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## **A Comparative Analysis of Factors Influencing the Evolution of Miniature in Safavid and Ottoman Periods**

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### **Abstract**

The history of miniature has always been related to the socio-cultural and political contents and inclinations of each region. The analysis of finely illuminated and illustrated examples of historic manuscripts in Iran and Turkey was primarily dependent upon patrons, who were usually the rulers or governors of each region and wealthy enough to afford the large staff and expensive materials necessary for production of art masterpieces. The relative stability in Turkey provided meant that from the mid-fifteenth century Ottoman painting could develop virtually uninterrupted, whereas Iran was unstable due to political upheaval and constant threats of invasions. These problems which caused artists and craftsmen to move from one part of country to another at various times in different regions of Iran did not happen in Turkey leading to creation of different artifacts. In this paper, the evolution of miniature in Iran and turkey has been reviewed, analyzed and then compared based on the factors influencing the contents of these miniature in Safavid of Iran and Ottoman of Turkey.

**Keywords:** Art, History, Miniature



## Introduction

Most part of the painting styles created in art history of Iran or Turkey are called by the names of governments. For example Safavid School, Seljuk School and Ottoman are among dominant styles. It is true also about historical roots of these styles.

In this article, the word "Miniature" implies small-sized paintings which aimed to faithfully explain the text contained in manuscripts. This art form was used by the Ottomans from 14<sup>th</sup> to early 18<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman Empire and also by Safavid Dynasty in the 16<sup>th</sup> & 17<sup>th</sup> centuries in Iran. In this article, illustrated manuscripts in Ottoman and Safavid period, also known as Ottoman miniatures and Safavid miniatures are introduced focusing on how Persian painting concepts are transferred to Ottoman painting. Finally a brief review on different factors and features of Ottoman and Safavid miniatures are discussed.

## History and Characteristics of Miniature in Iran

Iranian miniature is one of the brightest manifestations of Iranian ancient history which undoubtedly comprises an important chapter of the world art history. It is a long time since this art has attracted the attention of many artists and researchers. Iranian painting and miniature with a seven thousand year background has hidden many experiences within itself.

The first miniature paintings in Iran dates back to the beginning of the Islamic period; between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> century, influenced by the Sasanid, Manain and Byzantine art that are called the Baqdad or Abbasi school (Figure 1).



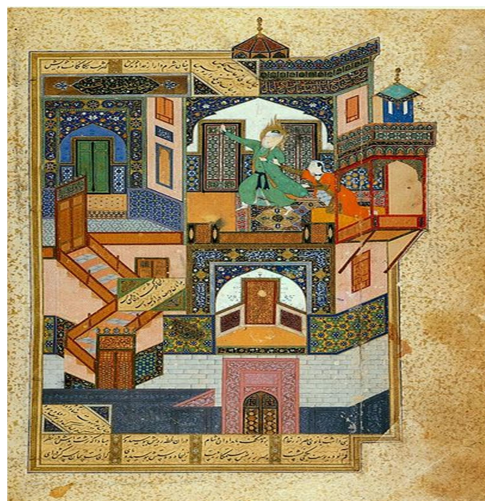
**Figure 1.** Illustration from Makamat al-Hariri. Abbasi school  
<http://kenanaonline.com/users/sayed-esmail/posts/119157>

After the Arab conquest, Iran continued to be overrun by foreign powers for another thousand years but painting continued and evolved. The Seljuk Turks arrived in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the Mongols in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and Tamerlane (Timurid) in the 14<sup>th</sup> century



**Figure 2.** Illustration from Shahname Damot. The Mongol Ilkhan school  
<https://scontent.cdninstagram.com>

After several centuries and behind several painting school, Herat school was created during the Timurid period. One of the best known and most influential painters from Herat school was Kamal-od-Din Behzad who followed Herat classical school to create his best works of art and along with his contemporary artists managed to refine and perfect the classical style of Timurid (Figure 3).



**Figure 3.** Illustration from Boostan and Golestan. Herat school <http://olama-orafa1393.ir>



At the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century the Safavid dynasty came to power, and Shah Esmail choose Tabriz as the capital once again. In miniature art, the second Tabriz school (Safavid) emerged by synthesis of diverse traditions from the Herat heritage and the first Tabriz school, developing a new path towards excellence in quality and quantity (Jamali, 2013) as shown in Figure 4.



**Figure 4.** Illustrated from Shahnameh Shah Tahmasebi. Safavi school  
<http://fotografia.islamoriente.com>

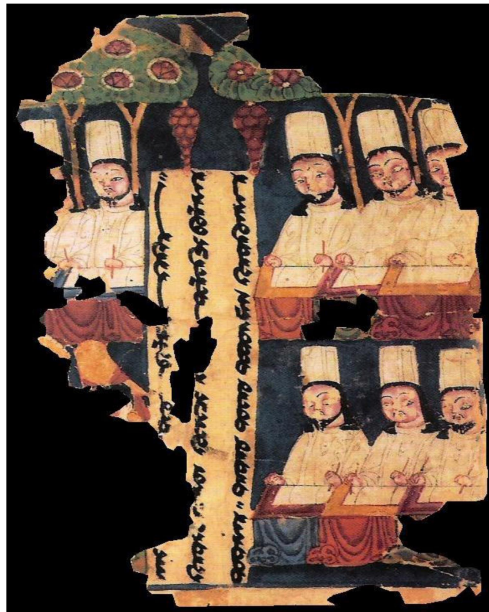
### History and Characteristics of Miniature in Turkey

The Ottoman miniatures have strong characteristics due to the influences of ancient cultures. This unique style fuses elements from the Far East, the Middle East, Mesopotamia, North Africa, Ancient Greece and Rome (TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi, 2008). The assimilation of miniature art dates back to the pre-Islamic period in Turks. The miniatures, discovered and published in 1923 show miniatures from the Uigur civilization in 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries (Palta, 2012). These miniatures depict an Uigur khan assenting to Manain belief (Figure 5). These parallel features strengthen the fact that Ottoman miniatures are influenced by Timurid and Turkmen miniatures.

In 1514, the Ottoman Sultan Selim I, defeated the Safavid military at Chaldiran and levied a contribution of craftsmen, amongst whom were many skilled in various facets of book production. Included in their number were calligraphers, artists, illuminators, and bookbinders and it is recorded that in 1516-17 over a hundred craftsmen and their families were taken from Iran to Istanbul. Undoubtedly it was also at this time that many of the illustrated Persian manuscripts now in the Topkapi Saraye Museum library were taken there. Illustrated and illuminated manuscripts which found their way from Iran to Turkey as early as the late



fifteenth century onwards, either as booty or, after the mid-sixteenth century, as diplomatic gifts (Titley,



**Figure 5.** Uigur Prits of Manichaeism belief Celebi, Duygu.2014, Ottoman Miniature Art.Master Thesis FS

### Discussion

The ottoman miniature however may have been owed initially to the influence of Persian artists and miniatures, Turkish artists developed their own distinctive style of painting (Titley,1983) as shown in Figure 6.



**Figure6.** Illustrated from Suleimanneh.1561.ottoman miniature upload.wikimedia.org



Ottoman miniatures differ from Persian miniatures in several aspects, including: their precise details (especially on maps) and more limited and vivid colors (Meredith-Owens et al, 1976).

Another difference is that the Persians were attached to three-quarter profile whereas Ottoman miniaturists were painting the figures also in frontal or in profile point of view (Figure 7). The linear 2D scheme attribution of the ornamented architectural motifs created a document function. The documentary approach made the Ottoman miniatures a reliable historical source (Germen, 2012).



Figure 7. Ottoman miniature 17th century <http://www.gettyimages.co.uk>

In topic selection, Ottoman miniatures appear to fall broadly into two main categories, those in which artists were influenced by the romantic Persian styles, and those which demonstrate the Ottoman preference for realism in both choice of subject and its interpretation. For this reason, the collection of Ottoman miniatures covers the whole spectrum of Turkish illustrative art, for it includes romantic poems, encyclopaedic works, anthologies, albums of portraits and paintings, epics, chronicles, histories, fables, maps, and paper cut-out (*decoupe*) work (Titley, 1983).

For instance: Matrakchi Nasuh is the most famous painter of the period of Selim II. Apart from his generous figurative, coloured and patterned style of Matrakchi Nasuh, he mainly focused on non-figurative, landscape combined topographical paintings. Nasuh painted cities, ports and castles seen from above like a map, and combined the architectural elements from different viewpoints in one picture (And, 1978) (Figure 8) Or Abdülcelil Celebi, pen name Levni, is the other most prominent and the greatest traditional manuscript painter at the beginning of the 18th century (Atıl, 1999). The masterpiece of Levni is the *Sürname-i Vehbi*, which is about the circumcision feast of the sons of Sultan Ahmet III. These miniatures are demonstrating the last traditional illuminations made in Ottoman Imperial atelier.



Çağman's study (2012) show that most of the Ottoman illuminated manuscripts are produced according to the Sultan's orders. Therefore, Ottoman pictorial art was fostered frequently by the Sultan's establishments (Binney, 1973)



**Figure 8.** A 16th century map of Tabriz, Iran by Ottoman historian Matrakchi Nasuh <http://mapsontheweb.zoom-maps.com>

The miniaturists were required by their patrons to paint the generosity of Sultans. Consequently, a large number of miniatures provide the function of being a historical source and annals. Therefore, the artists concentrated on the combination of narrated, minor detailed, subject matter compositions with the will of pictorial realism (Andm, 1978). But the lack of perspective and the instance of pictorial realistic narrative created alternative composition structures in Ottoman miniatures.

Over the centuries and with the onset of westernization in the 18th century, the use of this traditional art has changed its place from documentary book art to subjective artworks. This shift is also reflected in the size, techniques and materials of miniature art.





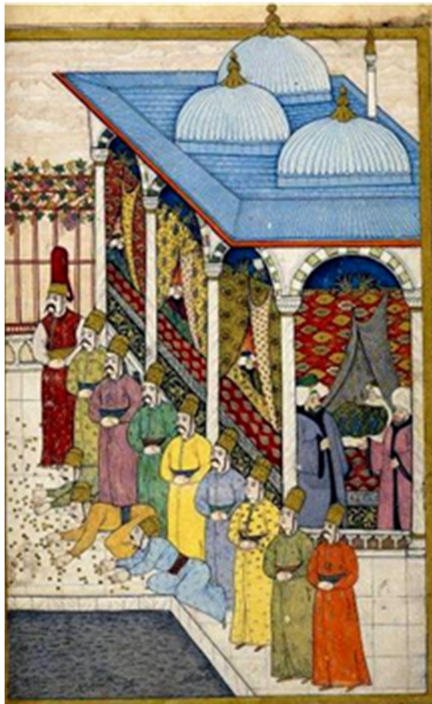
**Figure 9.** Princes in Circumcision, Levni, Surname-i Vehbi.  
<http://www.iscsjournal.com>

The Persian style in miniatures usually illustrated romantic tales and poems, and the history of Iranian miniature has always been related to the Iranian literature. The evolutionary force in the field came around the 10<sup>th</sup> century by the emergence of the great works of literature and poetry starting with Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* and continuing with a flood of inspiring masterpieces like Nezami's *Khamseh* (12<sup>th</sup>), Sadi's *Boosten* and *Golestan* (13<sup>th</sup>), and Hafez's collection of poetry or *Divan* (14<sup>th</sup> c). survives throughout the sixteenth century (Safavid school) like *Khamseh* by Nezami and Tahmasp's *Shahnameh* are two magnificent examples of safavid period which once again embody the magical fusion of words and images. Although by the end of the same period the Ottoman preference for illustrating chronicles and histories in a factual manner had become firmly established.

Along with the creation of Iranian poetic masterpieces from the 10<sup>th</sup> century, which delivered subjects for miniature paintings, the talented miniaturists gave face to poetic characters, making them immortal in the mind's eye (Figure 10).

This whole process corresponds to the alternative world or the in-between space which the Iranian miniature artists aimed at creating by re-imagining or visualizing the Ideal of the poetic world (Jamali, 2013).





**Figure10.** Illustrated from Khamseh of Nizami .The ascent of Muhammad to heaven (mi'rāj). 1543.Safavid miniature <https://en.wikipedia.org>

### Conclusion

Although mutual roots between the Persian miniature and Ottoman miniature, and art transferring between this cultural areas but exist obvious difference, particularly in topic selection for illustrated books. Ottoman painting has depicted many of its contemporary topics. For example: record defeats, Ottoman history, court celebrations or patron travels. So, they can be used as evidences for studying social and political history.

But in Safavid painting rarely focuses on everyday topics and it is hard to trace historical courtier events in the Iranian painters' works. Persian miniaturists usually illustrated romantic tales and poems and epic themes or mystical themes.



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