

A Study on the Content and Style of the Illustrations of the Manuscripts of the Maqamat of Hariri of the Tabriz School During the Ilkhanid Era

Abstract

Iranian-Islamic painting is the manifestation of God's beauty. The principles of this national art have evolved and developed for over many centuries. The manifestation of this art is perceived in works that have remained until today, although the number of book remaining is minor. In fact, the main theme of Iranian-Islamic painting is presence of "the book" and this is a symbol of sanctity and the general respect for books and writing in Islam. The first coherent style of Iranian painting is the Tabriz Ilkhanid School of Painting or the Mughal School. A group of paintings of this school have a direct relationship with religion, and interestingly, considering the diversity and freedom of religion in the mentioned period of Iran's history, the paintings were also the manifestation of religious stories of Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Among the notable works of this era are the silk official copies, one of the valuable examples of which is a copy kept in the Bodleian Library in Oxford dated ۱۳۳۷/۷۳۸ and two copies of the British Museum dated ۷۰۰/۱۳۰۰ and ۱۳۶۳/۷۶۳. The result of examining the illustrations of the mentioned three versions and comparing them with the Maqamat of Hariri manuscript in the early Baghdad school is an apparent manifestation of the stages of completion and integration of painting features is the optimal use of the features of the civilizations brought to Iran (Chinese and Byzantine).

Research aims:

۱. Studying the content and style of the paintings of the Maqamat of Hariri during the Ilkhanid period.
۲. Comparing the style and subject of the paintings of the Maqamat of Hariri of the Ilkhanid period with the paintings of the early Baghdad school.

Research questions:

۱. How many copies of the Maqamat of Hariri were illustrated during the Ilkhanid period?
۲. How are the illustrations of the Maqamat of Hariri analyzed in terms of form, content and stylistic features?

Keywords: painting, Ilkhanid, Maqamat of Hariri, Tabriz school, manuscript.

Introduction

Iranian miniature or painting is an art in the service of book layout and ornamentation of books and manuscripts; nonetheless, this art has a specific framework, format and codified principles. Form, space and color are three inseparable parts of this art, and despite the fact most of its aesthetic standards are derived from Iranian-Islamic art and civilization, Iranian painting reached its final development when influenced with the painting art of rich civilizations such as China and Byzantium. According to the few remaining examples of this art before the 15th/16th century, the art of miniature painting was generally used to express legends, myths, folk legends and tales. Nevertheless, during the time of the Ilkhanids, more thoughtful attentiveness was considering regarding the chosen topics. In fact, during the time of the Mughal Ilkhans, the religion of Islam in Iran was seriously threatened with destruction, and Chinese and Byzantine painters used the art of painting for propagating Buddhism and Christianity and aimed to incline the Ilkhanid rulers as art patrons towards their desired themes. Thus traces of Buddhism and Christianity can be seen in the works of this period. In the intervening time, Iranian Muslim artists and painters were not idle as they devoted themselves in creating paintings with religious themes, stories and narratives. Among the manuscripts left from this era, the Maqamat of Hariri is a rich literary and art source and its delicate paintings and panels form a part of the lasting heritage of Islamic-Iranian painting. Apart from the Baghdad school of painting, this version was re-illustrated in the years 1300/700, 1323/723 and 1337/738.

In this article, according to the evolution of Islamic painting from the school of Baghdad to the Ilkhanid period, the stylistic features of painting in the era of the Ilkhanids are initially examined, then, while introducing the book of Maqamat of Hariri and acquaintance with its illustrated versions, the paintings are scrutinized according to technique and content. The current research has been written in a descriptive and analytical way, relying on the data of library sources, and it aims to provide a new analysis of the style and content of the illustrations in this edition by prudently evaluating the illustrations of the manuscripts of the Hariri authorities.

Conclusion

The Maqamat of Hariri is a book written in Arabic and first illustrated in the school of Baghdad and in the center of the Abbasid caliphate. Since Baghdad was located between the two great civilizations of Iran in the east and the Byzantine Empire in the west, the works of the time were influenced by these two cultures and the common aspects of Sasanian, Manichaean and Byzantine art along with Islamic elements. After the fall of the Abbasids and the arrival of the Mongol Ilkhanids in the country who were more familiar with the art of the Far East particularly, China; painting became the scene of the confrontation of the art of different cultures; moreover, with the intelligence, tact, taste and patriotism of painters, a unique school of art with a correct combination of the artistic features initiated in the city of Tabriz.

The works obtained from the manuscripts of the Maqamat of Hariri illustrated during the Ilkhanid era was an independent manifestation of the stages of completion and integration of artistic characteristics. For instance, in the preserved version of this manuscript in the British Museum, dated ۱۳۰۰/۷۰۰ related to the beginning of the Ilkhanid reign, it demonstrates an influence of the culture of the pre-Ilkhanid era, that is, the school of Baghdad; however, it fails to portray the features and beauties of that era. This is mostly due to the haste and carelessness in the presentation of the works that has turned it into an example of a primitive art, which of course may not properly bear the characteristics of a certain era.

Among other illustrated examples of the Maqamat of Hariri manuscript, there is an illustrated version of this book kept at the Bodleian library, Oxford, dated ۱۳۳۷/۷۳۸, which beholds completed features of the Tabriz school. The designs and illustrations of this edition are influenced by the events and culture of that time. The presence of faces similar to Chinese faces are present, also, the design of motifs and features derived from the shapes of flowers and plants on the clothes, and the presence of round halos on both heads of people are influenced by the cultures of China, Iran, and Byzantium, respectively, which are well placed next to each other in this version. This copy displays the works and characteristics of a school that is still taking shape and is at its beginning stages and will later that will achieve outstanding prosperity.

The comparison of the similar versions of Hariri authorities from these two schools also shows the progress of painting in the design and composition of image components in the region between the Nile and present-day Iraq, which after the arrival of the Arabs and the

establishment of the Islamic government under the name of the Abbasids, initiated the first steps towards the evolution of art of book ornamentation and painting.

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