BOOK DECORATION IN ILKHanID SCHOOL

(Recibido el 05-07-2017. Aprobado el 06-09-2017)

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Abstract. During 13th and 14th centuries, Tabriz was enumerated as one of the important centers of encouraging and fostering artists and this provided for the development and perfection of painting and gilding and illumination techniques. The Ilkhanids government period was one of the important historical eras in Iran in regard of book designing and bookbinding. Khajeh Rashiduldin Fazlullah, supported by the artists and scientists, largely contributed to the progress of science, knowledge and art. Pictography was booming during the period of his tenure. He established a compound called “Rab’e Rashidi” near Tabriz. The compound was comprised of a library, a hospital and numerous buildings for artists’ residence and the staff members. A great many of the artists of the then time, including the calligraphers, pictographists, gilders, table drawers, bookbinders and book cover makers were invited to this cultural and artistic location and got involved in book designing and transcription and multiplication of historical, philosophical and literary books.

Keywords: book design, Ilkhanid, Tabriz, Khajeh Rashiduldin Fazlullah, Rab’e Rashidi, Holy Quran, Jame’e Al-Tavarikh, Shahnameh Damot, Yaqut Musta’asimi

1. INTRODUCCIÓN

Book designing in Ilkhanid era caused the formation of a new school called Tabriz School. Inter alia the changes that were brought about in the gilding and book designing of the holy Quran and generally in the other books in that era were the use of eight-sided (octagonal) shapes and dodecagon star polygons in combination or in separate on the front pages as well as the use of blue stars and small multiflora plants for decoration. The heading part of the SURAHs is depicted relatively broadly in Kufi style of handwriting. In the margins of the Holy Quran, as well, occasional ornamental figures are seen depicted following arabesque style. Besides golden colors, other colors like blue, red, green and orange have also been applied. The gilding industry scored its peak of perfection in this era. Khajeh Rashiduldin Fazlullah’s extreme care for book designing especially regarding the Holy Quran transcription and the decorations and gilding works therein caused the heightening of the painting and gilding arts and this had a considerable effect on the later periods. Amongst the scholars, writers, poets and artists following the Ilkhanid School, Yaqut Al-Mosta’emi shone like a ruby and his appearance set a new venue in calligraphy and handwriting styles. The scientific and literary, cultural and artistic works were thence written by the mighty and versatile hands of Yaqut and his prominent pupils and decorated by the gilders and pictographists. During the Ilkhanid era, famous gilders like Muhammad Ibn Ayback and well-known bookbinders like Abdulrahman, some other artists from Rab’e Rashidi, came to existence.

2. STUDY METHOD

The present study has made use of library method to investigate and research book designing of Ilkhanid era based on the extant resources and literature. Also, there is provided some of the masterpieces of this era that are currently being kept in the museums and libraries.

2.1 Ilkhanid School

In the very beginning of their governance over the conquered lands, Ilkhanids were forced to apparently obey the Islamic virtues, rites and beliefs due to the cultural richness of the Islamic Iran. Qazan Khan (the sixth Ilkhanid king and a successor of Holaku Khan) was a just sultan of a good manner and a great many of the Mongols were converted to Islam following his lead. The Mongols of Iran who had inclinations towards Islam from long ago also became Muslims. Sultan Muhammad Khodabandeh (Uljaito), Qazan Khan’s brother, was also a Shi’ite. He built a city called Sultaniyeh and established it as the capital of his government. Also, the Mongolians became inclined to Shi’ism during his sultanate.

2.2. Book Designing in Ilkhanid Era

The painters and gilders’ occupation underwent a decline during Mongolia’s invasion of Iran till the end of the thirteenth century but from the early years of the fourteenth century, following the submission of the Mongolian kings to Islam and the formation of Ilkhanid dynasty, the grounding was set for the cultural exchanges and miniature and gilding again reached to their upswing era. In the early years of the 13th and 14th centuries, Tabriz was recounted as one of the most important centers of encouraging and fostering artists and this provided for the development and perfection of painting and gilding techniques. Ilkhanid dynasty’s period of government is one of the important epochs of Iran’s history in regard of book design. The entire pages of the manuscripts were inscribed with pictorial illustrations and this is of a great importance in the history of Iran’s painting. Tabriz School has been recognized as one of the most important painting art schools in Iran. The most important center of book-making and book pictography activities in this era was Tabriz; moreover, cities like Bagdad, Maraqej, Sultaniyeh, Hamadan and Shiraz were also important centers of book designing in Ilkhanid era (Moghtada’ei, 2014: 49-50). The paintings that …

Khajeh Rashiduldin Fazlullah (minister of Sultan Muhammad Khodabandeh) was an enthusiastic fan of art whose works and supports in favor of the artists and scientists caused the progress of science and art. During his tenure of ministry, book illustration reached to its peak of prosperity. He built an edifice near Tabriz, called Rab’e Rashidi or Rashidiyeh, consisted of a library, a hospital and numerous buildings for the artists and employees to dwell therein. A great many of his contemporary artists, including calligraphers, gilders, illustrators, table drawers, bookbinders and book-cover makers, were invited to this cultural and artistic place and started historical, philosophical and literary book designing and manuscript transcriptions (Almasi, 2001: 32).
The pictorially illustrated books of Tabriz School are the followings: the pictures of the book “Tarikh-e-Tabari”, the book “Moones Al-Ahrar (kept in metropolitan Museum in the US), the book “Manafe’e Al-Haywan by Ibn Bakhtishou’e, written in 1281, which is a description of the animals’ attributes and the manifestations of the nature (Figure 1), the book “Jame’e Al-Tawarikh-e-Rashidi, by Khajeh Rashiduldin Fazlullah, written in 1292 (Figure 2), the book “Kelileh va Demneh” (maintained in Istanbul University’s Library), the book “Shahnamey-e-Ferdowsi”, “Shahnamey-e-Damot” or “Shahnamey-e-Sa’eedi”, written in 1309-1315, (Figure 3), the book “Maqamat-e-Hariri”, written in 1314 (preserved in Vienna’s National Library)

The Ilkhanid School miniaturists were the following ones: Mahmoud Ibn Muhammad Ali Tusi Katib, Master Ahmad Musa, Amir Dowlatyar and Mowlana Valiyullah (Moghtada’ei, 2014: 50).

Figure 1: A picture from the book “Manafe’e Al-Haywan” by Ibn Bakhtishou’e, 1281, Tabriz, Pier Pant Morgan Library, New York

Figure 2: a picture from Jame’e Al-Tawarikh by Khajeh Rashiduldin Fazlullah, 1292, Ilkhanid School

Figure 3: Ardawan’s captivation by Ardashir, a pictorial page from Shahnamey-e-Damot, Tabriz, 1309-1315

2.3 Holy Quran’s Inscription in Ilkhanid Era

Paying a greater deal of attention to the inscription of Holy Quran and decoration and gilding works thereof during the Ilkhanid era caused the formation of a new school called “Tabriz School”. The advent of Tabriz School had a great influence on Iranian painting art of the then time and the gilding art of the later periods. Amongst the changes that were brought about in the gilding and decoration of the Holy Quran and the other books of the Ilkhanid time was the use of eight-sided (octagonal) shapes and dodecagon star-shaped polygons in combination or in separation which were most frequently inscribed on the front pages as well as the blue stars and tiny multiflora plants used for illustration of the books. The headlines of the SURAHs were relatively broad, following Kufi style of handwriting, on an azure blue background featuring gross tree branches and leaves. In the
margins of the holy Quran, as well, there are seen occasional ornamental figures of the arabesque style, very fascinating in terms of the diversity of the colors used. Besides the golden colors, there was also made use of other colors like blue, red, green and orange. All in all, the gilding industry of the then time conquered the peaks of perfection and promotion. Khajeh Rashiduldin Fazlullah’s greater deal of attention to the book designing, especially regarding the transcription of the Holy Quran and the decorations and gilding works therein, as well as the emergence of Tabriz School, caused an upswing in the painting and gilding arts which was of a considerable influence on the later periods.

Inter alia the scientists, writers, poets and artists following the Ilkhanid School of illustration, Yaqut Al-Mosta’imi shone like a ruby and a new venue was opened to the calligraphy and handwriting arts. That is because the scientific and literary and cultural and artistic works were since inscribed by the mighty ahnds of Yaqut and his pupils and all of the other calligraphers after him and then they were rewritten and recorded and kept by their upcoming gilders, illustrators specialist in gilding and decoration of the books. During his life, Yaqut Al-Musta’imi transcribed hundreds of holy Quran versions the majority of which are decorated and ornamented by gilding works. He trained six prominent disciples who were Arqun Ibn Abdullah Kameli, Yusuf Mashhadi, Sheikh Ahmad Sorehwardi, Mubarak Shah Ibn Qotb, also known as Zarrin Ghalam, Nasrullah Tabib and Sayyed Haydar Gondeh Nevis. These masters each transcribed a great many of the Holy Quran books as well as an array of the other books, particularly Sorehwardi who transcribed several numbers of Holy Quran which were later on decorated and ornamented by the gilders. Also, other famous gilders like Muhammad Ibn Ayback and bookbinders like Abdulrahman were amongst the other Rab’e Rashidi artists (Moghtada’ei, 2016: 120).

In Ilkhanid era, 24 great versions of Holy Quran were transcribed with the support of Mongolian kings. These newly transcribed Holy Qurans were superior to all the recognized prior specimens in their sizes, shapes and splendor (Blair, 2012: 36). The most famous of these Holy Qurans were two versions that had been transcribed by the order of Sultan Muhammad Khodabandeh (Uljaito): one is the Holy Quran, kept in Leipzig, transcribed and gilded by Muhammad Ibn Ayback in 1284 in Baghdad and the other is the Holy Quran kept in Egypt’s Royal Library and was transcribed and gilded by Abdullah Ibn Muhammad Hamadani in 1291. This latter version is consisted of several completely illustrated and gilded pages and is considered as a masterpiece of its type in terms of ornamental shapes (Dimand, 1986: 80).

There is another version of the Praised Quran written by Yaqut Al-Mosa’imi and featuring gilding works on headlines of the SURAHs and AYAT marking. It was transcribed in 1266 and it is currently maintained in Iran’s National Museum (Figure 4).

The existence of opening pages are inter alia the features of Ilkhanid era gilding works that are either only gilded pictorial illustrations alone or accompanied by lines assisting the beauty of gilded pictorial illustrations. The spider network symbol, in the form of concentric radii and circles, is manifested and portrayed explicitly and it is usually colored blue or golden.

2.4 Holy Quran’s Decoration in Ilkhanid Era

Sheikh Ahmad Sorehwardi, a prominent pupil of Yaqut Al-Musta’imi, wrote inscriptions for Bagdad Mosque when he was living in Bagdad. After being transferred to Tabriz, the capital city of Ilkhanid dynasty, he got busy transcribing Holy Quran. He transcribed 33 versions of Holy Quran. The brilliance period of his works was the 14th century. Inter alia the Holy Qurans he has transcribed is a Holy Quran written in 1282 and gilded by Muhammad Ibn Ayback, an Ilkhanid Era gilder. This Holy Quran is currently being exhibited in Iran’s National Museum (Figure 5).
2.5 The Specifications and Attributes of the Version

- Holy Quran Size: 50cm in length and 38cm in width
- Transcriber: Sheikh Ahmad Sohrehwardy
- Gilder: Muhammad Ibn Ayback
- Text Handwriting: Mohaghegh
- Headline Handwriting: decorative Kufi style of writing
- Version’s Ornamentation: this version of the God’s words is amongst the best sample work by Muhammad Ibn Ayback who was an artist that was also invited to Rab’e Rashidi Compound. The important features of this Holy Quran and the other Holy Quran versions transcribed in Ilkhanid era are as stated below:

  - Large parts of the God’s words have been the focus of Rab’e Rashidi supervisors in such a manner that this has had a great effect on the statuses of the headline schemes and, in the meantime, it provided the gilders with a good space for the elineation of geometrical figures and continuous Girih.
  
  - The use of beautiful colors like red, golden, azure blue, green and yellow
  
  - The increase in naturalism and configuration of figures
  
  - The use of Turanj along with the SURAhs’ headlines with plant-like and arabesque inscriptions

The Ilkhanid Era gilders made use of such colors as golden, blue, red, green and orange and dark blue was usually used as the background upon and at the margins of the other colors were applied.
There was appeared brilliant faces in such areas as science, literature, astronomy, poetry, theosophy, painting, music and calligraphy and each made a great deal of efforts in advancing and enriching Iran’s culture in Ilkhanid era. Such unparalleled and unexampled men like Khajeh Nasiruldin Tusi (wise and scientist minister of Holaku Khan), Khajeh Rashiduldin Fazlullah (enthusiastic fan of art and minister of Uljaito), Ata Malek Jowaini, Allameh Helli (an Imamiyyeh scholar), Ibn Batuteh (an Islamic geographer and tourist), Abdulmo’men (musician), Jamaluldin Yaqt Al-Musta’simi (versatile alligrapher who was the leading figure of world calligraphy). There were also other famous faces in poetry and theosophy like Afshahulmotakallemin Sheikh Sharifuldin Ibn Moslehduln Sa’adi Shirazi, Shams Tabrizi, Mowlana Jalaluldin Muhammad Balkhi, Owhadi Maraq’ei, Fakhruldin Araqi, Khajavi Kermani, Ibn Yamin, Ubeid Zakani and Lisan Al-Quyb Shamsuldin Muhammad Hafiz Shirazi (a great theosophist and sonnet-reciting poet) in Ilkhanid era. These figures created invaluable works that will remain eternally and are now the ornaments beautifying the libraries and museums worldwide (Moghtada’ei, 2016: 124).

At the same time with the Mongols’ governance, the art of gilding was also growing in Egypt and precious Holy Quran versions were transcribed and decorated with gilding works in their kingdom (Lings, 1998: 115). The features of these versions are explicitly indicative of the Holy Quran versions that had been transcribed in Ilkhanid dynasty kingdom. It seems that the calligraphers and the gilders who had been trained in Bagdad School of transcription, like the other artists, migrated to Cairo during the 14th century and began gilding and transcribing more Holy Quran versions under the support of the kings therein.

During the 12th, 13th and 14th centuries, gilding masters such as Abdulaziz Mozahheb, Zayduldin Khattat, Jamaluldin Naaqsh Esfahani, Fakhruldin Hussein Ibn Badi’e, Sheikh Badruldin Naqqash, Ahmad Ibn Abi Nasr Atiq, Muhammad Ibn Mas’oud and Muhammad Ibn Ayback (all prominent gilders from Ilkhanid era) had proved their superiority to the others (Figure 8).

There are Holy Quran versions as well as other valuable and precious manuscripts left for us as memoirs from Ilkhanid era that are currently kept in libraries and museums. In this era, the art of book designing that included calligraphy, illustration, gilding, table-drawing, bookbinding and book-cover making was the prevalent in Rab’e Rashidi art workshop. In this art center that was founded by Khajeh Rashiduldin Fazlullah, prominent artists, expert in the aforementioned fields of art, gathered around and created immanent works.
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