

Turco-Persian Miniature Painting in the Ilkhanid Era: Royal Library-Workshops and Cultural Policies

İlhanlı Döneminde Türk-İran Minyatür Sanatı: Kraliyet Kütüphane-Atölyeleri ve Kültürel Politikalar

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Abstract

The visual culture of the Iranian Plateau has been profoundly shaped by the myriad artistic traditions of its diverse communities, including Persian, Turk, Mongol, Kurd, Turkmen, and Arab influences. During the Ilkhanid period (1256-1353 CE), the consolidation and legitimization of state power in newly acquired territories were closely tied to cultural and scientific endeavors. The evolution of artistic styles in this era was driven by two primary factors: intercultural artistic exchange and the cultural policies instituted by the ruling elites.

Cultural institutions, notably royal libraries and workshops, emerged as pivotal centers for interaction among prominent artists from East and West. These institutions, influenced by their origins in China, adopted distinctive administrative and production practices. Early manuscripts and visual styles produced in these settings exhibit notable influences from Central Asian and Chinese art. The interaction among artists engaged in manuscript illumination and illustration fostered a hybrid miniature painting style, characterized by the synthesis of diverse cultural elements. This intercultural exchange was purposefully orchestrated to align with the state's strategic objectives and policies, demonstrating a conscious integration of diverse artistic styles.

This research aims to enhance our understanding of stylistic developments in Ilkhanid miniature painting through an interdisciplinary approach that incorporates sociological, political, and cultural methodologies. The establishment and evolution of artistic institutions were significantly shaped by governmental policies and the personal preferences of rulers, which in turn influenced artistic production. Artistic directors employed the creative talents of artists in alignment with prevailing cultural policies, ensuring that miniature painting flourished under the patronage of the Ilkhanid court and reflected the court's cultural values and aesthetic preferences.

Keywords: *Ilkhanid Era, Turco-Persian Miniature Painting, Cultural Policies, Royal Library- Workshops, Intercultural Artistic Interactions.*

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Özet

İran Platosu'nun görsel kültürü Türk, Fars, Moğol, Kürt, Türkmen, ve Arap etkileri dahil

olmak üzere çeşitli toplulukların çok sayıda sanatsal geleneğinden derin bir şekilde etkilenmiştir. İlhanlı dönemi (1256-1353 MS) boyunca, yeni ele geçirilen topraklarda devlet gücünün konsolidasyonu ve meşrulaştırılması, kültürel ve bilimsel çabalarla yakından bağlantılıydı. Bu dönemde sanatsal tarzların evrimi, iki temel faktöre dayanmaktaydı; kültürler arası sanatsal değişim ve yönetici elitler tarafından uygulanan kültürel politikalar.

Kültürel kurumlar, özellikle kraliyet kütüphaneleri ve atölyeleri, Doğu ve Batı'dan gelen mümtaz sanatçılar arasındaki etkileşim için merkezî noktalar olarak ortaya çıktı. Çin'deki kökenlerinden etkilenen bu kurumlar, kendilerine özgü idari ve üretim uygulamalarını benimsemişlerdir. Bu ortamlarda üretilen erken dönem yazma nüshalar ve görsel tarzlar, Orta Asya ve Çin sanatından önemli etkiler sergilemekteydi. Tezhip ve illüstrasyonla uğraşan sanatçılar arasındaki etkileşim, farklı kültürel unsurların senteziyle karakterize edilen melez bir minyatür resim tarzını teşvik etti. Bu kültürler arası değişim tesadüfi olmaktan ziyade devletin stratejik hedefleri ve politikalarıyla uyumluydu ve sanatsal tarzların bilinçli entegrasyonunu yansıtmaktaydı.

Bu araştırma, sosyolojik, politik ve kültürel yöntemleri içeren disiplinlerarası bir yaklaşım benimseyerek, İlhanlı minyatürü stilistik gelişmelerini daha iyi anlamamızı amaçlamaktadır. Sanatsal kurumların kuruluşu ve gelişimi, hükümet politikaları ve yöneticilerin kişisel tercihleri tarafından önemli ölçüde şekillendirilmiş ve bu da sanatsal üretimi etkilemiştir. Sanat yöneticileri, sanatçıların yaratıcı yeteneklerini hakim olan kültür politikalarıyla uyumlu bir şekilde kullanarak minyatür sanatının İlhanlı sarayının himayesi altında gelişmesini ve sarayın kültürel değerlerini ve estetik tercihlerini yansıtmalarını sağlamıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İlhanlı Dönemi, Türk-İran Minyatür Sanatı, Kültürel Politikalar, Kraliyet Kütüphanesi- Atölyeleri, Kültürlerarası Sanatsal Etkileşimler.

INTRODUCTION

This study explores the cultural exchanges among diverse ethnic groups, including Turks, Persians, Arabs, Armenians, and Greeks, on the Iranian Plateau as crucial factors in the development and transformation of Miniature Painting styles in the region. These communities, each possessing distinct visual traditions and artistic expressions, contributed to the formation of a shared artistic vocabulary that evolved through cross-cultural interactions. By analyzing the mechanisms of artistic transmission, adaptation, and synthesis across different geographical contexts, this research seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the formation of Miniature Painting identity on the Iranian Plateau.

Miniature Painting, as a distinctive artistic tradition within Islamic art, underwent significant transformations due to political shifts, trade networks, and artistic patronage (Grube, 1968: 50; Blair & Bloom, 1996: 1-3). The mobility of artists, along with the circulation of illustrated manuscripts, played a vital role in shaping regional schools of Miniature Painting, leading to a dynamic exchange of styles and techniques (Brend, 1991: 127). This study, therefore, investigates how multi-ethnic interactions and cultural policies influenced the stylistic evolution of Miniature Painting from the medieval period onward.

Research Objectives

The primary objectives of this study are as follows:

To analyze the complex interplay of cultural, social, and political factors that shaped the stylistic development of Miniature Painting on the Iranian Plateau.

To examine the role of cultural policies, royal patronage, and artistic migration in influencing the evolution of Miniature Painting.

A crucial moment in the transformation of Miniature Painting traditions was the Mongol conquests in the 13th century, which initiated a profound shift in the visual arts of the Iranian Plateau. The Mongols, by incorporating Persian, Chinese, and Central Asian artistic elements, redefined the stylistic trajectory of Miniature Painting (Kamola, 2019: 8). Following their conquests, the Mongols relocated prominent artists, craftsmen, and artisans from captured cities to their imperial courts, where they were integrated into royal workshops (Roxburgh, 2001: 12- 15).

This forced migration of artistic talent led to a synthesis of diverse influences within Ilkhanid court workshops, where Persian artistic traditions merged with Chinese landscape painting, Central Asian motifs, and Byzantine iconographic elements (Hattstein & Delius, 2010: 348-352). As a result, the Iranian Plateau became a cultural crossroads, fostering a unique artistic identity that later influenced subsequent dynasties such as the Timurids and Safavids. This study, by tracing these artistic movements and their adaptations, highlights the multifaceted nature of cultural exchange in the evolution of Miniature Painting.

Cultural Diversity and Artistic Exchanges in the Ilkhanid Period

The Mongol successors, ruling over an expansive empire, encountered a variety of religions and cultures, which profoundly shaped the artistic expressions of the period (Brook, 2010: 143). This cultural diversity influenced visual aesthetics and encompassed historical, economic, and social aspects of artistic and literary production. The Ilkhanids' ability to govern a multi-ethnic society—characterized by a diversity of tastes, prefer-

ences, ideas, and values— depended on their capacity to align cultural policies with the priorities and expectations of both the ruling elite and local traditions. Cultural strategies were integral to structuring leadership and shaping the ideological and administrative framework of the Ilkhanid state (Lentz & Lowry, 1989: 56).

Artistic interactions between Iran and its surrounding regions, particularly Central Asia and China, played a pivotal role in the formation of a hybrid visual style. The recruitment of artists from Central Asia and China into Ilkhanid manuscripts and miniature workshops resulted in an unprecedented synthesis of Persian, Mongol, and Chinese artistic elements. This fusion was most evident in the royal workshops, where Iranian and foreign artists engaged in an exchange of ideas, techniques, and visual motifs. However, this cultural exchange between the Ilkhanids and China remained predominantly unidirectional: while Iranian artists left little impact on Yuan visual culture, Middle Eastern artists working within the Yuan Empire were evaluated based on their proficiency in Central Asian and Chinese artistic techniques (Brook, 2010: 145).

The political upheavals following the Mongol invasion had a profound effect on cultural production, particularly through the migration of artists. As Mongol rule expanded across the Iranian Plateau, large numbers of artists and craftsmen from the eastern regions migrated westward, settling in Iraq, Syria, and Anatolia. This migration facilitated the transmission of artistic knowledge and techniques, expanding miniature painting traditions in these regions. Artistic movements emerging in western Iran during this period reflect these influences, with notable innovations in design, coloring, and compositional techniques, as demonstrated in the works of Aḥmad Mūsā, one of the most prominent artists of the era.

Simultaneously, Mongol interactions with China facilitated the influx of artistic currents from the East into the Iranian Plateau, gradually replacing previously dominant styles. These exchanges extended beyond mere artistic aesthetics; they encompassed broader cultural and social dynamics that shaped Ilkhanid identity. The movement of artistic styles between the East and the West was not merely incidental but was deliberately aligned with the strategic objectives of political and state officials. Artistic developments did not emerge in isolation, nor were they solely driven by the artistic community; rather, they were shaped by the policies and ambitions of the ruling authorities, who sought to reinforce dynastic legitimacy through cultural integration (Komaroff & Carboni, 2002: 35-45).

Political Patronage and Institutionalization of Art in the Ilkhanid Empire

The Ilkhanid Empire's extensive connections with Central Asia and China expanded Iran's artistic horizons and intertwined Middle Eastern artistic sensibilities with Far Eastern traditions. As a result, a unique visual language emerged, characterized by the fusion of Chinese, Mongol, and Persian elements, which profoundly influenced the miniature painting traditions of Iran (Soucek, 1999: 190). Additionally, the Ilkhanids' cultural exchanges with Iraq and Mesopotamia—particularly in the field of calligraphy—facilitated the penetration of Baghdad school traditions into Iranian artistic practices, significantly impacting Iranian calligraphers and manuscript illuminators.

The interactions between the Ilkhanids and the Byzantine world, mediated through diplomatic missions, Christian envoys, and foreign merchants, introduced Ilkhanid painters to Medieval European and Byzantine artistic styles. Additionally, the Silk Road served

as a conduit for the constant introduction of new artistic influences from Central Asia, enriching Persian visual culture. The exchange of imperial gifts between the Yuan emperors and Iranian rulers further facilitated the transmission of Chinese artistic traditions into the Turco-Iranian visual lexicon, leading to the incorporation of Chinese decorative motifs and compositional structures into Persian manuscript illustration (Berlekamp & Wang, 2015: 68–70).

Elements derived from Central Asian, Chinese, and Uyghur artistic traditions became permanent features in Iranian miniature painting, particularly within the court-sponsored workshops of the Ilkhanids. The influence of these artistic exchanges is evident in the development of Maragha Library's visual culture, which maintained close ties with the Yuan royal library. The establishment of royal libraries, painting ateliers, and artistic institutions was not merely an effort to legitimize Ilkhanid rule but also reflected a deliberate emulation of Chinese imperial artistic models, as seen in the administrative structure of these institutions.

Genghis Khan's policies on cultural preservation and education in northern China served as an influential precedent for the Ilkhanids. He implemented a program to preserve cultural heritage, inspired by the Chinese educational system, and established the Imperial Guard as both a school and a training ground for the ruling elite (Morgan, 2001: 109). Moreover, Uyghur scholars played a crucial role in the transmission of literacy and cultural knowledge, teaching the Mongols script and administrative techniques (Lamb, 2010: 60). While Yuan cultural institutions retained elements of earlier traditions, their objective was not merely to preserve Chinese culture but to integrate and manipulate multiple artistic traditions to serve Mongol interests. As a result, the management of cultural affairs in the Ilkhanid court emerged as a key aspect of governance, directly shaping the administration of artistic workshops and the visual narratives produced under Mongol rule.

The conceptualization of state-sponsored artistic institutions during the Ilkhanid era was heavily influenced by Chinese administrative models, yet the artistic output of these institutions was shaped by a broader network of Central Asian and Middle Eastern visual traditions. The Ilkhanids, by integrating Mongol, Persian, Chinese, and Byzantine artistic elements, created a hybrid visual culture that redefined manuscript illumination and courtly art in the Persianate world.

The Establishment of Libraries and Cultural Institutions under the Ilkhanids

The Ilkhanid period (1256–1335 CE) was marked by significant advancements in scientific, literary, and artistic scholarship, facilitated by the establishment of major libraries and cultural institutions. Among these, the Maragheh Library (circa 1279 CE), the Dar al-Mushaf of Shanb Ghazan (1298–1303 CE), and the Library and Dar al-Mushaf of Rab'-e Rashidi (1303–1308 CE) played a crucial role in the preservation, production, and dissemination of knowledge (Scerrato & Grube, 1997: 18; Saliba, 1987: 116). These institutions functioned not only as repositories of manuscripts but also as intellectual hubs where translation, authorship, and transcription were actively pursued.

The concept of libraries in the Ilkhanid era extended beyond mere book collections; they served as multifunctional centers where scholars engaged in scientific research, manuscript production, and literary adaptation. Recognizing the power of knowledge in consolidating political and cultural legitimacy, the Ilkhanid rulers patronized the creation

of state-sponsored scholarly institutions, fostering an environment where intellectual exchange thrived (Komaroff & Carboni, 2002: 36). These cultural policies were further reflected in the formation of royal library-workshops, where artistic, literary, and historiographical traditions were institutionalized.

Royal Library-Workshops: Socio-Political and Cultural Factors

The development of royal library-workshops under the Ilkhanids was shaped by three interrelated factors: the transition from a nomadic lifestyle to urbanization, the strategic use of cultural production for political power, and the role of art in consolidating political legitimacy. These factors contributed to the flourishing of artistic patronage and manuscript production, positioning the Ilkhanid courts as major cultural and intellectual hubs in the medieval Islamic world (Carboni, 2020: 120; Roxburgh, 2005: 55). The gradual transformation of the Ilkhanids from a nomadic polity to a settled empire played a key role in the establishment of royal artistic and literary institutions. Originating from Mongol steppe traditions, the Ilkhanids initially adhered to a pastoral and mobile lifestyle. However, as their dominion expanded over Iran, Mesopotamia, and Central Asia, they increasingly embraced urban life and centralized governance (Kamola, 2019: 75; Morgan, 2017: 95). This transition led to the foundation of permanent royal courts, which became administrative and cultural centers where luxurious manuscripts, scientific treatises, and illustrated works were produced for both aesthetic and ideological purposes (Blair & Bloom, 1996: 5). Among the most renowned Ilkhanid manuscripts was the *Jami' al-Tawarikh* (Compendium of Chronicles) by Rashid al-Din, produced under royal patronage and illustrating the dynasty's commitment to scholarship and visual historiography (Hillenbrand, 1999: 201). These workshops institutionalized artistic collaboration between artisans, calligraphers, and painters, ensuring that manuscript production aligned with courtly aesthetics and political narratives.

Beyond artistic aspirations, the Ilkhanids recognized the strategic role of culture and art in political discourse. Unlike their predecessors, they actively recruited artists, intellectuals, and scribes from diverse regions, offering royal patronage as a means of consolidating their rule. This multicultural artistic environment not only enhanced the grandeur of Ilkhanid courts but also demonstrated their governance capabilities through artistic sophistication (Komaroff, 1992: 25). Ilkhanid cultural policies emphasized art as a vehicle for political messaging. Illustrated manuscripts, architectural commissions, and monumental inscriptions were produced not only for aesthetic purposes but also as political instruments that reinforced Ilkhanid supremacy and demonstrated their ability to assimilate Persianate, Islamic, and Mongol traditions into a unified imperial identity (O'Kane, 2003: 51-55). This process transformed art from a decorative medium into a means of dynastic legitimization, strengthening the Ilkhanid dynasty's authority among its diverse subjects.

The Ilkhanids faced a significant challenge in governing a vast and ethnically diverse empire, composed of Persians, Arabs, Turks, Armenians, and Chinese craftsmen. In response, they strategically utilized artistic production to create a shared cultural identity, bridging the religious and national paradigms of different communities. By integrating Islamic motifs, Persian historiographical traditions, and Mongol imperial symbolism, Ilkhanid artistic policies sought to foster a sense of unity and imperial grandeur (Canby, 1999: 80). During this period, art functioned as a bridge between different cultures, facilitating cultural integration and imperial propaganda. For instance, royal genealogies depicted in illuminated manuscripts connected the Ilkhanids to Mongol heritage while

simultaneously embedding them within broader Islamic and Persian historical traditions (Roxburgh, 2001: 135). This deliberate fusion of visual cultures not only enhanced the Ilkhanids' acceptance among Persian and Islamic elites but also solidified their claims to sovereignty.

Institutionalization of Miniature and Calligraphy Workshops

The institutionalization of calligraphy and miniature painting in the Ilkhanid court took a definitive shape with the ascension of Ghazan Khan in 1295 CE (Rashid al-Din, 1998: 173). Recognizing the potential of the arts as both a cultural expression and a political instrument, Ghazan Khan implemented structural reforms that centralized manuscript production under court patronage. His personal engagement with artistic and scientific endeavors led to increased financial investment in state-sponsored workshops, thereby transforming artistic production into an organized, hierarchical system (Thackston, 2001: 46; Komaroff & Carboni, 2002: 140).

Between 1296 and 1297 CE, the royal library was reorganized into two specialized sections, each overseen by a master artist. The calligraphy workshop (*kitabatkhaneh*) was dedicated to transcribing and embellishing texts, refining Naskh and Taliq scripts to ensure the stylistic consistency of manuscript production. Meanwhile, the miniature workshop (*nakkashkhaneh*) focused on illustrating manuscripts, integrating Persian, Mongol, and Chinese artistic elements to produce sophisticated narrative compositions (Soucek, 1999: 52). The production of books followed a strict hierarchical structure, managed directly by the royal court, ensuring that commissions adhered to Ilkhanid visual conventions and ideological narratives (Roxburgh, 2005: 85). Unlike earlier periods where manuscript production was often decentralized, the Ilkhanids institutionalized artistic practices, making independent artistic endeavors rare and reinforcing state oversight over cultural production.

Cultural Policies in the Royal Library-Workshops

One of the defining characteristics of Ilkhanid artistic workshops was their multicultural composition, reflecting the dynasty's transregional engagements. The court recruited artists and scribes from diverse cultural backgrounds, resulting in an environment where Persian, Mongol, Chinese, and Arab visual traditions converged (Komarof, 1992: 96-100). Ghazan Khan invited artists from Kashmir, Khitan, and Uyghur regions, many of whom specialized in book production and manuscript illumination (Rashid al-Din, 1998 Vol. 2: 1332). These artists introduced new artistic techniques, particularly in color application, perspective, and figural representation, leading to innovations such as Chinese-inspired cloud motifs, Mongol equestrian scenes, and Persian narrative arrangements. This artistic cross-fertilization laid the groundwork for later Persianate manuscript traditions, influencing the aesthetic conventions of the Timurid and Safavid periods (Blair & Bloom, 2003: 112).

The function of miniature painting and manuscript production extended beyond artistic expression, serving as a political tool for dynastic legitimacy. Royal commissions reflected the Ilkhanid court's engagement with visual culture as a means of consolidating power and projecting authority. Artists based in Rab'-e Rashidi depicted court life, victories, and historical narratives, reinforcing Ilkhanid supremacy through visual storytelling (Canby, 1999: 83). Courtly figures, including the khan and queen, were rendered

in traditional Mongol attire, their clothing and motifs signifying dynastic identity and imperial ideology. The emphasis on manuscript production was closely tied to the shifting religious policies of the Ilkhanid rulers. Before Ghazan Khan's conversion to Islam, illuminated Qurans were not a priority in royal commissions, as evidenced by the absence of surviving Qurans from the reigns of Abaqa Khan and Arghun (Rashid al-Din, 1998, Vol. 2: 1332). However, Ghazan Khan's embrace of Islam prompted the transcription of the first royal Quran in the court library, signaling a broader integration of Islamic visual traditions into Ilkhanid artistic culture.

Scientific manuscripts also gained prominence under Ghazan Khan's patronage, reflecting his interest in disciplines such as medicine and botany. One of the earliest commissioned works was a manuscript of *Manafi' al-Hayawan* by Abdullah Ibn Bakhtishu, produced at Rab'-e Rashidi around 1298 CE (Būdāq Munshi Qazwīnī, 2019: 38-53). This zoological compendium, translated from Arabic to Persian and illustrated at the artistic center of Maragha, exemplifies the fusion of scientific knowledge and artistic representation (Gray 2004: 24). The production of such works underscores the Ilkhanid court's commitment to both intellectual inquiry and artistic innovation, further solidifying its legacy as a major center of cultural synthesis.

The organizational structure and cultural policies of Ilkhanid artistic institutions laid the foundation for later developments in Persianate manuscript traditions. By centralizing artistic production, integrating diverse stylistic elements, and aligning visual culture with political narratives, the Ilkhanids established a model of royal patronage that would influence subsequent dynasties. Their workshops facilitated the creation of some of the most significant illustrated manuscripts of the Islamic world, shaping the trajectory of Persian miniature painting and calligraphy in the centuries that followed (Roxburgh, 2001: 119-130). The merging of Mongol imperial aesthetics with Persian manuscript culture during this period marked a pivotal moment in the history of Islamic art, setting the stage for the golden age of Persian miniature painting under the Timurids and Safavids.

Translation as a Cultural and Intellectual Endeavor

One of the most significant activities in the Ilkhanid libraries and artistic workshops was the translation of literary and scientific works from various languages, including Chinese, Mongolian, Sanskrit, Syriac, and Arabic, into Persian. This translation movement was not merely an academic exercise but was regarded as a means of cross-cultural exchange, facilitating the transmission of scientific, philosophical, and historical knowledge across diverse civilizations (Morgan, 2017: 178-180).

The Ilkhanids placed great value on scientific and historical texts, viewing their translation as a means to connect their rule with the broader intellectual traditions of the Islamic, Central Asian, and Mongol worlds (Hillenbrand, 1999: 412). By gathering books from various regions and preserving them in centralized archives, they ensured the survival of diverse intellectual traditions while also promoting Persian as a language of scientific and literary discourse. Translators played a crucial role in this process, first converting texts into Persian and then collaborating with scribes and illustrators to complete the transcription and embellishment of manuscripts (Roxburgh, 2001: 95).

Among the earliest and most significant translated and transcribed works produced in Ilkhanid institutions were:

Zij-i Ilkhani (1273 CE) – An astronomical treatise compiled under the supervision of Nasir al-Din al-Tusi at the Maragheh Observatory, incorporating Persian, Greek, and Indian astronomical traditions (Kennedy, 1962: 14; Saliba, 1987: 112).

Jami' al-Tawarikh (1332 CE) – A universal history commissioned by Rashid al-Din Hamadani, providing an extensive historical account of the Mongols, Persians, Chinese, and other civilizations, marking a key moment in historical scholarship and manuscript illumination (Blair, 1995: 22; Nasr, 1993, 147).

Olcaytu and the Evolution of Ilkhanid Artistic Patronage

Continuing the cultural policies of the Ilkhanate, Olcaytu actively supported the production of manuscripts, miniatures, and the illumination of lavish Qur'ans. The artistic developments of this period were characterized by the introduction of religious themes into miniatures, marking the first instance of such depictions in Islamic art and manuscript production in the early 14th century. Following his conversion to Islam, Olcaytu sought to integrate religious scholars into the court and educational institutions to promote Islamic studies (al-Qashani, 1967: 97–100; Wassaf, 1967: 304). During this period, manuscript production and illustration methods were systematically theorized and recorded, reflecting a more structured approach to artistic management.

Ibn al-Fuwati provides a crucial account: “The painter worked inside Olcaytu’s tent, illustrating a book for the vizier Rashid al-Din” (Ibn al-Fuwati, 1994: 478). The significance of this observation lies in the artist’s direct presence in the royal yurt, indicating that Olcaytu, alongside Rashid al-Din, personally oversaw the selection of subjects, artistic quality, and execution of illustrations. This highlights the extent of court involvement in manuscript production, reinforcing the notion that artistic endeavors were closely aligned with Ilkhanid political and ideological strategies.

The miniature style developed in the artistic workshops of Rashid al-Din and Olcaytu represented a synthesis of Seljuk and Central Asian painting traditions, an artistic fusion likely facilitated by Uyghur scribes working in the royal court (Pope & Ackerman, 1938: 43). The illustrations in these manuscripts reflect a naturalistic style heavily influenced by Chinese painting traditions, particularly in the depiction of nature, trees, and mountains. The integration of Mongol and East Asian artistic elements is evident in these illustrations, particularly in the representation of horses, which are depicted as small and compact, akin to those seen in Yuan dynasty paintings. Additionally, human figures wear long, draped garments in the Greek style (*Band-e Rumi*), and their movements and interactions with animals are rendered naturalistically, demonstrating a new approach to volume and three-dimensionality through the use of dark and light shading techniques. These stylistic elements gradually diminished toward the late 14th century, marking a shift in the evolution of Ilkhanid manuscript illustration (Brend, 1991, 137).

Artistic Patronage After Olcaytu: Abu Sa'id and the Rise of Illustrated Manuscripts

Following Olcaytu, Abu Sa'id (r. 1316–1335 CE) emerged as a notable patron of art and literature, continuing the Ilkhanid tradition of royal cultural sponsorship. “He was proficient in both Mongolian and Persian script, and Ahmad Rumi was his master calligrapher” (Qumi, 1973: 23). In addition to his role as a literary patron, Abu Sa'id composed Persian poetry, attracting poets and scholars to his court, where they benefited from his

refined literary taste and artistic commissions (Wilber, 1986: 29). His deep engagement with Persian literary traditions led to the selection of Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* as the first major project for book decoration and illustration in the royal library. After a brief decline in artistic production, Minister Ghiyath al-Din Muhammad was entrusted with the management of the Rab'-e Rashidi library. Under his careful supervision, the writing and production of court books, including illustrations for the *Shahnameh*, resumed with renewed vigor. This period also saw the institutionalization of miniature painting as a formalized discipline, leading to the emergence of a new generation of artists, including Aḥmad Mūsā (Būdāq Munshi Qazwīnī, 2019: 38-53).

Aḥmad Mūsā, trained under his father, was recognized as a pioneer in portrait painting, significantly transforming the stylistic trajectory of Persian miniature art. "Aḥmad Mūsā, who was trained by his father, became recognized as a pioneer in portrait painting and invented the pictorial style that is prevalent today" (Thackston, 2001: 345). As the head of the royal painting workshop, Aḥmad Mūsā played a pivotal role in advancing miniature painting in Tabriz and Maragheh. Among the books produced under his direction, often in collaboration with his disciple Shams al-Din, are: *The Tales of Bidpai*, *Abu Sa'id Nama*, *Kalila wa Dimna*, *The History of Chinggis Khan*, *Miraj Nama* (Munshi, 1998: 112-115; Pakbaz, 2004: 64). One of the most significant illustrated works of this period is the Great Mongol *Shahnameh* (commonly known as the Demotte *Shahnameh*), produced under Aḥmad Mūsā's supervision in Tabriz between 1330 and 1335 CE. This masterpiece showcases the influence of Jami' al-Tawarikh miniatures while incorporating characteristics of the Khitan painting style and elements rooted in Central Asian visual traditions (Komaroff & Carboni, 2002: 228).

Jami' al-Tawarikh (Câmi'-i Tevârih) (1308–1317): A Milestone in Ilkhanid Historiography and Artistic Synthesis

The *Jami' al-Tawarikh* (Compendium of Chronicles) was initiated under the encouragement of Ghazan Khan and later completed under the patronage of Oljeitu (Kamola, 2019: 154). This monumental work serves as a compilation of world history, incorporating diverse historical narratives from available sources up to the Mongol period (Ettinghausen, Grabar & Jenkins 2001: 203; Grabar, 2009: 123) (Figures 1–4).

Artistic Elements and Stylistic Trends

The *Jami' al-Tawarikh* miniatures exhibit a distinctive fusion of Persian, Mongol, and Chinese artistic traditions, reflecting the Ilkhanid court's cross-cultural influences. The naturalistic representation of figures, expressive gestures, and individualized facial features enhances the narrative depth, while the incorporation of rolling landscapes, stylized clouds, and tree forms demonstrates a strong Chinese artistic influence. Mongol elements are evident in the depiction of costumes, headgear, and compact, dynamic horses, closely resembling those in Yuan dynasty paintings. At the same time, Persian miniature traditions manifest in the use of intricate decorative motifs, fine detailing, and vibrant color palettes, enriching the manuscript's visual appeal. Architectural representations also play a significant role, with monumental structures carefully rendered to integrate Turco-Iranian architectural elements. This fusion of artistic styles in *Jami' al-Tawarikh* not only defined Ilkhanid manuscript painting but also set a precedent for later Timurid and Safavid miniature traditions, influencing the broader trajectory of Islamic art.



Figure 1. Ghaznavid Sultan Mahmud received a richly decorated honor robe from Caliph al-Qadir in the year 1000. *Jami al-Tawarikh*, 1305–1314, Edinburgh University Library / Bridgeman Art Library.



Figure 2. An assassin (left, wearing a white turban) fatally stabs the Seljuk vizier Nizam al-Mulk in 1092, Topkapı Palace Museum and Library, MS H 1653.



Figure 3. *Jami' al-Tawarikh* miniature depicting Mahmud ibn Sebuktegin's conquest of India, produced in Ilkhanid Tabriz around 1306 CE or c. 1314/15 CE. (Edinburgh University Library, MS Arab 20, fol. 131v), (*Fig. 172*, *The Legacy of Genghis Khan: Courtly Art and Culture in Western Asia, 1256–1353*).



Figure 4. *Jami' al-Tawarikh* was completed in Tabriz around 1331, Iranian National Library, Eastern Branch, Persian Supplementary Section, No. 191, Illustration: 27, Folio.

Manafi' al-Hayawan by Ibn Bakhtishu (1297–1299): A Milestone in Ilkhanid Manuscript Painting

The manuscript *Manafi' al-Hayawan*, containing 94 miniatures, holds significant importance in the history of miniature painting on the Iranian plateau. It represents one of the earliest artistic productions of the Ilkhanid period, demonstrating the dynasty's commitment to fostering cultural and artistic programs that could compete with major civilizations, particularly China. The artistic style of this manuscript reflects the collaboration of miniature artists from diverse cultural backgrounds, resulting in a fusion of Persian, Chinese, and Mongol artistic elements. This synthesis highlights the rich cultural interactions within the Ilkhanid court, reinforcing the dynasty's efforts to integrate visual traditions from various regions under Mongol rule (Scerrato & Grube, 1997: 18).

Authored by Ibn Bakhtishu (c. 1297–1299), *Manafi' al-Hayawan* is recognized as the oldest surviving illustrated Persian manuscript from the Ilkhanid period. The manuscript, currently housed at the Morgan Library & Museum in New York, was illustrated in Margha under the patronage of Ghazan Khan in 1290, reflecting the stylistic influences of Ilkhanid Tabriz or the First Tabriz School (Afshār, 1945: 38–54). This manuscript predates the Rab'ī Reşîdî period, belonging to the late 13th century, and represents an early attempt at formalizing artistic techniques that would later become institutionalized in Ilkhanid artistic workshops (Figures 5–7).

Artistic Features and Stylistic Influences

The illustrations in *Manafi' al-Hayawan* exhibit several defining characteristics that highlight the artistic developments of the Ilkhanid period. The depiction of animals is particularly notable for its vivid coloration and naturalistic rendering, set against detailed landscapes featuring trees and plants. This approach reflects a synthesis of Persian, Mongol, and Chinese artistic elements, demonstrating the influence of cross-cultural exchanges within the Ilkhanid court. The use of contour lines to define figures enhances clarity, while detailed rendering of bodily features adds a sense of realism. Additionally, cross-hatching techniques were employed to create three-dimensional relief effects, and gray tones were applied to deepen shading and add depth to the compositions (Scerrato & Grube, 1997: 228-229). The background compositions in *Manafi' al-Hayawan* predominantly align with the Shiraz School (13th century) within the broader Iranian artistic tradition. The Fars region, known for its strong connection to Sasanian artistic heritage, played a crucial role in preserving Iranian artistic conventions during the Mongol era. The manuscript's stylistic influences can be categorized into four distinct artistic traditions: (1) Traditional Iranian style, which retained Persian pre-Mongol artistic conventions; (2) Mongol style with strong Chinese influences, evident in the fluid brushwork, atmospheric landscapes, and stylized animal representations; (3) A synthesis of Iranian and Mongol-Chinese styles, integrating Persian themes with imported visual techniques; and (4) The assimilation of Chinese influences into Persian manuscript traditions, showcasing the adaptation of East Asian aesthetics within Persian artistic frameworks. These elements collectively highlight the manuscript's role in shaping the visual identity of Ilkhanid book illustration and its lasting influence on later Persian miniature painting traditions.



Figure 5. A folio from *Manafi' al-Hayawan*, depicting Ilkhanid miniatures from 14th-century Iran, Freer Gallery of Art, (commons.wikimedia.org)



Figure 6. *Manafi' al-Hayawan* (The Usefulness of Animals), Persian and Arabic versions, Iran, Maragheh, 1297–1298 or 1299–1300, Morgan Library, MS M.500, fol. 4v, (ica.themorgan.org)



Figure 7. *Manafi' al-Hayawan*, attributed to Ibn Bakhtishu and dated to the 12th century, with explanations written in Persian, Morgan Library, MS M.500, fol. 11r, (Gray, 1961: 20).



Figure 8. *Manafi' al-Hayawan*, Persian and Arabic copies, British Library, Or 2784, (upload.wikimedia.org)

The Great Mongol Shahnama (Demotte Shahnama or Abu Sa'id Bahadur Khan Shahnama) (1330–1336)

The Great Mongol Shahnama, also known as the Demotte Shahnama or the Abu Sa'id Bahadur Khan Shahnama, holds a prominent place in Iranian cultural and political history. Beyond its literary significance, the Shahnama serves as a political treatise, conveying themes of pride, moral values, and legitimacy. The Mongol rulers recognized the Shahnama as a powerful symbol of Iranian cultural heritage, aligning it with their political ambitions to integrate Turco-Mongol authority with Persian traditions. This manuscript, which gained the title Demotte Shahnama due to its early ownership by the dealer Georges Demotte, remains fragmented today, with approximately 60 illustrated folios scattered across various collections (Grabar, 1980: 177-182 ; Kevorkian & Sicre, 1991: 75) (Figures 9–13).

Artistic Influences and Stylistic Characteristics

The illustrations in this manuscript exhibit a high degree of naturalism, particularly in the portrayal of human emotions and expressions, demonstrating a synthesis of Eastern

and Western artistic traditions. The painters drew inspiration from Byzantine, Chinese, and Persian visual aesthetics, integrating elements that elevated the grandeur and ceremonial aspects of courtly scenes. Some courtly depictions are deliberately exaggerated, such as *The Death of Alexander*, housed in the Freer Gallery in Washington, which conveys a heightened sense of drama through its ornate and almost ostentatious composition. The influence of Chinese painting is particularly evident in depictions of nature, where trees, rocks, clouds, and mythical creatures such as dragons and phoenixes reflect stylistic tendencies rooted in Taoist thought. In a manner similar to Chinese landscape paintings, elements such as twisted trees and jagged rocks extend beyond the frame's borders, creating a sense of dynamism and movement. The mountains are rendered in a turbulent and animated manner, with stone slabs arranged to convey depth and fluidity, reinforcing symbolic connections between nature and spiritual philosophy. In addition to Chinese artistic influences, the manuscript also integrates Byzantine artistic conventions, particularly in its depiction of sacred and courtly imagery. The influence of East Asian and Mongol traditions is also evident in the representation of figures, weapons, and clothing, incorporating distinctive Mongol and Chinese stylistic elements. These cross-cultural influences reflect the cosmopolitan nature of the Ilkhanid court, where Persian, Mongol, and Chinese artists collaborated to create a unique pictorial language.

The Pinnacle of Ilkhanid Painting

The Demotte Shahnama represents the culmination of Ilkhanid artistic achievements, marking the mature phase of Persian miniature painting during this period. The manuscript serves as a visual narrative of royal power, mythological grandeur, and cultural synthesis, demonstrating the artistic mastery of the Ilkhanid court workshops. By integrating naturalistic expression, Eastern and Western artistic traditions, and grand courtly imagery, this manuscript embodies the zenith of Ilkhanid pictorial refinement, influencing later Timurid and Safavid artistic traditions.



Figure 9. The Mourning Ceremony for Alexander's Sarcophagus, Demotte Shahnameh, mid-14th century, Freer Gallery of Art, F1938.3, (www.si.edu).



Figure 10. Bahram Gur appoints his brother Narsi as governor of Khorasan. Great Mongol Shahnameh (Demotte), Old Collection, Tabriz, 14th century, estimated c. 1331–1337, Khalili Collection of Islamic Art, MSS 994, (www.khalilicollections.org).



Figure 11. Alexander the Great and the Talking Tree Predicting His Death, Freer Gallery of Art, F1935.23.



Figure 12. Bahram Gur hunting a wolf, Harvard University Art Museums, (www.harvardartmuseums.org).



Figure 13. A manuscript of Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, written in Naskh script, possibly produced in Tabriz in 1330, Louvre Museum, Department of Islamic Antiquities, No. 7095, (www.meisterdrucke.com.tr)

Conclusion

The Ilkhanid period (1256–1353 CE) stands as a pivotal era in the history of Turco-Persian miniature painting, characterized by institutionalized artistic production, royal patronage, and cross-cultural exchanges that shaped the evolution of manuscript illustration. The integration of Persian, Mongol, Chinese, and Central Asian artistic elements in royal workshops fostered the development of a hybrid visual language, demonstrating how political and cultural policies influenced aesthetic choices and artistic techniques. The establishment of state-sponsored libraries and workshops played a crucial role in formalizing manuscript production, elevating miniature painting from an individual artistic pursuit to a systematic and state-controlled enterprise.

The Jami' al-Tawarikh, commissioned under Ghazan Khan and Oljeitu, exemplifies the Ilkhanid commitment to historical documentation and artistic innovation. This manuscript reflects a harmonization of Persian and East Asian visual traditions, particularly in naturalistic depictions and spatial composition. Similarly, the Manafi' al-Hayawan demonstrates the Ilkhanid court's patronage of scientific and literary works, incorporating sophisticated animal illustrations influenced by Mongol and Chinese artistic traditions. Meanwhile, the Great Mongol Shahnama serves as a political and cultural manifesto, visually reinforcing Mongol rule through the reinterpretation of Iranian historical and mythological narratives. The institutionalization of artistic workshops under the Ilkhanids, particularly at Rab'-e Rashidi and Maragha, ensured the preservation and transmission of artistic knowledge, paving the way for future developments in Persian miniature painting. The artistic legacy of this period laid the foundation for Timurid and Safavid manuscript illustration, influencing both visual aesthetics and the structure of royal patronage in later Persianate empires.

Ultimately, Ilkhanid miniature painting exemplifies the intersection of politics, art, and intercultural exchange, where state-directed artistic production was employed as a means of political legitimization and cultural synthesis. By fostering artistic pluralism while maintaining a coherent visual identity, the Ilkhanids shaped a distinct artistic tradition that continued to resonate across Islamic manuscript production for centuries.

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