Art in Iran and central Asia in Temürids' Era

As in the architecture part, Temürid style in constructing buildings and elegant complexes became a prevailing and everlasting style, in this era the methods and designs of ornamental arts remained as a style and standard for the subsequent generation in Iran, India and Turkey. Not only the style, technique and composition in ornamental artistic works of Temür continued in the subsequent eras, but a number of artistic masterpieces of Temür era was perceived and collected by the experts. The style of ornamental arts of Temürids can be seen in different types of ornamental works. But the most prominent of them is employing ornamental works in printing precious books and gilding them, which nowadays most of the illustrative copies remained from that era proves this claim. Gallery which its history can be attributed to workshop and library Rashidoddin in Tabriz- established the early years of 14th century. This gallery was a place for printing illustrative handwritten books and a centre in which pictures, compositions and themes were made and sent to other workshops. The books created in these workshops were of the best gilding, calligraphy, book- binding, painting and form which in fact were used as a means for advertising the political sovereign of the ruling system.
The First Period of the Temürids:

The most prominent reason on Temür’s support of ornamental arts and techniques is the conformity of tools and variety of arts which has been used in Ahmad Yasivi’s tomb in Turkistan by his direct command. In fact, there is no record of illustrated manuscripts, created in Temür’s era, however other things and art which can be seen in this tomb, are attributed to Temür’s era and his support.

Harmony in dimensions and applying the materials with the best quality, as well as showing the best skills in various artistic subjects which are applied in this tomb along with its perfect architecture, indicate that all these have been done under the direct supervision and support of Temür.

Its door is contained of two doors with two doorposts, one of which exists at the pre-arch of the original entrance of the tomb and the other one at the entrance of the tomb. Every doorpost of these doors is divided into three parts; each part contains a separate frame, in that the large frame is at the middle of two small frames.

On the upper frame, there are some lines like an inscription (epigraph), and the lower frame includes a medallion with geometric draft, but the magnificent carving of each doorpost, is done in the middle frame. The two doorposts installed on the original entrance, are decorated delicately and beautifully with
real-like Eslimi designs, including net-like as well as palm-like drafts in crescent-like frames.

The triangular parts of the doorposts are filled with plant like gorgeous natural drafts in a net-like form, including flowers and numerous leaves. The space among the parts and the margins of each doorpost is decorated with designs including octahedron stars between which is filled with Eslimi pictures. Most of the plans and drafts used in these doors are the developed drafts before this era which were used in Iran and central Asia in woodworks. The remained inlaid works on wood from the tomb of grandson of the great master of the Sufi, namely Sheikh Safioddin Bokhari in the midst of the 4th century (A.D.) and also the skillfully carvings made on wooden Quran-rack related to 1359 A.D indicates this claim. But the harmony of heterogeneous elements in the composition of one plan is considered as the advances of this technique and industry in Temur’s era. Every doorpost of these doors contains one metallic door-knocker from gold or silver and a manuscript of poems from Gulestan Sa’di.

Six brazen oil – burning lamp, obtained from the tomb of Ahmad Yasvi, are made devoted under the command and support of Temür. The importance of these lamps which have pillars, is laid in their big size to the extent that the
height of each of them reaches to 90 centimeters and on which; the name of Temūr is carved.

The name of Sultan Hossein Baysonqor (Temūr’s grandson) and one of the great calligraphers and celebrated supports of the Book are written in the margin of some of the pages of this Quran; some experts believe that this was done by him.

A stone Quran –rack sized at 230 * 200 centimeters which formerly was at the large altar and dome of Bibi Khanum mosque, and today it is at the yard, was made under the Oloq-Beik (Temūr’s grandson) in order to be suitable place for putting and preserving this precious Quran.

According to the claims of travelers who had viewed this region during Temūr’s era and also on the basis of eulogist of his family and friends of that era on the walls of Temūr’s places, but there is no traces of these nowadays, and only some pictures of them can found in illustrated books of that era. In the western parts of Iran, the precious written manuscripts were made for the artists of Jalayerians’ court. The ornamental style and method of these, were the main resource for producing precious and illustrated manuscripts in the Alexander Sultan era (Temūr’s grandson) -1384-1415 A.D.- who was the ruler of Shiraz in 1409 A.D.
Eighteen precious illustrated manuscripts during 1410 up to 1413 A.D. have been created under the command of Alexander Sultan. The oldest existed manuscripts of illustrated books of northern east of Iran and Mesopotamia, are those manuscripts which are made for Shahrokh, the son of Temûr (who related from 1405 up to 1445 A.D.).

The subject of the most of these manuscripts is related to history which indicates the interest of the rulers of that era to make the name of their authority and dynasty everlasting in the history. The first book of these types of manuscripts is entitled as “Generalities of history “created in 1415 and 1416 A.D.

The book contains a revised collection of a translation of Tabarvian ‘s history about the prophet’s life , comprehensive history compiled Rashideddin, letter of conquest about Temûr’s life compiled by the royal historian and eulogist, Sharafeeddin along with an addendum compiled by Hafez Abrú about Shahrokh. The short lived historic style (a method to produce illustrated documents throughout Shahrokh/s era) was soon replaced with the classic Iranian style of painting wide spread throughout the region. This particular style was prevalence to prince Baysonghar’s support and over sight of the artisans who organized this style. One of the illustrated copies of this period is a king’s letter commissioned by Baysanghor, containing all the characteristics of this
style, yet slightly different from other copies. This particular illustrated copy has the 38*26 dimensions, containing 21 miniatures where some cover the whole page, along with a 2-paged preface. Baysanghor’s fascination with epic poetry had him commission a revised and edited version of Ferdowsi’s king’s letter with a new introduction written on it.

Unfortunately the original version is no longer available. The calligraphy of this book was done by one most prominent calligraphers of the period, Mirza Ja’far. The golden background of most pages displays generous, utterly opulent decorations.

Once the art school of Harat was established, it became the hub for this particular style. The best example of this style is the one transcribed for prince Muhammad Jookie, son of Shahrokh. It contains 33 full miniature mostly based on fictional topics. Where Baysanghor’s kings - letter illustrations are mostly based on the king’s wishes and desires. But this king’s letter depicting Tahmineh entering Rostam’s bedroom displays harmony and balance especially in blending bright enamel-like colors, which is an imitation of the school of Harat. But in other portraits, especially in the large scenes of fight, the small characters are set in the portraits in such a way that are influenced and overwhelmed by the main and big characters of the portrait. In some of the miniatures, the fortresses and strongholds are located continuously, and the
natural sceneries, including spongy like stone sceneries, illustrate an imaginary and fanciful world in the eyes of the viewer. This copy of Shahnameh had a great importance in the court of Temurids of India, since it was sealed by the seal of Gurkanids emperors, from Baber to Aurangzeb, and the hand-written note of Shah Jahan along with two painting were attached to it. The miniatures of this illustrated Shahnameh – which is an exhibition of skills and techniques of Temurids description and painting in the first half of the 15th century. In fact lack the glittering and shinning of the paintings pertaining to its former era, i.e. Baysonqor era, as it is free from the prominence and fascination of its subsequent era miniatures, namely the era of Behzad.
The Last Period of Temürids:

The history of creating a book in Harat was unknown till now. In 1458 A.D. Jahanshah – the king of Torkman dynasty- conquered Harat and illustrated books with artists and industrial workers was sent to east. Hossein Bayghara was not a famous prince. After he saw a battle between Torkmen in the west and Temürs prince in east, he got out from his place in Khrazm and conquered Harat without any resistance in the spring of 1469 A.D. he established a glorious court and during 36 years he continued artistic activities. Bayghara 's court had many attraction for scientists, poets, artists such as a great poet Jami and a popular diplomat Ashir Navaii.

The first illustrated book was Zafarnameh by Shir Ali in 1467-1468. This book has six miniature paintings in two pages and the face of Temür repeated in many pages. In these pictures, some scene of Temür’s reign was seen.

There is a probability that Hossein Bayghara wanted to show his relationship and heredity with Temür.

Undoubtedly we can say, this version was finished before the victory of Hossein Bayghara in the battle with Torkish and establishment of Harat. This book found a respect in Temürids' court in Akbar’s kingdom-Jahangir and Shah Jahan in India.

Most of the miniatures in this book were attributed to a famous Iranian painter, Behzad; but the paintings didn’t have any signature. The paintings that Behzad provided for Bayghara in Tanznameh are a good example of methods and style of Behzad’s painting. Jahangir had a good information and experience to recognition of miniature of famous painters. He said that eight paintings of this version related to Behzad.

One of miniature in this version with the title of “Building of Samarghand mosque “proceeded to every day topics and activities. Behzad’s painting have a
some specifications such as representation of various characteristics with actual shape and type, special attention to different expressions of statues and drawing. Also he designs real situation by using bright, shining and pellucid colors. In the period of Hossein Bayghara and by his support, all arts related to decorating books were extended.

One of the wonderful and excellent samples is the Mathnavi of Jalaloddin-Roomi in 1483 A.D. by Bayghara in Harat. On the cover there is a rectangle outline with citron in center and four fichus on the corners. All surfaces adorned with arabesque’s design. The basis is inlaid working and gold blocking. This shape was in 15th century and then the plans and pictures transferred to carpet weaving.

Binding industry with polished cardboard paper, known as under-waxed painting, was an expanding innovation done during the dynasty and scattered vastly during the Safavids Dynasty. Then it was identified as Islamic Alcoholic wax.

Like the front cover, the inner side lining of the cover was decorated with splendidly. These include miniature of delicate leather decoration made on blue paper. The upside, downside and folding covers had special designs showing miniature deer, monkeys, wild ducks, foxes, birds on trees, etc.
covers were decorated with flying ducks and there was an intorted dragon taken from Chinese expert painters.

During the past centuries, most of the tools indicated in Temürids style and related to artistic masterpieces and people's daily lives were damaged or dilapidated; however, one can find traces of such designs in paintings remained. For instance, the picture remained in the introduction to Sa'di’s Bustan in Cairo shows a Sultan Hossein Bayqra's Palace. On the left, a prince is shown on the throne in the bower, below him there is a carpet design with geometric drawings of citron. Before the prince, there is a low table on which one can identify a blue and white china clay pitch and metal one. On the right, there are the maids and servants holding bottles, glasses, and plates taking food everywhere. It should noted here there is no carpet or fabric cloth remained from Temürids and we can just read between the lines through the information we have.

The clay and china stoneware, known as blue and white clays, was highly valued during the 15th century. Most of such works were imitations from china clays. These were designed with specific pictures of the 15th century AD. The Temürids clay works were inferior to China clays as most the blue and white clays produced in this era were solid enameled mud with repeated designs.

Most of the artistic meretricious works in the 15th century AD were produced for Temürids family only. Therefore, one may claim such works as
Temürids productions. A sample for this can be a copy of Nezami's Khamse, which was written due to a Temürid Prince, Abolghasem Yaber. The writing of the book was initiated by Azhar, a famous calligrapher of the time; however, it was finished till his death. A year after Yaber's death and when Harat was ruled by Jahanshah, the copy was given to Khalil Sultan, an Agh-Ghoyunloo king and to his order, Abdorrahim Al-Kharazmi, a calligrapher known as Anissi, continued writing the book. Two painters named Sheykhi and Dervish Mohammed painted the pages. However, before it was finished, Sultan died and the book was left unfinished. Then Sultan Khalil's brother, Sultan Ya'ghub, continued his job, but it wasn't finished as the king died before it was over. Finally the book was given to king Esmael, the founder of Safavid's Dynasty and it was finished then.

Iranian and middle Asian decorative art of the 15th century AD was scattered to other sites by all Temürids artists and craftsmen who followed Temürids style. The properties manifested through Temürids art in Iran and Central Asia in the 15th century AD were taken to Turkey, Muslim residential India, etc. and this way it turned to be an international style. Temürids stylography, especially those which applied botanical sources, highly influenced Ottoman royal court while creating a new independent style of this dynasty in the 16th century AD.¹

¹ Sheila S. Blaire and Jonathan M. Bloom: The Architecture of Iran and Asia Minor during Ilkhanates and Temürids. Translated to Persian by Hashemi Golpaygani, pp 85-107
60) Exterior of a Temple in Aligereh
61) Musician with his musical Instrument
62) Indian doll marking with his dolls
63) Local daucers and musicians (Indian) Like mystical sky
58) Picture of Afghan Man (probably in Kabul) that Playing a music
59) Meeting of Afghan men in an entertainment party