Ghiasian Mohamad Reza
Lives of the Prophets: The Illustrations to Hafiz-i Abru's "Assembly of Chronicles"

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Academic interest in late medieval and early modern library collections has grown in recent years, and manuscripts and their illustrations are increasingly recognized as important tools for reconstructing intellectual trajectories and political horizons. As in Renaissance Europe, Timurid Iran witnessed an increase in both the number of private collections as well as individual curators with a discernible imprint on collections held in royal libraries. Mohamad Reza Ghiasian's *Lives of the Prophets: The Illustrations to Hafiz-i Abru's Assembly of Chronicles* traces the activities and impact of one such library, the royal *kitābkhānah* (library and atelier) at the court of Tamerlane' son, Shāh Rukh (r. 1405-47), himself a celebrated bibliophile. The king's *kitābkhānah* was overseen by Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū (d. 1430), historian, geogr rapher, and favored *nadīm*.

Ghiasian's book is a meticulous analysis of the paintings added to the two surviving illustrated manuscripts of Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū's *Majmaʿ al-tawārīkh*. The focus is on the lives of the prophets from Adam to Muhammad, and "finding the reason why the sections on the stories of the prophets are richly illustrated in the *Majmaʿ al-tawarikh*." (p. 3) The manuscripts under study are held in three different collections; one at the Topkapı Sarayı Library in Istanbul (Hazine 1653, Hazine 1654 and Bağdat 282), another at the David Collection in Copenhagen, and a third at the Reza Abbasi Museum in Tehran. Many of these itinerant manuscripts bear the mark of multiple libraries, from *Rabʿ-i Rashīdī* in Tabriz founded by the fabled Īlkānid vizier Rashīd al-Dīn Faḍl Allāh (d. 1318), to Shāh Rukh's library in Herat, to several Ottoman libraries and elsewhere. The author also identifies a new manuscript of Rashīd al-Dīn's *Jāmiʿ al-tawārīkh*, produced at the end of the thirteenth century at the *Rabʿ-i Rashīdī* atelier.

Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū modeled his history on *Jāmiʿ al-tawārīkh*, which survives in four fragmentary manuscripts produced at *Rabʿ-i Rashīdī*, three in Persian and one in Arabic. By the fourteenth century, all four were held at Shāh Rukh's *kitābkhānah*. There, Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū and his colleagues reworked the Persian manuscripts. He added the pre-Islamic part of his own *Majmaʿ al-tawārīkh* since that section was missing from the surviving manuscripts, while others provided the illustrations. The three are now held at the Topkapı Sarayı Library in Istanbul (Hazine 1653, including Hazine 1654 and Bağdat 282). At a later point, a fourth Persian manuscript of *Jāmiʿ al-tawārīkh* made its way to the Timurid atelier in Herat. It too comprises the pre-Islamic section of Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū's history followed by Rashīd al-Dīn's text, and is known as the Dispersed manuscript, copied from Hazine 1653 during the lifetime of its author, in 1426 or later. (p. 57, 89) The latter two are the only extant illustrated manuscripts of Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū's *Majmaʿ al-tawārīkh*.

Following a brief codicological and paleographic introduction to the various manuscripts, Ghiasian offers a sketch of the Timurid court in Herat where the fourteenth-century manuscripts of Rashīd al-Dīn's *Jāmiʿ al-tawārīkh* were refurbished by Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū and several illustrators. The historical narrative – dee rivative by the author's own admission – contains questionable asides on the alleged popular notions of legitimacy, such as "during the fourteenth century, the people of Central Asia believed that only descendants of Chingīz Khan (r. 1206-27) could adopt the title of khan and attain "sovereign power." (p. 6). It emphasizes Shāh Rukh's Persophile tendency, although Turkic remained the language of the chancery and manuscript production, and his eschewing Mongol norms for Islamic ones.

The strategic and robust patronage of the arts was a cornerstone of Timurid kingship. Ghiasian enumerates Shāh Rukh's diverse architectural projects, which included building and restoring mosques, shrines, Sufi *khānaqāhs*, bazars, and hospitals. But it was the art of book that captivated the Timurid royal house, as detailed in Chapter 2. Proceeding from useful tables enumerating the various manuscripts known to have been held in the royal library, Ghiasian takes a closer look at the library's illustrated manuscripts, excluding the two at the center of his own research. These include another monumental history by Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū, known alternatively as *Kulliyāt-i tārīkhī* or *Majmūʿa-i Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū*. *Kulliyāt* is an anthology of histories compiled at Shāh Rukh's request around 1417. To fulfill the ruler's commission for a chronicle of nations and generations, as well as the lives of Persian, Arab and Turkic rulers, Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū accounts for the selection in the introduction: He begins with Abū ʿAlī Balʿamī's (d. 974 or ca. 992-97) adaptation of Ṭabarī's (d. 923) history which he deems most reliable, followed by Rashīd al-Dīn's *Jāmiʿ al-tawārīkh* that ends with the beginning of Uljāytū's reign in 705/1305-06. To bring the narrative to date, he appends a copy of *Ẓafarnāma*, Niẓām al-Dīn Shāmī's 1404 biography of Tīmūr, which

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he complements with a brief account of the king's illustrious achievements. (p. 34) However, only the first part of the manuscript, the Bal'amī section, is illustrated.

Chapter 3 on *Majmaʿ al-tawārikh* chronicles the life of its author and its surviving illustrated manuscripts. Based on the colophon of Hazine 1653, Ghiasian claims to have resolved a controversy by providing evidence that 'Abd Allāh b. Luṭf Allāh b. 'Abd al-Rashīd, known as Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū was born in Herat, but that his family hailed from the village of Bihdādīn, near the historical town of Zūzan in the Khāwf region in Khurāsān, some 250 km south of Mashhad. (p. 45) However, the historian's ancestral origin is already considered as given in an entry by Maria Eva Subtelny and Charles Melville published seventeen years ago.(1) More difficult to ascertain is the explanation for the epithet, to which the book under review contributes little.

An avid chess player, keen traveler and a constant presence in Tīmūr's retinue, Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū was an eyewitness to much of what he wrote on the events of that reign, as well as those of his son Shāh Rukh. He also conducted archival research. (p. 48) For Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū's political views and his approach to history, Ghiasian relies on A. K. S. Lambton's 1978 summary account of Timurid historiography,(2) whereas Maria Szuppe's extensive and more recent entry would have served as a better guide.(3)

Work on *Majmaʿ al-tawārīkh* began in 1422-1423. Ghiasian notes the various histories consulted in its preparation, as well as is manuscript history. Envisaged in four volumes, it is the pre-Islamic section–from creation to Muhammad–that is not only considerable in size, surpassing Rashīd al-Dīn's account, but also a favorite with illustrators at the Timurid court, and the focus of the remainder of Ghiasian's book. The second volume contains Muhammad's biography and ends with the fall of the 'Abbasids in Baghdad in 1258. The third volume, the bulk of which remains unpublished and is held in manuscript form in several libraries in Iran, is a history of Iranian dynasties that begins with the Ṣaffārids (861-1033) and ends in 1355 with the demise of the last Īlkhānid Abū Saʿīd Bahādur. The final volume is dedicated to Shāh Rukh's son, Bāysunghur, a great patron of the arts who predeceased his father in 1433, and brings the narrative to 1427 and the failed attempt on the Sultan's life.

A detailed account of the contents of Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū's lives of the prophets follows a brief overview of the genre in early Arabic and Persian historiography. Although both Rashīd al-Dīn and Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū adopted Ṭabarī's model, like Bal'amī before them, they omitted the names of the vast majority of the individual transmitters of the recorded narrative. Hazine 1653 contains 116 illustrations, of which sixty-nine were completed at *Rabiʿ-i Rashīdī* in Tabriz and the rest at Shāh Rukh's *kitābkhānah* in Herat. The undated Dispersed Manuscript was included in its entirety in an exhibition of Persian art at Pennsylvania Museum of Art in 1926. Of the 407 folios, 150 were illustrated. Thereafter, it suffered the fate of many other valuable manuscripts and was dispersed and sold to dealers and collectors around the world. Seventy-three folios were illustrated at Shāh Rukh's library. The rest adhere to two different styles. The cream-colored folios (thirty-eight miniatures), although bound with this manuscript, belong to the Divided manuscript. The illustrations on these do not bear a close relation to the text, and were made at a later date, between the mid-fifteenth to the early twentieth century. Miniatures in the second style, although superimposed on the writing and unrelated to the text, imitate the artistic style of craftsmen active at Shāh Rukh's *kitābkhānah*. Those in the third style (eighteen illustrations) are depictions of Chinese emperors. They too are later additions, but they emulate the painting style of artists active at *Rabʿ-i Rashīdī*. (p. 92) Most are pasted on unillustrated folios in irrelevant chapters, including those on the Ismāʿīlīs and Saljūqs. According to Ghiasian, these accretions originated with art dealers in the early decades of the twentieth century, in an effort to augment the number of illustrated folios and enhance the collection's value. (p. 96)

The fourth chapter conducts a comparative stylistic analysis of the illustrations done at Shāh Rukh's *kitābkhānah* illustrations in Hazine 1653 and the Dispersed manuscripts to reveal Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū's discernible imprint on the color scheme and other aspects of manuscript production. Most prophets wear green robes, while the pious of different stripes are clad in brown. Most of the humans "are Turkman in appearance" (p. 114), and Indians are painted in a brown hue. Most of the paintings gloss the narrative, with a limited range of colors, sparse ornamentation, and a flat composition. The color yellow for a cow, Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū writes, echoing the Qur'an (Q. 2.69), is used in an illustration that adorns an anecdote in the section on Moses because it is associated with

(1) Maria Eva Subtelny and Charles Melville, "Ḥāfeẓ-e Abru," *Encyclopaedia Iranica Online*, 2002; http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/hafez-e-abru.

(2) A. K. S. Lambton, "Early Theories of the State: Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū and Niẓām al-Dīn Šāmī," *Bulletin d'Études Orientales de l'Institut Français de Damas*, 30 (1978), p. 1-9.

(3) Maria Szuppe, "Historiography v. Timurid Period," *Encyclopaedia Iranica Online*, 2003; http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/historiography-v

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rejoicing, and when used in the depiction of livestock, makes the heart happy. (p. 113)

It is in the catalogue of the illustrations of prophets in Chapter 5 that Ghiasian returns to a detailed analysis of the illustrations from Shāh Rukh's *kitābkhānah*, which are juxtaposed with illustrations from an array of manuscripts — of *Jāmi' al-tawārīkh* and others further afield, to trace the genealogy and afterlife of techniques and innovations originating at the Timurid atelier. From the evolution of features of the ship in the section on Noah's ark, to Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū's reversal of Rashīd al-Dīn's preference for the Jewish version of the story of Abraham wherein Isaac rather than Ishmael is sacrificed, every episode in the pre-Islamic section of *Majma' al-tawārīkh* is analyzed in depth, yielding new insight and pointing to paths for future research. The giant creature 'Ūj undergoes a dynamic transformation at the hands of the artists at Shāh Rukh's atelier, to take one example. Introduced to the Islamic world from *isrā'iliyyāt* literature, 'Ūj is a frequent stand in for heresy and unbelief. The Timurid artist added him to the animals aboard Noah's ark. (p. 182-90)

The Conclusion unfolds with an intriguing parallel between Shāh Rukh and Abū Bakr (r. 632-34), Muhammad's companion and successor as the first caliph of Islam. Most depictions of Abū Bakr emphasize his piety, sagacity and liberality. His conversion to Islam at the hands of the Prophet himself, for example, is only illustrated in the Dispersed manuscript, and not found in other Ilkhānid or Timurid sources. Ghiasian's careful attention to divergences from Rashīd al-Dīn's text, introduced in the service of Timurid ideology, reveals that although the author of *Jāmi' al-tawārīkh* acknowledges that Abū Bakr was not the first male convert, the account of his conversion was chosen for illustration by the Timurid artists. In the vast majority of medieval Islamic sources, that accolade is reserved for 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (r. 656-61), Abū Bakr's contender for the caliphate, Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law, and the last of the Rāshidūn caliphs and the first imam of the Shi'a. The Dispersed manuscript states, unequivocally if counterfactually that the first caliph was also the first male convert to Islam. (p. 217)

Abū Bakr's is a carefully crafted portraiture. In one illustration, for example, he is shown manumitting Bilāl, who is subsequently appointed as the first muezzin by the Prophet himself. Like the prophets, he sports a green robe in some illustrations. The opposite applies to 'Alī's three portraitures, all depicting battle scenes — two of the battle of Uhud fought in 624, and a third of the conquest of Khaybar in 628. The ideological freight of the illustrations comes to light, Ghiasian conjectures, in an analogy with the reign of Shāh Rukh. In fact, the illustrators at Shāh Rukh's *kitābkhānah* groom Abū Bakr as their patron's doppelganger, drawing on the first caliph as the rightful heir to augment Shāh Rukh's claim to Tamerlane's mantel. Although wise and pious and perhaps, unlike the Prophet, uninterested in military affairs, Abū Bakr is idealized as a companion par excellence, and Muhammad's true successor. Likewise, the Timurid prince who did not inherit his father's avid appetite for conquest bolstered his realm on other fronts. In cultivating the arts and the sciences, Shāh Rukh confirmed himself as Tīmūr's true heir even though he was not the designated successor, a fifteenth century avatar of the first caliph.

But the energies of the recipients of Shāh Rukh's munificence were engaged in an even more wide-ranging public relations campaign, argues Ghiasian. The end of Timurid ideology was to forge a direct continuity with Īlkhānid rule, albeit now fully Islamized. Shāh Rukh adopted Ghāzān's (r. 1295-1304) title, *pādishāh-i Islām,* and like him, propagated Sunni theology. Islamizing the Persian kings and the lives of Muhammad's predecessors, was another strategy adopted by practitioners, as evidenced in the illustrations of the manuscripts refashioned in his atelier.

Lives of the Prophets: The Illustrations to Hafiz-i Abru's "Assembly of Chronicles" ends with four appendices: A translation of the illustrated episodes of the lives of the prophets based on Hazine 1653, a table of its headings and illustrations, and two long lists detailing the location of those paintings he has identified to be later additions to the Dispersed manuscript; differentiated on the basis of style.

Mohamad Reza Ghiasian has produced a valuable study of premodern Islamic source material, and must be commended not just on account of his insightful findings, but also for his careful and studied approach that illuminates the deliberate and multivalent manipulations exercised by craftsmen and intellectuals in the interest of political and ideological gain. The cultivation of the arts for the forging of a receptive ideational context is on full parade in his engaging study.

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