

The Analysis of Azerbaijani Islamic Architecture during Seljuk, Ilkhanid and Timuriddynasties

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ABSTRACT

Islam religion was developed unprecedentedly from Saudi Arabia into Middle East, the Indus River and over the north of Africa to the Atlantic Ocean in very first centuries. The intrinsic value of Islam aroused millions of people all over the world and unified various nationalities under the authority of Islam. Through exchanging science, techniques and the ancient arts of these tribes with one another, and associating them with Islam, a new era of dignity and glory appeared which was called Islamic Culture and Civilization. After that, the Islamic architecture, within thousands of years of sustained experience, and taking advantage of its high capabilities and creativities, attained in creation of valuable and splendid architectural buildings and left so many masterpieces.

Considering the importance and prosperity of various arts in Iran after Islam, it's been tried in this paper to analyze the Islamic Architecture during Seljuk, Ilkhanid and Timurid dynasties, and its effects on Azerbaijan architecture.

KEY WORDS: Islamic Architecture, Azerbaijan, Seljuk dynasty, Ilkhaniddynasty and Timurid dynasty.

1. INTRODUCTION

After the foundation of Seljuk dynasty in the first half of the AH 5th C.(AD 11th C.), the most brilliant period of Islamic art began in Iran. In this period, an architectural style named "Razi", which had been started since the Ziar dynasty in Shahr-e ray and continued up to "Mongols" invasion, reached its climax. Some well-known mosques such as "Barsian Mosque" near Esfahan, "Jam-eMosque of Ardestan", "Kabir Jam-e Mosque of Ghazvin" and "Jam-e Mosque of Esfahan" which had been built during the buyidera, are the examples of this style. In early AH 7th C. (AD 13th C.), many Islamic countries including Iran were destroyed by Mongols invasion, but after awhile, with the foundation of Ilkhanid dynasty, the Mongols accepted the culture and traditions of defeated countries and became one of the advocates of Islamic Art and artists. In this era, a style named "Azeri" prevailed which continued up to the "Safavid" dynasty, and the cities such as; "Tabriz", "Baghdad", "Sultaniye" and "Esfahan" became the center of art and artists, and numerous religious and non-religious buildings were constructed in these cities.

In the middle of AH 8th C. (AD 14th C.), once again, Iranian cities were destroyed by Timur, but then Timuridstoo were overwhelmed by Iranian Art, in a way that "Samarqand" and "Bokhara" came to be Iran Art Centers, and the "Azeri" style which had been prevailed since Mongols era, kept on to be used. In this period, an innovation happened in decorative architecture i.e. "Faience Mosaic". We can refer to "Gohar Shad Mosque", "Jam-e Mosque of Varamin", the mainparts of the building of Imam Reza holy shrine, "Blue Mosque of Tabriz", "Jam-e Mosque of Yazd", and the like, as some famous constructions of Ilkhanid and Timuriddynasties.

1. Azerbaijan in Seljuk Era

The Seljuk Turkshave been allotted a special place in the history of Islam and Iran. The admission of Islam by these brave people, their immigration to Iran, and the foundation of the largest Empire after Islam were the reasons for deep and prominent changes in the history of Islam and Iran. They protected the Islamic World in the time of depression and weakness, defeated the offender Crusaders and propagated the Turkish language across to the heart of Europe by founding the great Turkish Empire. The Ottoman Empire foundation was a result of the Seljuk efforts and according to the history of Islam "the research of Cambridge University": "The Seljuks were the first people who considered Iranian nation culture of a higher importance and value than national level."¹

J.J Saunders writes about the importance of this tribe and their Islam conversion: "About AD 960, the Seljuk clan of the Oghuz Turks, who pitched their tents near Jand, along the lower reaches of the Syr Darya,

¹The history of Islam (the research of Cambridge University), translated by Ahmad Aram, page 214.

converted to Islam, a change as momentous as the conversion of the Franks under Clovis to Christianity nearly five centuries before.”¹

“Carla Klausner”, about the great empire of Seljuks and their way of governorship says: “the Turkish Sultans at first had been influenced by Persian Ideal, i.e. the tyrant king, which was running in the conquered states. However, they were mostly religious and less dictatorial in contrast with their successive ancestors in the east of Islamic world.

That’s why Berthold says espionage, which was one of the main features of the governmental domination in this strict, was abolished by ancient Sultans...

Furthermore, the Turk leaders did not entirely accept the Iranian idea of the king being as the government’s despot, since they considered the empire as the absolute property of all the family members. This tribal concept which in fact was a kind of weak union, was kept alive by various members of Seljuk family in the entire Seljuk era. The states were left to the younger members of the family. Therefore, from the very beginning, it was clear that separate dynasties for instance in Rome, Kirman and Syria rose and developed in a rather independent line and relying on the local specific conditions.

2-1. Azerbaijan architecture in Seljuks Era

Generally, the importance of the Seljuk Art within the Islamic Art is hidden under the superb situation of Iran in this art, so that it can be compared to the pivotal role of Italy in European Art. This art also made the way for increasingly development of Iranian Art in future centuries. The Seljuk Art developed from Syria to the north of India by the help of Seljuks or their remaining rulers. Between 1000-1220 AD was the basis and scale of various arts, from pottery to metalwork and from book decoration to architecture² ...

About 40 Seljuk minarets have been known in various types of constructions in this era: including one or two staircases with or without a central pillar, an umbellate overhang balcony, three rows of facades, shafts jointed with built-in edges and pillars, and two minarets which are connected to an entrance (whether the entrance of a building or Kiblah portico) and it is considered as one of the old historical innovations of Iranian architecture. Therefore, in Seljuk era, the minaret had mostly a symbolic role rather than a devotional and religious one. There are still some free minarets from the Seljuk era which are not joined to other parts of construction and it seems they’d been used as signal lights through roads and deserts.

Not one intact mansion is left from the Seljuk period, but archeological excavations have specified the floor plan of four-portico mansion of Marv and the palace of Ghale Dokhtar in Azerbaijan (which is still solid though it’s ruined).

... Except the glass dishes which had been discovered in Konia Citadel and are now kept in Konia Museum and are probably made by the migrant artisans to Roughhe and other potters around Euphrates, most of the earthen wares from the Seljuk era are multicolored striped dishes which had been produced at the east of Mediterranean from Cyprus to Caucasia and the black sea. The used materials in Anatolia were little and united and it’s not known where they’d been produced. But undoubtedly, the statue sketch had been so popular and was similar to the dishes which had been unearthed in Orancal/Balakon, Azerbaijan. The non-glazed heavy relief dishes along with pleasant animal patterns had been discovered in Any and other places in eastern Anatolia, and most of them belongs to Orancal.³

2. After Chinggiz,

The great Mongol Khan “Mongol Gha’an” assigned his brother Hulagu Khan to reoccupy Western Asia to fortify the Mongol’s colonial settlements. Because since the death of Chinggiz Khan, the Khan’s direct domination had become feeble and weak on Islam society in the south of Amu Darya. Thus, Hulagu set off for the west. He crushed the devotees of the north of Iran or Ismailian’s resistance (AH 654/AD 1258), exterminated the army of Caliph in Iraq and killed Mosta’sem, the last Abbasids Caliph (AH 656/AD 1258) and headed toward Damascus. But there Mongols were defeated by Egyptian Mamelukes in Ain Jalut located in Palestine (AH 658/AD 1260) and their advance was obstructed. Then, Hulagu became the ruler of Iran, Iraq and Anatolia, and was given the title of Ilkhan.

“J.J Sanders” believes that: “When the Mongols under Hulagu turned to Persia, they made straight for the great grazing lands of Azerbaijan, and the adjacent plains or swamp of Mughan and Arran, which in later years were to be the centre of the power of the Il-khans. Azerbaijan was also politically in a superb situation, since from these extensive camping grounds, Mongols could threaten alike the Muslim principalities of Iraq, Syria and Anatolia and the Christian kingdoms of the Caucasus.”⁴

¹The history of the Mongol Conquest, translated by Abolghasem Halat, page 45.

²“The Seljukian” by Dr. Jacob Ajand

³The Seljukian, translated and edited by Dr. Jacob Ajand, pp 157, 169 & 189.

⁴The history of the Mongol Conquest, translated by Abolghasem Halat, page 80.

“In spite of war and interior chaos, Ilkhanid period is one of the prosperous eras of Iran history. Hulagu’s successors converted to Islam. Tabriz and Maraghe which were the Ilkhanids’ capitals, turned into the center of science. Particularly, chronology and natural science received a lot of attention.”¹

“Marco polo described Tabriz as “a great and glorious city”. Fra Oderic (AH 720 /AD 1320) pronounced it “the finest city in the world for trade. Every article is found here in abundance.... The Christians here say that the revenue the city pays to its ruler is greater than that which all of France pays to its king.” Clavijo called it “a mighty city, abounding in riches and goods,” with “many fine buildings,” magnificent mosques, and “the most splendid bathhouses in the world.” He calculated the population at a million souls.”²

Dr. “Christopher Varner” in the preface of his book about the history of Tabriz (from Zandiye to Qajar), has also written about the situation of this city in Ilkhanid period. He writes:

“In AD 13th-14th C. (AH 7th-8th C.), Mongol’s khans who had been informed of their economical-political status in Middle Asia and Europe, decided to select Tabriz as their capital. This city henceforward made such a progress which had been called “Dar ul’ Saltanah” (Royal City) and became the centre of trade and business.

Units of weight and money of all Mongol territories and their ext governments changed into the standard unit of “Tabrizi”. As the writer presents, throughout this period, the monetary unit of “Tuman” and the weight unit of “Kharvar” were prevalent. He has mentioned “Dinar” as the subcategory for “Tuman”, and “Man” and “Seer” as the sub categories for “Kharvar”. In order to clarify and to show his accuracy in numbers calculation in sale or lease documents during Qajar period, the writer had added an enclosure to the book, named “Money, weight, and technical notes”. In this enclosure, he has accurately calculated the worth advancement of “Tuman” (based on Hintus words) in Zand period (30 golden marks), in Agha Mohammad khan time (17 marks) in Fath Ali Shah sovereignty (15 marks) and in Naser al-din Shah governorship (10 marks).³

“The years between AH 651 (AD 1253), in which Hulagu left for Iran and is the beginning of Ilkhanid Era until AH 736 (AD 1336), in which Sultan Abu Saied Bahador Khan the son of Oljeitu died, and specially the time of sovereignty of the two great Ilkhans; Ghazan Khan and Oljeitu, is the shining and brilliant era in Ilkhanid era. The attempt to establish charity institutions, great sciences schools and reliable academies, to show respect and honor and give comfort to the Ulemas and Sufies, to encourage industrial men, to juice up trading and farming, to develop and reclaim cities, to give religious liberty, to prepare people’s welfare, to set useful and advanced laws in order to regulate social and economic relations, and to adjust governmental and class injustices, makes it an exceptional and unique era in the history of our country.

The advanced humane, social and moral laws of Ghazan, controlled the regulation of civil and military system, security of social justice, elimination of oppression and injustice caused by governmental and official agents, purification of judicature, adjustment of religious prejudices, disputations and controversies, establishment of a proper economical and trading system, supporting the extension of endowments, charities and science schools and encouragement of insight and science seekers. The set of Ghazan laws is unique and amazing in the history of Iran, in terms of importance and depth of social and humane objectives.

3-1. Azerbaijan architecture in Ilkhanid Era

The Mongols ideological opinions and their relations with different cultures such as Christian Europe and China had new artistic, commercial and intellectual impressions on this country. For example, in Tabriz, dwelling places had been built for Italian merchants and the Ilkhanid territory had a prominent relational role in trading with Far East and India.⁴

The most beautiful architectural buildings of this era, i.e. AD 13th-14th C., still survive in Azerbaijan. Tabriz great citadel, Sultaniyeh Dome, Jam-e mosque of Marand, and several domes in Maraghe had been left as memorials of this era.⁵

“In general, the plans, techniques and ornamental patterns of the Seljuk era continued in the architecture of Ilkhanid time, and after about 50 years of depression, a new era of architecture burgeoned. This change was as a result of Islam, Iran and urban life of Ilkhanid dynasty during the reign of Ghazan Khan (AH 694-703/AD 1295-1304).

... One of the innovative features in the architecture of Mongols period, was constructing architectural complexes in newly built areas near Tabriz, such as, Ghazaniyeh of Ghazan Khan and Rob-e Rashidi of Rashid al-din Faddlollah the minister of court. Ghazaniyeh had involved the mausoleum of Sultan, the palace, a mosque, two schools, a monastery, a shrine for Sayyeds, an observatory, a hospital, a library, archival and governmental buildings, baths and fountains.

Rob-e Rashid also had two mosques, schools, a monastery, scientific institutions, two libraries, hospitals, baths, caravanserais, mills, paper mills, dyeing, mint house and different gardens. However, it is not known

¹ Clifford Edmund Bosworth, the Islamic dynasties, translated by Fereidoon Badreie, page 228.

² Will Durant, the history of civilization, (religious edition), page 781.

³ The monthly book of History and Geography, Tehran published, 1382, Azar, page 15.

⁴ Manouchehr Morteza, Issues of Ilkhanids Era, pp 7 & 87.

⁵ The Islamic dynasties, ibid.

whether these constructions had been built based on an associated or a divided method. If it's been built based on an associated method, apparently all the words approved, these complexes were in fact the pioneers of Ottoman Sultans' foundations in Adnigh, Burthe and Istanbul.¹

3. Azerbaijan in the Timurids era

In the interval between the death of Sultan Abu Saied, the last king of Ilkhanid dynasty and the domination of Amir Timur Gurcani, a queer chaos happened in all over the country. The struggle over power among the rival groups lasted nearly half a century. As a result, the unity of country was scattered. Local incompetent rulers of unstable governments who were mostly fool, ambitious and pleasure-seeker, caused much incurable damages on the political, economical and social structures of the country. They disturbed everything and agitated people in such a way that even the most pious people were eagerly waiting for a man like Timur to come.

Amir Timur Gurcani (AH 736-807/AD 1336-1405) was of Turkish ancestry, a soldier-natured noble man from Middle Asia who was also interested in culture and intellectual matters.

"Timur dynasty claimed that they were the descendants of Chenggiz. Timur's father was the ruler of Kash when the Joghataian Mongols' political power in Transoxiana was disintegrated and weakened due to inefficient nominal rulers who were Tughlugh Timur's descendants. Timur chose Transoxiana as the center and base of the great empery which he had established on the flatland".²

"Mansur Heydar", the Indian researcher writes about the Turk's influence on the Timurid's governmental system:

"Since Timurids' cultural remains had been so effective on governmental structure of Indian Gurcanies, thus our researches can also be practical to understand the components of Gurcanian's governmental system.

Although it's needed to discuss and investigate about the scope of Turkish effects on Mongol's political organization, the available information in different sources indicates that they had impressed the Mongols so much that the Mongol-Turkish expression can be applied for the Mongol's governmental system. When Chenggiz entered Central Asia, his army mostly consisted of Turkish soldiers along with the "Mongol's in central core". But after Chenggiz conquests, a considerable number of these Mongol's preferred to return to Steppe areas along with their leader. That's why when dividing the conquered regions among his children, Chenggiz only offered 4,000 Mongols to his son Chagatai. Even this little number of Mongolian decreased among the great population of Turkish people in the area which prepared the way for founding a new empery.

While Mongol's impression and effects considerably continued through several generations, the native Turks left great impressions on these conquerors, because they were more advanced economically and politically compared to their Mongol commanders. Turkish language became the imperial common language, because Mongols had no written language, and on the other hand, the Turkish culture was dominant over the economical, social and political conditions. "Berthold" in his book "the history of Mongol-Turkish Nation" declares that: "Mongolian dynasty and its military was in fact a combination of Turk tribes with Mongolian names."

The Barlastribe, to which Timur belonged, was a Mongol-Turkish tribe. Therefore, Timur's imperial was a unique union of Mongol-Turkish political and military systems."³

In his three campaigns to Iran, every time Timur came to Azerbaijan and set up his court in Tabriz; from there he attacked to other places such as Gorjestan.

"H.R. Roymer" describes the strategic importance of Azerbaijan and Tabriz as follows:

"The military and administrative organization of Iran under Timur differed in essential points from that of Transoxiana. Seven Tumens of Transoxiana had no equivalent in Persia. Instead the country was divided into provinces or areas controlled by governors of the kind that, with the exception of Farghana, did not exist in Transoxiana. Here especially there was a lack of uniformity. The Persian gubernatorial districts differed in size, and their legal arrangements were neither uniform from case to case nor over the course of time. Two of them were particularly notable, because of their size and their titles, which were derived from older traditions. They were Tabriz (or Sultaniyeh) and Qandahar. Prince Miran Shah was expressly appointed to "the throne of Hulagu" when he received the governorship of Azerbaijan, a post he occupied from AD 1396 until his dismissal in AD 1399. So was his successor Muhammad Sultan b. Umar Shaikh on his appointment in AD 1401. Three years later he was in turn followed by prince "Umar, Miran Shah's second son, who was to have jurisdiction over all the princes in western Persia, including Fars, Iraqi Ajamas well as Mesopotamia. Timur must have considered them very important territories, perhaps all after Trasoxiana. In the case of Azerbaijan and the areas belonging to it this clearly makes sense."⁴

¹ Ilkhanids, translated and edited by Dr. Jacob Ajand, pp 160-165

² Clifford Edmund Bosworth, the Islamic dynasties, page 247

³ Timurids, Translated and edited by Dr. Jacob Ajand, page 94.

⁴ The history of Iran (the research of Cambridge University), Timurids period, translated by Dr. Jacob Ajand, page 102.

4-1. Azerbaijan architecture in Ilkhanid Era

“With the choice achievements of its architecture, in terms both of technical and decorative developments, Timurid civilization undoubtedly reached its peak. It is part of the great artistic heritage which passed to the Safavids in the 10th/16th century and became the starting point of a new development which so impressed itself on the outward appearance of Persia that it remains to this day one of the characteristic features of the country. The initiative of the Timurid princes, no matter what may have been the motives and personal interest of the art-loving patrons among them, was responsible for the emergence of painting of high quality. No examples of moral or textile painting have been preserved, but specimens of miniature art are numerous. Illuminated manuscripts of the Timurid period constitute some of the most priceless treasures in the libraries and collection of east and west. Even before Timur's time several generations of artists, influenced by the work of the Far East, and at the time of Hulagu, probably not influenced by Turkish art, had awakened the art of old Iran to new life out of the petrification of obsolete forms. In the 9th/15th century, under Timurid – that is to say, essentially Turkish – patronage, the art of painting looks to its Iranian past, and the influence of this past, forces back the hitherto dominating influences.”¹

Timur spent all his life in battles and conquests while Timurid's rulers of AD 15thC. offered glorious cultural unity to the eastern Islamic world and the effects of this culture were elevated and remarkable in Iranian and Joghataian Turkish literature, architecture, painting and bibliopegy. In addition, “Uluq Beg”, the son of Shah Rukh Mirza, is famous for his interest in astronomy.²

“Baisunkur”, Shah Rukh's son, is the organizer of the most beautiful technique of book writing in Iran and he can be called one of the greatest book-lovers of the world. Under his support, 40 scribes and calligraphers under the guidance of “Molana Jafari Tabrizi” who was the student of “Abdullah Ibn Mir Ali Tabrizi” were duplicating the books.³ “Agha Mirak Tabrizi” too was unique in Miniature.

“The beautiful and complicated tradition which had been established in Herat for a long time - the city in which Baisunkur, the younger brother of Ibrahim, was the prominent supporter of his own generation art - did not go further up than AD 1425. As a matter of fact, in calligraphy, Herat came to be important after AD 1420, when Baisunkur went to Tabriz at the head of the army to rebuke its ruler, and took Molana Jafar Tabrizi, the Nastaliq calligraphy's teacher; Seyyed Ahmad Naghash (the painter), Master Ali Mosavvar (the illustrator) and Ghavam al-din Sahhaf (the bookbinder) with himself to Samarqand.”⁴

This compulsory migration of artists from Tabriz to Herat was not just limited to this period. In the history of this city, Tabriz had been plundered culturally so many times and indeed no other city had ever experienced such massive damages. Not only Baisunkur but also Timur, himself, took some of the Tabrizian artists to Samarqand by force.

The fatal damages which Timur had caused upon Azerbaijan economy, health and economical progression is observed. Generative powers develop and Azerbaijan would be able to establish relation with some of eastern and western governments and improve its economy. The intellectuals of Azerbaijan rise and achieve appropriate positions in different fields of science and art. Painting, architecture and particularly poetry enter a new phase and get to modern modes. The desire for the native language culminates. Huge constructions in Baku and Tabriz - Shervans house in Baku and Blue mosque and Ali Shah citadel in Tabriz and Sultaniyeh Dome in Zanzan are reconstructed.⁵

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