

Glass Painting in Iran and Italy: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

Glass painting is emerging as one of the most popular trends in crafting. While depicting historic and religious events, craftsmen offer an extensive line of specialty acrylics, stains and accessories for all glass and glazed ceramic. Even though the initial steps are not completely distinctive, the works are rooted back to Italy. However, with the introduction of glass painting in Iran in the medieval age, it customized with Islamic and Iranian culture. The purpose of present research is to determine the visual Islamic-Iranian indexes in glass painting on one hand and contrastive analysis of these elements with traits of Italian visual arts, on the other.

The results indicate that although the reverse glass painting in Iran pursued Italian style in terms of techniques and material application; from content and subject aspect Iranian painting evolved to tremendous visual beauty.

Key words: Glass Painting; Iran; Italy; Iranian Painting; Portrait

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Introduction

Glass painting (Vitrai) is an old form of art whose place of birth has been Apulia, in the southern region of present day Italy. Venice and Moreno Islands in Italy were also regarded as important centers of this craft, especially in the medieval age. With the passage of time, the ecclesiastical art gradually became a popular art hence, penetrated into people's home. This art entered Iran via the port of Venice during the Safavid period and reached its zenith during Qajar era. This painting, unlike other arts, immediately took local flavor after entering the country. The author embarked on this research taking into account the manifestation of the sacred Islamic Iranian art and the development of this new art. The paper tries to identify the native indicators of Iran and Italy Vitrai in order to prove Iranian painters' loyalty to the legacy left behind. The complete information on the aboriginal indicator of this art in Italy and Iran requires a comparative analysis of samples since middle ages and to obtain distinction and similarity between them is likely to be the basis of this research. The research method to achieve the desired results is through analytical and comparative samples and the methods of collecting data were largely through digital libraries. With regard to the research background, the paper focuses on articles about glass museum painting on religious themes, by Mahnaz Shayestehfar (2011), glass painting of religious icon during the Qajar (2011) by Maedeh Mohammadi, icon painting in Vitrai written by Morteza Afshar (2008), paintings of ascension of the Prophet to the present by Zahra Khodadad & Morteza Asadi (2011) coffee house painting, glass painting, features & effectiveness (2009) by Kamran Sokhan Pardaz & Hojato Alah Amani. There are two more articles: one about restoration of Vitrai by Mahdi Kordi (2009) and introduction of Vitrai and practices of conservation & restoration by Ferial Salahshoor (2003). Repair, technical, understanding the structure, composition of material and historical looking on Iranian traces has been discussed. Vitrai (2009) collected by Ferial Salahshoor has historical and descriptive look at Iranian and European works however it lacks any analysis and implementation. On the other side, this collection had borrowed from other authors whereas in the current research, an attempt is to make not only analytical and comparative study but to highlight the historical perspective of the theme.

Vitrai Background in Iran

The exact date of the arrival of this type of painting to Iran is not known. But it is widely believed that this painting was transferred from Venice to rest of the world. This Italian city has been thriving center of glass making and decoration for centuries. Venice was a famous port city and since trade of various commodities from different countries was common there, hence, it may be said that the art entered the southern part of Iran and reached to people via trades. The first known sample of Vitrai in Iran includes beautiful birds & flowers that were often depicted on mirror of plaster ceiling and walls in aristocratic houses in Shiraz and their construction dates back to the Zand period. Over the time, in Qajar era, the painting behind glass & mirror with the pattern of birds and flowers became popular. Then the girl's face with European clothes and perspectives to be added gradually. One of the effective factors for change was imitation of theme, which was popular at the time (Salahshoor, 2009:7).

During the Qajar, the mirror & glass words were written in the form of bilateral monogram and were design with flower, birds and divine names on the edge. Then they were covered by golden and silver papers. The pattern was widely used to decorate the doors of big lords where Rouzeh Khani or the shrine that people go for prayer or fulfill a vow. The pattern also was used during different ceremonies such as Ashura, reaping and sowing (Quoted by Hossein Ayogi). Overall, major these in Vitrai are birds, flowers, religious narrative, drawing monument, holy shrine, epic stories, ancient Persian tale and calligraphy (Sayf, 1993:15).



The Reverse Glass Painting with Ghelyon (Saif, 1993:214)



The Reverse Glass Painting, Rostam with Kaykavous (Saif, 1993:192)

Vitrai Background in Italy

The first sample of Vitrai in Italy dates back to the 3rd century BC that was found during an excavation. Archeologists found containers with colorless glass inside each other that was used as engraved golden plate to decorate. These containers were produced in southern Italy and they were called golden glass. The sample of this container has been kept in the British Museum (Kordi, 2009:2). In the next excavation, archeologists found some medallion in Catacomb (the cellar bodies) of Italy which belongs to the third or fourth centuries AD. In the middle age Italy, using reverse glass painting with the depictions of saints was common practice. This work has been turned in religious ceremonies on the street by priests and people touched them as a blessing. In southern Italy, especially in Naples, the beautiful samples created by celebrated artist (Simon Martini, 1344-1284s) at the beginning of the 14th century. In the 15th century AD, due to high demand for the production of ornamental objects in Europe, Italian artists took the craft to other areas of Europe. About 1500s, the glass work (Vitrai-fiction) culminated in Venice. The city has been header in Europe and eastern Mediterranean area and it turned into a vast commercial network, hence, reverse glass paintings were sent to Far East markets and countries surrounding the Black Sea (Salahshoor, 2009:22). With the start of the renaissance and other developments in the 16^s Europe, the use of sheet metal and color had been common techniques. A great Italian artist (Luca Giordano) left some reverse glass painting. In later years, Vitrai was influenced by Rokoko & Baroque's art and got colorful and they also used mirror around their painting. The 17th century saw yet another development where artists found a solution by mixture of wax and color in order to make shinny and clear composition that along with gold and silver sheet turned sparkly and beautiful (Pakbaz, 2004:153). In Italy too, the glass painting gradually became a popular art and went to the public houses. This style has continued even today but not in the way it was popular in the early 19th century.



Broken bowl with the image of shepherdess & sheep Roman Empire

Techniques & Colors used in Reverse Glass Painting in Iran

In Iran, initially, panes of glass were used for reverse painting themes and for designing on a glass. For that matter, craftsmen used different methods such as Charmeh, Gorteh, and Chips. The alternative method was plotted on the paper under glass and then it was placed on the surface (Salahshoor, 2009:17). The method of coloring the themes started with lighting and landscaping and that followed with colored background. The color used for the reverse glass painting was water soluble and oil color that was also mixed with white color for corporeality (Sinka). After preparing the color, they firstly used water soluble color on the surface of a panel and then used oil color for protection. In order to preparing the glass, they covered the surface with starch glue, so that color sits on the panel properly (Ramazan Mahi, 2005:74). It is worth to mention that for drawing clothes of a Shia Imam, silk fibers and golden sheet were stocked on a place to give it more visibility. For the calligraphy they used aforementioned techniques (Afshari, 2008:31). During the later Safavid era, tobacco was used to cover reverse glass work. The papers were straw and yellow and were gathered from the house by painter. For protecting the lines had been written on the pane, it was covered by arc oil. Then to ensure, they covered the painting by tin. It was also useful for protecting the painting from the insect attack (Salahshoor, 2009:18).

Techniques & Colors used in Italian Vitrai

It has been describe by a 14th century Italian painter (cennino cemnini 1440-1370) that Italian artist first polished the surface by carbon then cleansed it by water and after dying, they used white part of egg on the surface and then stuck golden sheet on it. For drawing lines on a golden sheet, they used font needle made of horn or ivory. On empty places, they left red, black and ultramarine color with oil bases. Another design was implemented on thin parchment. Then, they made holes around it and filled by coal dust on the paper that was pasted on golden page, designed line transferred to the gold and the plane engraving by needle eventually (Tampsoon, 1960). Currently, Italian artists use gelatin instead of white part of the egg (Rayan, 2006). Another method is (Fanx Gilding), in this

way, they stick paper painted behind the glass and paint around it with oil color. Working with this method are very delicate and glorious (Rayan, 2006). They use oil color for painting design that it has been described by Antonia Da Piza in 14th century. Later, other artists used color seeds which were used in the reverse painting. The glass for painting on the canvas in 16th century, Italian painters covered the rear part of the work with silver and golden flat (Torboun, 2006).

Features of Reverse Glass Painting in Iran

Table1- Comparative Features of Reverse Glass Painting during Qajar and Pahlavi

Feature	Qajar & Pahlavi
Implication picture	Literacy-religious-reticulum icon-reticulum face-landscape-inanimate nature (flower-bird), narrative(historical-epic)
Composition	Following traditional Iranian painting
State of statue	Artificial-disregard the size & proportions-disregard perspective-large eyes-staring glances-bring up main character
Figure color	Conflict between hot & cold color-utilization of azure in the fields behind bright & clear reddish color-utilization of warm & orange color
Technique	The use of gold leaf in the background & technique coloring-utilization of dark color for background & light color for object

Features of Reverse Glass Painting in Italy

Table 2- Features of Reverse Glass Painting in middle age and early centuries

Feature	Early Centuries	Middle Age
Implication picture	Routine include shepherds & sheep-reticulum a face-inanimate nature-scenery	The birth of Christ, including religious images of Christ ,to cross Christ, virgin Mary, holy family
Composition	Without plan & perspective-all components & elements in a shot	Divided classical Greece & ancient Rome (Pyramid, triangle)
State of statue	The figure of standing & curved statue which is reminder of an ancient Greece & Rome sculptures	Following common drawing in Italy like: Byzantine, renaissance, baroque
Figure color	Single color	Using a variety of colors especially conflicts hot & cold color like green & red & gold as a flash & flicker of light
Technique	Using gold between two layers of glass for painting	The use of golden leaf in the background & coloring

Result

Although the reverse glass painting had been borrowed from Italy but it has been composed thoroughly with Iranian traditional methods. In fact, this art carries the changing nature of the Iranian painting which has been compatible with historical art.

Recommendatory Notes

- The term for pouring wheat
- Covering glass with plaster & make adhesiveness for painting
- He lived in 1370-1440, was Giotto's student & learned painting technique, he has eternal work written in 1437, the Ilibrodall Arte described the technique of the reverse glass painting
- This color is produced by mixture of Chinese dust, sand, sodium sulphate & carbon
- It's mercury that reflects by light
- It was made by burning oil, wool & other materials

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