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THE ART OF CALLIGRAPHY DURING THE TIMURID PERIOD

Sattorov Xurshid Abduvali o‘g‘li
3rd-year doctoral researcher at Fergana State University
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Abstract. This article examines the development of the art of writing during the Timurid period, the formation of calligraphy schools, and their role in science, literature, and book culture. It analyzes the development of calligraphy in the cities of Samarkand and Herat, the process of manuscript production, various styles of Arabic script, and traditions associated with book decoration. The article also explores the contributions of renowned calligraphers, including Sultan Ali Mashhadi and Mir Ali Tabrizi, the patronage provided by Timurid rulers for scholarly and artistic activities, and the influence of Timurid calligraphy on subsequent periods.

Keywords: Timurids, art of writing, calligraphy, bookmaking, manuscript, Nasta'liq, Naskh, Thuluth, Samarkand, Herat, Sultan Ali Mashhadi, Mir Ali Tabrizi, miniature painting, cultural heritage.

Introduction

The Timurid period, spanning the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, represents a significant historical era during which science, literature, architecture, visual arts, and book culture flourished in Central Asia and Khorasan. During this period, the art of writing developed not merely as a means of recording information but also as an artistic discipline expressing sophisticated craftsmanship and aesthetic values. Copies of the Qur’an, scholarly treatises, historical works, and literary manuscripts produced by calligraphers played an important role in the advancement of writing as an art form. As Timurid rulers patronized scholars, poets, calligraphers, and book decorators, cities such as Samarkand and Herat became major centers of manuscript culture.

During the reign of Amir Temur, the development of Samarkand as a political and cultural center created favorable conditions for scholars, craftsmen, and artists from various regions to gather there. The copying of books, preparation of documents, and preservation of religious and scholarly works increased the importance of writing culture in society. Later, during the reigns of Shahrukh, Ulugh Beg, Baysunghur Mirza, and Sultan Husayn Bayqara, the art of bookmaking developed further. In particular, the activities of royal libraries and manuscript workshops in Herat created an important cultural environment that brought together the various stages of manuscript production.

One of the principal branches of the art of writing during the Timurid period was calligraphy. Calligraphy is the art of writing the letters of the Arabic script beautifully, proportionately, and fluently according to established rules. Calligraphers paid particular attention to the shape, size, inclination, spacing, and arrangement of letters along each line. The artistic quality of writing was determined not only by the beauty of individual letters but also by the overall structure of the text, the harmony of the lines, and the decoration of the page. For this reason, calligraphy was regarded as a profession requiring knowledge, patience, and many years of practice.

Several styles of Arabic script were used during this period. Naskh was particularly important for copying religious and scholarly texts in a clear and easily readable form. Thuluth was distinguished by its large letters and decorative forms and was used in headings, architectural inscriptions, and artistic compositions. Ta‘liq and Nasta‘liq occupied a special position in the copying of Persian literature and poetry. Nasta‘liq was distinguished by the graceful curves of its

letters, the elegant flow of its lines, and its artistic proportions. Its formation and refinement represent one of the significant achievements of manuscript culture during the Timurid period.

Mir Ali Tabrizi holds a special place in the history of the development of calligraphic styles. Traditional sources associate him with the formation of the Nasta'liq script. This style subsequently became widespread in Persian literature, poetry, and the production of finely crafted manuscripts. However, rather than attributing the emergence of Nasta'liq exclusively to one individual, it is more appropriate to understand it as the result of the calligraphic traditions and artistic experimentation of the period.

Herat occupied a particularly important position in the flourishing of calligraphy during the Timurid period. Baysunghur Mirza, the son of Shahrukh, was one of the rulers who patronized science, literature, and the art of bookmaking. Calligraphers, painters, illustrators, and other craftsmen worked within the manuscript-producing environment associated with his court. The production of manuscripts involved the coordination of several activities, including copying texts, decorating pages, creating illustrations, and preparing bindings. As a result, books became not only sources of knowledge but also works of considerable artistic value.

One of the most renowned representatives of the Herat school of calligraphy was Sultan Ali Mashhadi. He was active during the second half of the fifteenth century and was recognized as a master of the Nasta'liq script. His work demonstrates the high level of development achieved by calligraphy during the Timurid period. In Sultan Ali Mashhadi's art, the proportional arrangement of letters, the fluidity of lines, and the elegance of writing were of particular importance. His calligraphic expertise served as a model for subsequent generations of calligraphers.

During the Timurid period, the art of writing developed in close connection with literature. The works of Alisher Navoi, Abdurahman Jami, and other literary figures were copied in manuscript form and circulated across different regions. The growing number of works written in Persian and Chagatai Turkic placed new demands on calligraphers, who were expected to reproduce texts accurately, arrange them attractively, and preserve the artistic appearance of books. In particular, the beauty of writing in poetic divans and literary collections enhanced the aesthetic presentation of their contents.

In manuscript production, paper-making, ink preparation, page decoration, gilding, and bookbinding were as important as calligraphy itself. Calligraphers used specially prepared reed pens and inks. The precise cutting of the pen's nib influenced the shape and thickness of the letters. Texts were often arranged within predetermined page margins, with careful attention paid to the spacing between lines and the overall appearance of the manuscript.

Gold leaf, colored ornaments, and miniatures were used in certain luxurious manuscripts. These decorations complemented the contents of the books and elevated them to the status of exceptional works of art.

The art of writing also played an important role in religious life. Copying the Qur'an, preparing religious treatises, and producing written materials for mosques and madrasas were among the principal areas of calligraphic activity. The artistic possibilities of writing were also employed in architectural inscriptions. Such inscriptions could contain Qur'anic verses, religious expressions, the names of rulers, and information about construction dates. The integration of writing with architectural decoration demonstrates that calligraphy during the Timurid period extended beyond the pages of books.

The development of calligraphy during the Timurid period was also closely connected with the cultural and scholarly needs of society. Manuscripts preserved in madrasas and royal libraries facilitated the transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next. Through the copying of

books, works on history, astronomy, mathematics, literature, and religious studies were preserved and redistributed. From this perspective, calligraphy should be regarded not merely as a decorative art but also as a means of preserving written heritage and continuing scholarly traditions.

The historical significance of the art of writing during the Timurid period lies in the refinement of calligraphic standards, the development of manuscript-production traditions, and the activities of highly skilled masters in centers such as Samarkand and Herat. These achievements influenced the subsequent development of calligraphy in Central Asia, Iran, and other regions in later centuries. Today, manuscripts produced during the Timurid period are preserved in museums, libraries, and research institutions, where they serve as important sources for historical, literary, artistic, and paleographic studies.

In conclusion, the art of writing during the Timurid period became a cultural phenomenon of considerable artistic and scholarly significance. Calligraphy, manuscript production, the refinement of script styles, and book decoration developed in close interaction with one another. The cultural environments that emerged in cities such as Samarkand and Herat contributed to the advancement of calligraphers' skills, the reproduction of literary and scholarly works, and the preservation of written heritage. Therefore, studying the art of writing during the Timurid period is important not only for understanding historical heritage but also for gaining a deeper appreciation of the origins of contemporary national culture and manuscript traditions.

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