

The Devine imagination in the Islamic Era Persian Painting: Ikhwan al-Safa's Views

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Abstract

Imagination and fancy are two specific terms often used in the Islamic philosophy and mysticism. In other words, these two play a substantial role in making the painting elements without which the painting analysis would be partly impossible. In the Iranian painting, the paradise is depicted elaborately which reflects the non-materialistic universe while at the same time possessing the natural shapes. The present study, on one hand, reviews the divine imagination of Ikhwan al-Safa and on the other hand, it deals with the role of visualization and imagination in creating beautiful space in the Iranian painting. Surveys show that the Iranian painters adopt the natural beauties and then mix them with the divine imagination to create awesome painting. The current study has been conducted based on library and documents research.

Key words: Devine Imagination; Visualization Power; Geometry of Imagination; Ikhwan al-Safa; Islamic Elements; Iranian Painting.

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Introduction

The Islamic era Iranian art has always incorporated some of the unique features such as arts, architecture, painting, calligraphy, music and craft. All of these features help the Iranian art distinguish from the arts of other cultures. Dazzling art and culture during the Islamic period bore inner and fundamental unity, which originated not only from one source but the detailed culture, was closely associated with each other. Religion, art, philosophy, literature, mysticism formed a body that could benefit each other. In fact, religion and philosophy inspired the art and other cultural elements alike. Aligned with such an interaction could create a work of art as well as its theorization. The works of this period cannot be examined in isolation as they reflect their nature like a mirror. For instance, the thoughts of Farabi cannot be separated from his music competence. Likewise, Ibn Sina's thoughts without intuitive stories or Behzad's paintings cannot be seen in isolation of Jami's mysticism. Molla Mohsen Faiz Kashani also falls in the same category when it comes to his *Razo Niaz* apart from his musical competence. It is worth to mention that the fundamentals of western philosophy were not utilized while analyzing the Islamic era Iranian arts. Probably, it was because of the fact that the Islamic philosophy was dominant at the time of the Iranian art creation. In other words, the art creation used to have totally different perspective of western art and artists. As such, studies carried out in the field of Iranian art must have taken the advantage of "Infinite Ocean" of the Islamic art wisdom introduced by Ikhwan al-Safa as well as his divine imagination. Initially, the research intended to study the opinion of contemporary traditionalist philosophers on the wisdom of Islamic Art. However, in the course of study, researcher was attracted by the Islamic Philosophy of Ikhwan al-Safa. Many contemporary Islamic philosophers have been influenced by the ideas of Safa whose *Epistles* in 52 volumes is considered as the first Islamic encyclopedia published in the world. The author also found it an incentive to study Ikhwan al-Safa and his views in terms of art. It is believed the Greek philosophy had much influence on Safa who attempted to purify the philosophy and adapt it with the position of holy Prophets in order to juxtapose philosophy and Sharia in the Islamic world. Henry Corbin⁷ believes, "epistles have a major impact on all scholars and Sufis in Islam. Since the first Islamic art is registered with Ikhwan al-Safa, it is unavoidable to mention his impact on traditional researchers and philosophers. As a matter of fact, Safa's theories about the formation and creation of art that deal with the whole process, requires a more comprehensive study. Some of his ideas discussed here include his worldviews, wisdom, place of humanity, universe and the forces of the soul, or imaginative power and imagination. Since this study focuses on the divine imagination and Islamic painting, we pinpoint the impact of Ikhwan al-Safa in the creation of Islamic era art specifically in painting figure.

Methodology

This research has been conducted specifically based library resources. The research could analyze the aspect reading and researching the divine imagination on the Islamic Persian painting.

Acquaintance with Ikhwan al-Safa

Some consider Ikhwan al-Safa as a neo-Plato while some Pythagoreans call him Muslim. Probably, the huge impact of these thoughtful Muslims and new thinking on the history of philosophy could be valuable and reliable reference in the phenomenological perception change (revolution) of art philosophy. The current traditionalist beliefs ignorantly or consciously have entered into this school of thought and as a main theorist of Islamic art and architecture, some relics or letter in philosophy or holy science have now been appeared. A careful insight into the ideas of traditionalists' followers shows they were greatly influenced by Ikhwan al-Safa. The most reliable reference in identifying of Safa except of *Epistles* is Abu Hayyan Tawhidi's *AL-AMTAA WAL-MUANASSA* which was written in the late 4th century that was exactly matched with Ikhwan's life time. Abu Hayyan earmarked each section with mentioning his name. He replies to Abou Abdolah Hossein Ebne Sadan, the friend and minister of Samsam Adoleh Bouyehi (Ale bouyeh) about the name of Ikhwan al-Safa: Abu Hayyan, in his speech, with the minister says: they are the members of a group which gathered because of honesty, affection & they believe in holy

stuff & purity therefore they have chosen the religion that in their point of views help them to do u-turn & have turning point to reach the real heaven. The Ikhwan al-Safa believed that since religious laws are mixed with puerility (ignorance) & taints with illusive, there isn't any solution to purify and baptize them without philosophy. According to them, when the Ijtihad philosophy of Greek is mixed with Arabic religious rules, they can achieve high level of spirituality. The minister then asked Abu Hayyan about the nature of sacred vote in religious rules & philosophy. His reply showed the point of views of Ikhwan al-Safa: According to their attitude, religious rules are for patients while philosophy is for healthy people to provide its incrustation and which help them finally reach to the healthy condition. This approach continues to have profound impact in order to fit and make new emerging proof of the holy Quran and philosophical solutions. Abou Eshagh Kandi, Farabi, Abol Hasan Ameri, Abou Tamam Yousef Ebne Mohammad Nayshabari, Akhwan Alsafa were the group of writers & mystic philosophers in 3rd & 4th centuries in Baghdad and Basra who professed the unity of thought & belief system of that time between Muslims & non-Muslims. Oliver Limen complimented Ikhwan al-Safa as: a brother of purity and innocence as his name shows in Arabic language. He is highly thoughtful of the people, researched about the developing of feeling and emotions as well as interests of logical attitude of Arab Islamic thoughts. He was also a favorite of Ismailis who claimed that he belonged to this group because their minds were made up of combinations, mysteries and secrets. They pursued to act mysteriously and in fact their thoughts showed beyond the superficial study. Ikhwan was well-known in the Middle East in the same way as Hegel, Kant, Walter in the West (Limen, 12011:385). Islamic thinkers & philosophers have talked a lot about the position of Ikhwan and his importance in the formation of Islamic thought. Thus, we suffice scrutinizing about Ikhwan because we focus mostly on his divine imagination in the Islamic art.

Ikhwan al-Safa's Ideology

One of the main philosophical features of Ikhwan is his comprehensive analysis of various phenomenon of universe in which he believes there is innate integrity. It is a preface to enter the discussion of art and beauty and while, reviewing his opinions, wisdom, philosophy and human are prioritized. Ikhwan's attitude to science and wisdom not only is an essential entry to his ideology, but a main feature in which the other researchers wish to pay attention to (Bokhari 2010: 65). In fact, the attitude toward science and wisdom is shadowed by the approach of sixth Shia imam (Iman Ja'afar Sadegh) hence, Ikhwan cites from Quran and Hadiths which shows his attitude in Kafi principle which is important reference of Shia. The Prophet Mohammad stated that God created wisdom from his light and from the right side of heaven, and then God asked wisdom to go and come back so it did then lord stated I created you with might and you have privilege over other creatures. This narration is crucial for proving the presence of wisdom in universe hierarchy by Ikhwan. He had to accept some common philosophical ideas in order to present his opinions. Or in order to mix it with Islamic ideas, he had to go through innovation. Both concepts are clear in Ikhwan' works. This contemplation in his works make it completely obvious that he adopted the Greek science and in conceptualization used Islamic and Quran concepts. Based on the Flutin concept which includes God, wisdom and soul Ikhwan very professionally extended it to nine concepts such as: creator wisdom, soul, raw materials, nature, body, sphere, four basic elements and creatures of this universe which is divided into 3 groups: minerals, plants, animals (Taslimi 2011: 221).

Wisdom in Ikhwan al-Safa's views

In Ikhwan al-Safa's view, the best gift for human is the wisdom. Accordingly, the wisdom has some features as well, the authenticity of property, accuracy, knowing facts and competency of the best choice. From the Islamic perspective, a wise man is literary a means for accepting the divine truths (Borkohat 2012:133). The best in attitude, the best in ethics, the best in behavior and the most noble, the cleanest, the most general and the most durable were opted. From his perspective, stability is part of the ruling system which prevents us from chaos. In his view, the wisdom bears common noun with two definitions: First, the creature God created which is the essence of extensive divine (philosophical definition). Second, sensual powers that are the object of actions like thought, visible, speech & predictor (public definition). These definitions by Ikhwan are aimed to define the existence and all creatures. According to him: there is a derivative of the mind's casual connection, an aspect of the find and help (understanding) & whatever the case and essentially turned out to be the cause of his being both devoid of three causes: Sensory powers, mediate one of intellectual forces, think like human visibility, clean & recognize illusion or argument in their ideas. Since, there isn't any way for reaching information & knowledge, wisdom is the most substantial aspect in gaining the knowledge (Ikhwan al-Safa 2002:192). They are called Axiomatic¹⁸ or Aristotle's Cognitive science¹⁹ as "early wisdoms"²⁰ (they are reasoning cases essentially proof the basis of proof including all of the components) Scholars have already believed that reason or wisdom has two aspects: instinct and educational. The instinctive wisdom is the one all human beings innately possess and the educational wisdom, which is called in some versions of others, acquired intellect, capable of explaining and understanding, not by nature, but mediated. And what wisdom is acquired is through education and science. Further, sciences are divided into: theoretical and affirmative. Theoretical sciences are sciences of thought through which we find out action, stealth and not the rise to the movement of breath that all rational soul is derived. The science of numbers such as geometry and composition is the product of human thought. And human sciences develop through reading books or stories. There is a spiritual connection between the wisdom and the creation of art because of the wisdom, inspiration is not working, but the other person opens the doors of beauty into existence (Burckhardt, 2012: 133) .

Human in Ikhwan al-Safa's views

Art, architecture and beauty that all theological schools define have relationship with human beings. Artistic creativity is the main aspect in creating beauty in its perception, imagination and human reasoning. Accordingly, in the Muslim perspective, the man and powers of his soul are the obligatory introduction into the philosophy of

art and beauty (Bolkhari, 2010: 71) From Ikhwan's perspective, human is the fruit of the universe and of His supreme forms in the universe existing under the moon, by means of which God is able to improve to the heavens after the death. He is a caliph of God on earth and in the dignity of the priesthood and its materiality, the clergy spirit, viability and the materiality of the body, the ability to die. Ikhwan expresses about the duality of man: "Beware that there is integrity between physical body, soul and spirit. Therefore the physical body is willing to remain in this earthy world." (Safa, 2002: 221) Contemplation in Ikhwan Safa's works shows that most human features are the benefits of the divine wisdom. The reason is that the primary means of man's wisdom, because the soul of all, the active intellect is imparted to the soul and confirmed by the divine being and has the knowledge of all creatures (Bolkhari, 2010: 72) In his perspective, three aspects of human cognition are considered: first, considering the state of the human body i.e., components, by members of his physical attributes; second, in terms of powers of self-esteem as well as single and special characters and third, in view of the activities of the body and the soul is the opinion of the ethics, actions, gestures, industry practices, and sounds like them. In his opinion, ego has three aspects: sensual, animal and rational, which are led by the wisdom. The main difference between Ikhwan and the other Islamic scholars is that he added the visual powers to divine spiritual power which is exemplified in Qur'anic verse *al-Alaq*. The holy Qur'an says: "Read in the name of your Lord who created man of wisdom, and recite the Holy Quran. Your Lord who taught by the pen is the most merciful" (Bolkhari, 2010: 74). Expressing Ikhwan's opinions pertaining to the universal hierarchy and understanding of the art and craft of man's place in the world are not possible. According to his thought in the field of fusion he was somewhat influenced by the Pythagorean and Platonic currents, an aspect of his analytical approach described in much of the world, Platonic and Pythagorean approach, especially the position of the viewpoint cited by them. Basic principles of Ikhwan's opinion is the phase of the world, which is the rule of grace Neoplatonism and influenced by the fact that God is like the sun which shed light on all the creatures. That is Allah, the One Almighty Creator of the universe is that all the plurality of illumination he emerges and according to the appearance, movement formed to rule on the wisdom. The sense of God and creator of the first and last things they know and believe that God has a sense of things in mind, or body image influenced Ikhwan. The invention and using the Pythagorean doctrine, and of course with the teaching Pythagorean, and of course, using the Qur'an and the Hadith, the teachings confirmed, based on the theoretical foundations of number, the emergence of a plurality of unity, with the ratio of a number of analysis and interpretation of their numbers. Ikhwan stated, analysis and descriptions offered on the understanding of the science of numbers. In his attitude, there is relationship between the number of species and the creation of the heavens and the universe and the four natural elements (cold, hot, dry, wet), which govern the nature.

Imagination in Ikhwan al-Safa's views

The core of this research, discusses about the spiritual power of the soul, the imaginative power²¹ that is wide and rich with art and beauty. Ikhwan believes in five powers for the soul. These are the three branches of powers: imaginative, thoughtful, and memorial. The proportion of fourth power to the ego is the same as interpreter to the king, that the power of rational. The fifth power of the ego as the minister of strategy and policy to followers, which Ikhwan has called it *Saneh* system and how it works in the craft of writing. Although based on the Ikhwan's views, all the powers were implemented for the creation and expression of *Saneh*, but in the realm of art-industry two powers i.e. *imaginative* and *Saneh* play fundamental roles. From Ikhwan's point of views, the universe affairs are sensible, rational or divine. Tangible things or objects that are current forms are perceived by senses i.e. sense of imaginative forms that remain to God, things which are perceived not to distract and not to think, but arguments that led to acknowledgment and acceptance of intellects are perceived as geometric rules and laws of logic. Forces of the eight branches from Ikhwan's vision: five senses, imaginative, thoughtful and memory, but people differ in goodness and intelligence. On the other hand, if it is correct perception, the perception of the monitor to conditions such as light, front and needs. Ikhwan believed that, there is evidence accidents and consistency. For example, light and darkness is essential for the proof of shapes, sizes and colors and understanding why these things are sometimes slip or error. That is also true of the other senses. The imagination power from Ikhwan's vision has amazing features and functions. First, they are able to summon images of sensations after their absence. Second, the imagination power is able to visualize the real and unreal things. In this case, all that would be able to combine these forms of writing and some connection to others, as one example of abstraction able camels, while the Article on uprisings or Ross palm tree imagine a palm tree on a camel or a horse with two wings image. After mentioning these instances, Ikhwan illustrated the action of painter and illustrators as: "These are similar to the work of artists who illustrate the roles of gender and killing demons and wonders of the sea, which is part of their roles as truth or unreal." (Bolkhari, 2010: 98) Other example from the Ikhwan's perspective but since it does not have much relationship to painting but we suffice to prove his views. Elsewhere, Ikhwan describes this as, "So the sensible images from the sensor to the imaginative reach, all of them collects and delivers the power of Imagination. It cleans the images of imaginative power and truth from falsehood, right from wrong and harmful to beneficial apart and then sent to the memory system. The power of images and you need to keep reminding them is re-summoned does not exist. In short, the soul or ego is capable of understanding the nature of the sensible and reasonable persons. Imagination in the meantime is the work of human motivation amazed at seeing the essences of the world and also assists higher forms of recreation, self-purification and purification of the soul if it is possible. Most Muslims in the realm of the soul's journey and ascension to find function and meaning of art and the artistic imagination is today (Bolkhari, 2010: 108).

Conclusion

With aforementioned discussion especially the viewpoints of Ikhwan, we conclude that the Islamic philosophy was much influenced by the Greek philosophy which is completely obvious from the works ranging from Abu Eshagh Kendi to Sadra Shirazi. Although, the present paper has specifically dealt with Ikhwan's views, but a glance on other Islamic philosophers clarifies that the position of Greek in Islamic philosophy was at initial stage not the objective. The emergence of Islam generated three movements in the world: first, new innovation in the Greek methodology, which started from Kendi and reached to its apex at the time of Farabi and Ibn Sina. The second movement is completely verbal which led to various clans in world of Islam such as Asharite, Motazilite, and Shiite which looked for sharia and proved the concepts. The third was enthusiastic to the obvious and hidden beauties in Greek philosophy; it also was the follower of Islamic knowledge. Ikhwan and the Shiite philosophy of Qoramateh and Fatimid Ismaili had something in common but very distinct and unique. According to Shia thought, the rule has been superior intellect, Quran and Hadith and documentation among them is the undisputed ruler. Ikhwan's structure of mind has integrity though some critics consider Epistles contains scattered issues, but there is no doubt that this dispersion is finally towards unity. Ikhwan's theoretical foundations of art are influenced by Platonic perspective. Sense and common sense in the mind and language as Greek which shows they fully accepted the Greek opinion and to have common sense. They are all manifestations of artificial human vision is both scientific and practical craft. Thinking, blacksmithing, painting, music, etc. are among the figures. These philosophers believe in the sociological perspective as well as interesting theoretical grounds cited for painting and music. The imaginary Iranian miniature paintings during the Islamic period are one example of such an obvious perspective. These spirituality figures are based on education requiring much intellectual and spiritual journey. The original founders of chivalry and Ikhwan associations emerged and developed in *Fotovat Nameh* as the main argument against the wisdom and generosity of the Islamic civilization was the craft or art. The art is quite a legal and philosophical. The book reflects the philosophy of science and human depth to the imitation of God and the wisdom of science with illumination means and cultivation. Ikhwan's view about beauty, futurists are quite geometrical. Their beauty of proportion and balance integrates the components of a known compound. Although this definition has its roots in the Greek philosophy, approach to the Muslim identity is quite Quran. In short, the current article is the beautiful allegory of the love of art and beauty in the Encyclopedia of the Ikhwan. "So know that in the end the love lives, be aware that love is buried inside the soul of human and express your love to the beautiful objects which awake people from the ignorance, and consider as training to rise and elation of physical self-evident to the rational ego to move from darkness to enlightenment. All the virtues and beauties that people observe around shall make them contemplate in order to reach to God" (Bolkhari, 2010: 219).

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