (Plate. 13)

Shah Rukh assembled a highly accomplished group of artists at Herat and they worked both for him and his son Baysungur. [38] There was a great development in painting at the time of Shah Rukh. A delicate style replaced the

earlier style. This was all because of Shah Rukh's own poetic and artistic abilities. Poetic appraisal and analysis are explicitly apparent in paintings of this school and poetry dominated the painting.^[39]

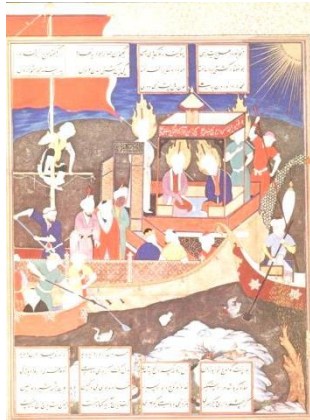


Plate.13 Muhammad, Ali, Hasan and Hussain with flame like haloes, *Shahnameh of Shah Tahmasp*, 1436, Herat.

Safavid Shahs also sustained Persian literature, poetry and art projects including *Shahnama* of Shah Tahmasp, was completed in c.1530 and it was almost an implausible outcome with fundamental importance and merit. This *Shahnama* is also known as the Houghton *Shahnama*.^[40] This manuscript contains 258 full sized miniatures.

In 1452, Timurids were replaced by the Black Sheep Turkmen, who from 1468 were followed by the White Sheep Turkmen. The Safavid dynasty which was one of the most remarkable ruling dynasties of Iran replaced White Sheep Turkmen in turn. The Safavids re-established law and order in the whole of Iran from the time of the Arab conquest and they constituted a stable government and established first local dynasty to rule over country. They are considered as the founders of Modern Iran.

In a general atmosphere of Islamic dynasties of Mongol and Timurids from fourteenth and fifteenth century, the attempt was to synthesize the cultural contributions and for this purpose aesthetical elements were on purpose and consciously taken from China.^[41] After the decline of Timurid Empire, Shah Ismail gained political distinction in 1501 and Shah Tahmasp succeeded his father for the next 52 years in 1524 at a very young age when he was only ten years. In Safavid period artistic relations with China particularly in the field of Chinese blue-and-white porcelains, are of connotation for their effect on the Persian economy of the later eleventh to seventeenth century. From the time of Shah Ismail Chinese blue and white porcelain remained in use at the Safavid court and Persian stone-paste and earthenware ceramics were formed for more common use.^[42]

A *waqf* donation to the Ardabil shrine and the *Astan-i Quds Razavi*, at Mashhad was made by Shah 'Abbas in 1607-8. To the former he donated his library of Persian historical and poetry books as well as his collection of

Chinese porcelains and other precious items. As per the statement of Iskandar Beg Munshi, the gift to the shrine of Sheikh Sufi consisted of Persian books as well as collection of Chinese porcelain, including large dishes, celadon ware, wine cups, and other Ghorid and Chinese bowls which were in the royal china store.^[43]

Artists in Iranian land had only at irregular intervals looked directly to nature as a source for their art. Illustrated manuscripts of the *Shahnameh* have included myths and legends till at least the fourteenth century. The snake-shouldered Zahhak, Fariydon and his bull-headed mask, the unconquerable Isfandiyar, the lion like Rostam, the guardian bird *Simurgh* and the *div*, all became familiar figures in Persian paintings. For the decoration of tiles, stories from the Rostam saga were in style. A genre of painting by folk artists, the so called *qahvehkhaneh* (coffee house) paintings by the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, were also producing scenes from the *Shahnameh* and this way, Persian myths continue to prove till today, significance to the beliefs, social attitudes and tastes of the Iranian people.^[44] And the utilization of *Chinoiserie* motifs in Persian manuscripts is a continuous conscious practice that describes Persian allegory till today.

Conclusion

Persia's supremacy in art of books was phenomenal and Persian manuscript illustrations flourished under aristocracy where the subjects were dictated by the rulers or aristocratic patrons. Persian artists culminated to perfection in this art - from the translations from Pahlavi to Arabic and later Persian literary works were the basis of this remarkable art and Persian artists decorated them with remarkable skills and kept their boundaries of inspirations open to adapt to foreign motifs. These motifs especially *Chinoiserie* motifs were created in Persian manuscript illustrations with extreme clarity and degree of consciousness while transforming them according to the requirement of their own literary taste. Persian artist selected literature that most suited to his art either from a national epic to romantic or pathetic poem.

Manuscripts were commissioned by rulers of different dynasties. There were no fixed or defined boundaries for the artists so the diversified aesthetics were expressed in a range of artistic manuscript illustrations with a variety of concepts from epic to romantic. Therefore, a loose cohesion and a continuity of adapted designs and motifs are apparent in Persian manuscript illustrations.

Dragons, phoenixes and paradise-like garden settings richly decorated with swirling clouds, blossomed trees and watercourses and heterogeneous division of two dimensional spaces that symbolize a state of being as well as a degree of consciousness, all were conscious efforts of Persian artist. Though these motifs are drawn from Chinese models but their identity in the manuscript illustrations shows that Persian artists have involved these motifs consciously in these illustrations and they are modified to describe pure Persian subject matter.

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