

Investigating Political and Cultural Effects of the Safavid Era on Book Layout

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Abstract: In the Safavid era, 1501-1722, Iran faced interrelated political, religious, social, economic and cultural changes. Accordingly, without consideration of these factors, nothing in the Safavid society could be studied or analyzed. Concurrency of these developments with the culmination of evolutions in Europe, the presence of Europeans in different scenes of Iran's community and neighborhood with the Ottomans added to the complexity of the description and interpretation of the evolutions during this period. Despite these complexities, the art especially the art of the book layout, as a mirror displaying the complete changes in society, is an efficient tool for understanding and interpreting the developments. So, investigating many factors such as religion, politics, foreign relations, cultural exchange as well as Safavid king's interest to art, through a library-analytical method, it was concluded that these factors had contributed to the development of arts, particularly the art of book layout. In addition, the mentioned factors were effective on changing the style and decline of the book layout.

Key words: Safavid, cultural-political evolutions, book layout, religion, style

INTRODUCTION

The use of Safavids of the Shiism as an ideology for the unifying the country is a proven historical fact. Two important features of the Safavid kings are mentioned. The first one is the recognizing of Shiism across the country and the creation unanimity between local governments and tribes. Second is attracting the interest of Europeans, who were the ancient enemies of Turks, for the political and commercial ties with them (Norouzi, 2002).

These important events in addition to strengthening the central governance with respect to the readiness of the community for various changes as well as because of economic prosperity and the interest of Safavid kings to the communication with the other nations, considerable effects were seen in various elements of those days society, especially in art.

With the rise of Shah Ismail to power in 1501 and integration of the miniature school of Timurid Herat and school of Turkmen Tabriz, the foundation of book layout in the Safavid era established strongly. Behzad, famous artist, emerged from this school. After Shah Ismail, Shah Tahmasp, trained in the Harat School, rose to the power, which had considerable impact on the creation of Courtier Art. He gave much importance to the book layout which led to the accumulation of many artists in his court. Tahmasp in thirties because of approaching to worship or involvement in the political affairs, abdicated of supporting the art and miniatures and artists of his court scattered. After Tahmasp because of chaos situation of the country, his successors were unable to contribute to the development of the art.

Internal disputes, collapsing economy and declining political situations led to losing created integrity in the Courtier Art which led to the flourishing of the single sheet paintings or scrapbook. Iran's poor condition ended with the throne of Shah Abbas in 1587. In the Shah Abbas era, more political and religious power developed in Esfahan and by entrance of Europeans and Chinese art objects, Iranian arts in compare with previous centuries became international. Paintings, drawings and single sheet calligraphy replaced with luxury art pieces and became popular favorite of people.

The content of paintings compared to the previous contents disintegrated and became close to the naturalism of India Mughal Empire type. Ideal beauty converted to the ordinary images and mystical metaphors of Persian poetry changed from beloved to a more physical one and the lines became more designed. After Shah Abbas, the country's conditions became chaos and in Shah Sultan Hussein's era, the last Safavid king, in 1694, he supported artists like Aligholi Jobedar and Mohammad Zaman. Portrait in the late years of Safavid became more realistic and its volume increased.

Certainly, all changes in miniature have their roots in the social, political and cultural beds of Iranian society at the time, that we investigate some of its numerous reasons in the following briefly.

SAFAVID AND EXPRESSING POLITICAL, RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL EFFECTS

The attempt of Safavid dynasty for creating a national unity compared to the period before him, in Islamic era, is remarkable. Mainly because that at this time

it was tried to provide a strong basis for the establishment of a rule including all types of people. In after Islam history of Iran, the rise of Safavid dynasty is an important event so that after centuries of governance of foreigners to the country and lack of a centralized state, Safavids made Iran a powerful and independent country at the east of Islam. Three belief tenets of Safavid Sufism including adherence to the Twelver Shiism, Mysticism and ancient culture of Iran, not only as ideology but also as three main pillars of political governance were considered among Safavids. The attempt of Safavid rulers to achieve a unique community not only emerges in the political and social dimensions but also it was apparent at the art of that time (Kianmehr *et al.*, 2006).

In the art the Safavid era, compared with other periods of art, there is some development, integration and homogeneity. This feature was due to the political domination of a single family and the move towards a centralized autocracy along with an efficient bureaucracy in a single city. These political evolutions defeated the feudalism powers and changed Iran to a unique cultural unit so that it changed different state styles of the 9th-15th centuries to an integrated style which were guided from capital (Soucek *et al.*, 2008).

Safavid rulers who knew the impact of art on every people and themselves were trained in art schools tried employing artistic features in accordance with the beliefs of the community to make them among people immortal (Kianmehr *et al.*, 2006).

Safavids with the aim of creating a centralized state in Iran were forced to get close different elements in this process. As it can be seen in arts, it can be considered an integration or combination of Western tradition, i.e., Turkmen and the transition in eastern of Iran, i.e., Harat, in architecture, calligraphy and visual arts (Soucek *et al.*, 2008). Among all the study areas, the art book layout in the Safavids era was accompanied by unprecedented growth and we can see three periods of emergence, growth and decline for it. Rise of western paintings, single sheets, Roqeh and paintings around Shiism all show the impact of Safavid's politics and culture on the art of book layout. Shiism was in fact a political movement in which followers of Imam Ali defended the claim the caliphate of Ali (puh), the Prophet's cousin and groom. Announcement of Shiism as the official religion of the state by the founder of the Safavid dynasty, i.e., Shah Ismail, was an urgent need with the aim of causing homogeneous thinking through guidance and order of Shiism (Sivari, 1994).

As much this action was religious, it was also political because through it, the Iranian Shiite faced with Sunni Othman which had the claim of being the caliphate

of worldwide Muslim. This way, the Safavid state got to its "territorial and political identity". The rise of Shah Ismail to the political leadership which was mainly rooted in a Sufi religious so that his followers gave him the epithet of "the Gods of caliphate", was the starting point of depth religious change in Iranian society. Although the next kings after him were not considered as Shah Ismail the pole of mysticism and religion, but always they maintained their political legitimacy through the religion (Karimiyan and Jayez, 2008).

Choosing Shiism as the official religion of the country BY the Safavids Led to greater awareness of people about the national identity and this way the strong and centralized state of Safavid dynasty was created and the government's focus on most of affairs led to the economic, cultural and religious growth and increased national unity among Iranians.

The Safavid was the first concentrated and powerful dynasty that after Islam nearly 240 years ruled on the vast territory of Iran. In addition, for the first time, they determined borders of Iran that led to development of foreign relations with Europeans which its impact is at the best visible and measurable in miniature. Political developments in Iran in the Safavid era coincided with major developments in Europe. Along with 240 years of the Safavid period, great personalities like Bacon, Shakespeare, Galileo, Kepler, Hayz, Descartes, Spinoza, Locke, Montsko, Voltaire, Rousseau and so on were born in Europe. The 54 years after the Safavid, America issued its Declaration of Independence and 67 years after that the French Revolution took place. Any progress in the overall level needs to a transformational leadership and an efficient administrative system, which progresses in the Safavid era do not seem to be an exception.

Part of the evolution in the Safavid painting is because of familiarity with Western culture so that the West culture strongly attracted the Safavid state to itself. For the first time, group of European artists came to Iran and mutually some young people were sent to Italy to learn Western painting. For this reason, in the middle of the governance Safavid Shah Abbas, we are faced with two methods of painting: evolution of the traditional method and the painting method called "European-oriented." Impact of Western painting on Iranian painting was not only in images, pictures, observing the exponential dimension, shading, etc. but also some changes in the means of painting emerged. Using oil paint, canvas and special colors of Western painting are some of these changes. Among painters who continue the traditional way, we can refer to Muhammadi, Agha Reza, Reza Abbasi which is probably the same Sir Reza.

Among the most worthy properties is the evolution of Kamal al-Din Behzad's attitudes to the natural state of human being. They simply by using their strong hands and their skillful pencils created art works that no similar instance of them there was before in Iranian paintings. Attention of Reza Abbasi to the man is more than that to the space around him. His emphasis on this point even in human form compared to simple areas he has used in his works is quite clear. From this time onwards, drawing is no longer in service for book layout and it became independent. This point in the works of artists who had gone to Europe is more obvious. The most famous artist among these artists is Muhammad Zaman that his paintings are entirely based on Western painting so that in some cases his paintings have no relationship with the Iranian-Islamic culture. However, in some other cases he has taken into consideration the cultural aspects of his time, including the images that were based on Persian literature. The element that during the past centuries is observed in Iranian painting, i.e., the use of decorative aspects in painting like precision in detail, elegance and fine works, can also be seen in works of Muhammad Zaman. Even the trees and the flowers existing on the background of his paintings can be seen as motifs in the margins of books or in concurrent and past paintings to him. Nevertheless, there are differences between the works of Muhammad Zaman and others that is a tendency to the naturalistic principles, e.g., dimension viewing, shading, etc. Hence, in works of Muhammad Zaman neither the richness of the transparent colors of Behzad's works nor the elegance and vivacity of Abbasi's calligraphy can be seen.

Safavid miniature like other branches of art was affected from the relationship with Europeans art the signs of the developments in these communications and interactions can be seen in other branches of the art. Direct contact with the Europeans who came to Iran, imported works of art from Europe and European artists who were living in Iran all led to the formation of a new style in Persian painting. Moreover, internal changes in the miniature such as independence of writing from realism accelerated the process of change in Iranian painting. In fact, changes in the Safavid miniature are two parallel processes: an internal change that followed by the lag and natural trend of miniature in Iran and the other was a rapid and revolutionary evolution in due to the influence of European art. Among these, the change that continued and gradually became widespread was the second one (Karimiyan and Jayez, 2008).

The cultural impact of influence of Iran except on neighboring countries was not great on other states, like the Europeans compared to the Mughal Empire in India or

Ming Dynasty in China. Nevertheless, Iranian's trade in the field of art through images of travelogues books of European sent to Europe and had the greatest impact on the culture in the 11/17 centuries in Europe. The official language of the Safavid state was Persian. Shah Abbas in his ruling chose the Persian language as the common language throughout the country. Safavids for better handling of Iran chose the Persian language as the as the first language of the country and all historical books in the Safavid era written in Persian. For example, we can refer to the writing of poetries on the painting and manuscripts.

Iran in the Safavid era affected even his rival, i.e., Ottoman. The wars between Iran and Ottoman that began from the late of 10/16 centuries and lasted until 10/17 centuries, not only diminished the cultural ties in the land, but also strengthened them. Among examples of these ties, we can refer to the transfer of valuable books from Iran to Ottoman either through war or through purchasing prescriptions as well as transfer of Iranian artists to Ottoman. Ottoman governors collected these books because of either their interest to books or in order to give them to kings as precious gifts. Most of the books kept in the Palace Museum of Top Qapi (Chanman and Zarin, 2007).

Safavid art from the middle of centuries 10-16 onward had significant influence on its neighbors. Mughal Empire and Indians kings of Deccan greatly benefited from the architecture, calligraphy and painting of the Safavid period and a large number of Iranian artists migrated to India, which had significant influence on Indian art (Soucek *et al.*, 2008).

In the early eleventh century, in the reign of first Shah Abbas, the capital was moved from Qazvin to Isfahan and artists of Qazvin and other major cities migrated to Isfahan and Isfahan became the center of artistic activities. Painting workshops prosper. Painting workshops prospered and in addition to books painting, wall printings were used to decorate the palaces and buildings.

In the next years due to the support of traders and artisans, the development of handicrafts and construction of new houses in new capitals, especially in Isfahan, painting takes on a different form and in some cases became part of the architecture. For example, it was used on walls for decoration and in some cases presented as wall paintings, etc. However, to the large extent it went beyond the book layout. Among the most famous monuments of the era are Ali Qapu and Chehel Sotoun in Isfahan.

On the other hand, Richard Ettinghausen argues that changes in the style in Shah Abbas era and its continuity by his successors were not merely signs of stagnation,

reflecting rapid decline of sensitivity and Iran's capabilities in artistic and technical fields. But it seems that consideration of realities of the lives of ordinary people, especially consideration of space and motion, in fact represents the Iranian revolutionary rotation in dealing of Iranians with the outside world. Suddenly the old framework broken and something new appeared, which may be violent and unseemly but represented the world really and not in a conceptual manner of the past (Sivari, 1994).

During the Safavid era, impression was studied theoretically, practically and from the Islamic viewpoint. Dost Mohammad, a calligrapher and painter in the Shah Tahmasp era, Sadeqi Beig Afshar, a painter and poet in the Shah Abbas era and Qazi Monshi Ahmad Qomi, a historian in the Shah Abbas era considered the writings existing in the paintings equal to calligraphies. They also stated that the art has no religious prohibition because for example, Imam Ali (AS) was himself a painter and a calligrapher. The assumption did not added to the volume of productions of paintings in this period but justified the previous works and added to the volume of impressions in the religious and mystical works of poets such as Nezami, Jami, etc.

Supporters of art including the kings and the nobility class were very effective in growth of art in the Safavi era. Although, this supports were in some cases implicit but the royal court was very impressive in tasting art and directing the arts. King was one of the main financial and governmental powers in absorption of the major artists to the court. On the other hand, the interconnections of artists were established through the master-apprentice system or through family ties, which led to the train of educated artists in the royal court (Soucek *et al.*, 2008).

The artistic and cultural achievements of the Timurid and Turkmen eras were employed by Safavid dynasty, especially by Shah Ismail. He was a man who loved art and literature and he did great respect for artists. During the war with the Ottoman Turks, Shah Ismail concealed the painter Behzad and the calligrapher Shah Mahmoud in a cave to keep them safe, which shows his great interest to art. Shah Ismail gathered artists of two art schools of Herat and Tabriz in his court and the combined experiences of these artists together led to the creation masterpieces of painting and book layout in Shah Tahmasp era. Some of these masterpieces included version of Shahnameh, famous Khamse of Tahmasbi and Timurid Zafarnameh.

Shah Ismail ordered to begin Tahmasb's Shahnama and some of the paintings and decorations were in his time. The work on Nezami's Khamse that at present is being kept in the library of Topkapi in Istanbul began

Tabriz when Aq Qoyunlu was ruling and when the ruling of Shah Ismail II new graphics added to it. After Shah Ismail, Shah Tahmasp launched workshops of book making in Tabriz which caused major challenges among artists in making valuable books. Many works of calligraphy and painting by Tahmasp in the museums are left, which show the interest Safavid kings to the literature and art. Qazi Monshi Ahmad Qomi in the book of Golestan Honar refers to the impression and calligraphy art of Tahmasp King. In addition, a copy of Arefi's ball and Polo is available at the public library of Saint Petersburg which is written by Shah Tahmasp himself. The miniature piece existing in the famous scrapbook of Bahram Mirza which is kept in the library of Topkapi of Turkey, is the work art created by Shah Tahmasp. Among his other major works are Shahnameh and Tahmasb's Khamse. He donated copy of Shahnameh that originally contained 258 images, to the Ottoman Sultan Selim II. Tahmasb's version was being prepared during the years 946-950 which have 14 exquisite paintings and is maintained today in the British Library. Zafarnameh Timurid has 24 miniatures which are hold in the Golestan Palace. Among these miniatures are the famous manuscripts in the library of Ibrahim Mirza Haftrang Orang Jami which was prepared in Mashhad and today it is maintained in Washington Ferreira Gallery.

After Shah Tahmasp, the Shah Ismail II came to the throne, but he had little interest in art and therefore he failed to support artists. For several years, the situation of Safavid state was restless until Shah Abbas I came to the throne. His gathered artists who were working in workshop of Shah Ismail II in Isfahan and they engaged in calligraphy of books such as Shahnameh as well as restoration of the previous copies of books. His library was quite exquisite and full of valuable books. He dedicated some of these books to the threshold of Sheikh Safi in Ardabil as well as some of them to the shrine of Imam Reza in Mashhad. Many of these are now available in library of Astan Quds Razavi. In the era of Shah Abbas, painters in addition to book making did also works including drawing single faces and calligraphic writing in single pages. Among the centers that considered manuscripts were Khorasan and Shiraz. The most important work developed in his time Ferdowsi's Shahnameh, which in currently hold in the Chester Beatty Library.

After death of Shah Abbas, his descendants rise to throne and book making and book layout declined. Among the drawings that appeared in the Safavid period were the arabesque drawing of a snake that in addition to the fine network was composed of motifs similar to woven meshes which most of them occupied part of periphery

and the middle space. Writing poems on the margins had been common which was one of the special features of the Safavid period. In Safavid drawings, the tendency to create wonderful elegance and complexity can be seen. The dominant colors used in illuminated manuscripts were lapis and golden and colors green, yellow and orange were further used in Timurid period. The combinatory colors were became more mature.

In Safavid era, individuality and uniqueness of artwork grew more and the anonymous feature which was common in works of ago painters, set aside so that in copies of the books, name of painters and calligraphers were recorded. Among the works on Safavid period with this feature is Timurid Zafarnamah with the following properties, page size: 24×2.37 cm², paper type: Samarqandi, calligraphy: Nastaligh by writings of Sultan Mahmoud Noor, date: 935 BC, illumination: by Mir Azod and painter: Behzad (Rahnavard, 2008).

This different approach not only improved the artist's feelings about capabilities of his own style but also led to the creation of a new trend among them which consider the artistic identity as an important part of an artwork. In middle of Safavid dynasty, prominent art trainers of Safavid emerged in different parts of the capital and nobles, merchants and agents transacted artworks and their support of the art changed the type and content of intellectual painting and drawing.

CONCLUSION

Changes in the art of book layout in the Safavid era are closely related to the religious, cultural and political situations. What contribute to the artistic growth and excellence of the communications and receptions of Iranians is the ready bed of the community. The existence of artistic workshops led to the training of adroit artists that were helpful in the transfer of useful experiences to apprentices of the workshops which led to creation of unique artistic products in the field of the book layout. The support of kings of the art led to the support of different groups of society of the art and the support of

the arts by people in addition to prosperity of the art product when lacking the support of kings helps to the protection of the artistic heritage by the people. On the other hand, the existence of national unity and similarity of the religion led to the creation of artistic arts as well as promotion of artistic concepts which further helped to the promotion of the book layout. Relationships with Europeans had a profound impact on the art of book layout and helped to the creation of paintings independent of the text and books. On being influenced by Art Europe, omanism further grew and along with arts workshops loss prosperity. Finally, it is noteworthy that all the studied factors leads to the growth and decline of the book layout art during the Safavid era and the bases of the decline of the book layout art was poured for the next period in Iran.

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