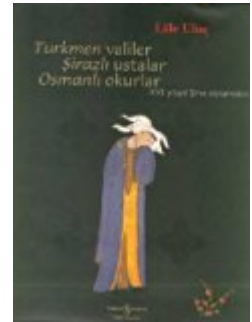


Lâle Uluç. *Turkman Governors, Shiraz Artisans and Ottoman Collectors: Sixteenth-Century Shiraz Manuscripts.* İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası, 2006. Illustrations. 531 pp. n.p., cloth, ISBN 978-975-458-963-4.



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Commissioned by Victor Ostapchuk (University of Toronto)

This book is the first monograph dedicated to the subject of Shiraz manuscript art since Grace Guest's *Shiraz Painting in the Sixteenth Century* was published in 1949. In the following years, surveys of Persian painting and collection catalogues duly paid attention to the commercial production of illustrated manuscripts in Shiraz. More and more, however, research focused on the work of the court ateliers, thus continuing the bias toward their metropolitan orbit that has permeated the attitude of Persian historians and biographers since the fifteenth century. Their restricted information about provincial developments and their lack of interest in what happened outside the court still makes research in Shiraz book art a cumbersome undertaking. Some, like Budaq Qazvini, in *Javahir al-akhbar*, a chronicle to the year 1576, approached Shiraz painting with contempt and ridiculed it as a “family business” of largely inferior quality.

A primary aim of Lâle Uluç's book is to disprove the verdict on quality. Her discussion of crucial moments in sixteenth-century Shiraz

painting is based on eighty-one high-quality manuscripts mostly belonging to the vast collection in the Topkapi Saray Museum. Colleagues will particularly welcome the publication of this largely unknown material, especially because the illustrations closely relate to the arguments of the text. The illustrations are all excellently reproduced in color and often accompanied by additional photographs of the most relevant details. No doubt, in the future not only research but also teaching will heavily rely on this corpus of reproductions.

The title of the book reflects the intentions of the author. This is a book on manuscripts, and not solely on their miniatures, and it aims to analyze Shiraz book art along three vectors: administrative power, artistic creation, and the involvement of collectors outside Iran. As to the first promise, the illustrated manuscript is, indeed, dealt with in its totality as a decorated object. This not only contributes to our knowledge about Shiraz illumination and decoration of bindings but also makes it easier to understand the developments in painting, for instance, the permanent drive for exten-

sion of the picture space and elaboration of the scene. What falls short is the relationship between text and image. It may be legitimate to expect the reader to approach this specialized publication with a general knowledge, at least, of the content of Persian classics and their most popular episodes in order to comprehend the subjects depicted. It is more problematic that the impact of divergent pictorial solutions on the interpretation of a literary subject is only sporadically addressed. The analysis of the visual changes remains restricted to the formal aspect.

Chapter 1 outlines the historical frame, namely, fifteenth- to sixteenth-century history of Shiraz, its importance as a center of long-distance trade, and its legendary connection to the prophet-king Solomon. Here the paucity of data pertaining to the Zu'lqadir rule in Shiraz becomes obvious. Any reasoning as to the role the Turkman governors may have had in the artistic production has to rely on few hints. Uluç reserves her idea on their involvement for chapter 8 on patrons and there she relies on two basic facts. First, the enormous expenses devoted to the luxurious manuscripts produced particularly in the later decades of the sixteenth century lead her to the assumption that there was some financial backing by the administration. Second, the sharp decline in the output of decorated manuscripts as well as in the quality of individual copies coinciding with the end of Zu'lqadir rule and the installation of *ghulam* governors at the end of the century also points to some Zu'lqadir involvement in the production of luxurious manuscripts. Although nothing is known about the mechanics of such support it seems an acceptable hypothesis.

A sketch of artistic context is given in chapter 2 where the author deals with connections to late fifteenth-century Shiraz production of illustrated manuscripts as well as with the influences radiating from the court atelier in Tabriz during the early years of Safavid rule. The following chapters elucidate the development of the decorated book

in Shiraz over several stages using as the main criterion the leaps in expenditure for the embellishment of manuscripts.

The author chooses a new approach to analyze Shiraz manuscripts up to 1565 (chapter 3). She connects artistic innovations with book artists whose names are known through several inscriptions contained in manuscripts. Thus, the illuminator Ruzbihan is used to designate the phase at the beginning of the sixteenth century when painting was characterized by an "illuminator style." Qasim b. 'Ali whose name appears in architectural inscriptions on three miniatures in the 1520s is treated as the representative of the innovative elements detected in the next phase of Shiraz painting that reflects awareness of the Tabriz court style. A group of book artists working (from time to time?) at the shrine of Hazrat Maulana Husam al-Mulk va'l-Din Ibrahim is suggested as being the environment that disseminated the new achievements. The usually preferred method of analyzing commercial—in contrast to courtly—manuscripts in chronologically and regionally connected but "anonymous" groups is, thus, supplemented by an attempt to personalize artistic progress. Because of the uncertainties surrounding the person of Qasim b. 'Ali as well as the shrine and the nature of the relationship the artists had with it, this is done with due reservation. Notwithstanding such uncertainties, the stylistic development of Shiraz manuscript illumination, illustration, and binding is thoroughly explored in this chapter. The author directs the reader's attention to the most daring experiments in layout, construction of the architectural background, and figure drawing, and clearly succeeds in demonstrating the steady rise in quality of the Shiraz manuscripts.

One of the problems that Shiraz manuscript production still poses is what determined the acceptance of new texts into the range of books deemed suitable for illustration. In this respect, the *Majalis al-'ushshaq* is particularly interesting.

This collection of stories about famous Sufis as well as princes with mystical leanings had been compiled at the beginning of the sixteenth century at Herat. It was never illustrated by a court atelier in Iran. In chapter 4, Uluç proves that the *Majalis al-‘ushshaq* manuscripts were an integral part of Shiraz production after the middle of the sixteenth century and, with its depictions of the urban scene, had significant influence on the illustration of other texts. An explanation for the sudden popularity of this text is given in chapter 9 where it is attributed to Ottoman demand sparked by the presumed authorship of the Timurid ruler Mirza Husayn and general admiration for Timurid patronage. This was well possible, but may not have been the whole story. Taking into account the nature of the influence exercised by *Majalis* illustrations on illustrative cycles of other texts, there seems to be a connection to urban self-reflection. This would not necessarily contradict the author’s insistence that Shiraz miniatures intended to depict courtly life, and did so with utmost splendor at their peak. Selecting the urban scene as a backdrop of royal ceremonies may have had a special appeal to urban workshops and their patrons.

It is during the period from 1565 to 1590 that the most lavishly decorated manuscripts were produced in Shiraz. Every opportunity to add beauty and value to the manuscript was used. Quantity was obviously of main importance, as the large sizes of manuscripts, illuminated areas, and miniatures show. Valuable materials, too, were applied in great quantity. Quality rose simultaneously. The precision of the illumination was maintained while it became more variegated through the incorporation of new elements and more colors. The spread of miniatures over the entire page did not lead to the enlargement of details but to their multiplication. Apart from the main plot, figures were engaged in a number of subordinated actions, new topics were visualized,

and well-known ones treated in an uncommon way.

Much attention is paid by Uluç to double-page frontispiece and finispiece miniatures. The ample information provided for the identification of one finispiece subject, the representation of Sa’di’s grave and the nearby pool, is particularly intriguing. Was it only the importance of Sa’di’s tomb for Shiraz that led to the inclusion of such a depiction into copies of his works? Could the bathers be regarded as a visual commentary to the ethical intent of the texts, the cleaning of the soul? In this context, for instance, one would like to know more about the illustrative cycles and their interpretation of Sa’di’s work.

The overview of Shiraz manuscript production is completed with the documentation of its decline in the 1590s, and the following two chapters, 8 and 9, deal with patronage. Whereas the (so far exploited?) sources do not provide satisfactory explanations of how internal patronage operated, extension and impact of Ottoman patronage is convincingly demonstrated based on a wealth of information and statistical analysis. With respect to the idea that book agents may have played a role in the transfer of manuscripts, it could be added that the name of Haji ‘Ali Toqati Rumi mentioned on page 505, together with the statement that the manuscript was bought in Shiraz, also appears in a Shiraz copy of Jalal al-Din Rumi’s *Mathnavi-yi ma’navi*, now in the Herzogin Anna Amalia Library (Ms. Q 658) in Weimar (Germany).

Paying homage to the fine manuscripts, the book is generously provided with illustrations of the best quality. Of the few misprints three should be corrected. The wrong detail was selected to show Ruzbihan’s signature (p. 163); the date given for the Quran E.H. 48 on page 353 is incorrect; and the two column headings in the table on page 478 should be reversed.

Summing up, Uluç’s book will no doubt rehabilitate sixteenth-century production of illustrated

manuscripts in Shiraz. Although the selective approach cannot create a full impression of the Shiraz output during this period, the study is an important contribution to the understanding of commercial manuscript production in this city.

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