

MIDDLE EAST STUDIES IN ACTION: ANNUAL UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH POSTER SESSION

Temür, Painter of Politics

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Persia in the post-Mongol era is an ambiguous concept. The area is riddled with different ethnicities, religions, and seemingly endless claims to power. The Timurid Empire is no exception to this trend. Temür rises to power in 1370 using Central Asian nomadic styles of ruling and quickly dominates this geographic region inhabited by a plethora of ethnicities and religions. He understands the volatility of maintaining a large, diverse empire and takes key steps in securing his “united” rule. The key political move that this paper examines is Temür’s commissioning of art. The art endorsed by the Timurid government surrounds the illumination of manuscripts and the illustration of literature. The Timurids conveyed two main messages to those living under their empire. The first message targets the main ethnic groups: Iranians, Mongols and Turks, justifying Temür as their rightful leader. The second message is delivered to the ethnic minorities, instilling fear to prevent rebellions and ensure subjugation. This paper will demonstrate that the Timurids decided to present political messages through cultural media because they understood the how literature and art were imperative in shaping identity.

This poster examines two pieces of art that demonstrate the physical depiction of the Iranians from the *Shahnameh*. Scenes are present where both the Iranian and Turanian (Turkic) armies battle, but their physical characteristics are identical. The Timurids needed to ensure Mongol support of their rule as well, thus this poster looks to a depiction of Chingiz Khan as a Caucasian man with physical descriptions akin to Persians in a scene from the *Jami’ al Tawarikh*. To establish the dominance over minorities such as the Armenians and the Chinese, the paper analyzes an illustration by Siyah Qalam, where two demons resembling Chinese folklore are enslaved and forced to entertain by playing the Armenian *Kamancha* and serving tea from Chinese teaware. ✂

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Introduction

Temür rises to power in 1370 using Central Asian nomadic styles of ruling and quickly dominates the geographic region of Persia which is inhabited by a plethora of ethnicities and religions. He understands the volatility of maintaining a large, diverse empire and takes key steps in securing his "united" rule. The key political move that this research examines is the Timurid Empire's commissioning of art. The art endorsed by the Timurid government involves the illumination of manuscripts and literature.

Research Questions

- What is unique about Timurid Art?
- What messages does the art commissioned by the Timurid Empire convey and to whom?
- What are the impacts of Timurid Art on Persian society and culture?

Methodology

- This project examines four pieces of Timurid Art:
- Two pieces from the *Shahnameh* (Ruyzoghori)
 - One piece from the *Jami' al Tawarikh*
 - One piece from the collection of *Siya Gulam*

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Results

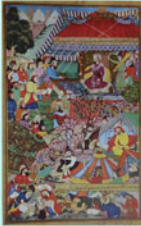
Timurid Art combines aspects of the three majority ethnic groups within the Empire: Turks, Mongols, and Persians. The art often involves Persian literature illuminated in a Central Asian style. The inverse—depicting Turkic and Mongolian literature in a Persian artistic style—is also found. Less common, however, is the commission of art that utilizes cultural aspects of the ethnic minorities of the Empire such as the Armenians, Kurds, Georgians, and Arabs, illustrating them in a subservient nature.



Shahnameh (Ruyzoghori). Rustam Slays Baresi, (c. 1430), Golestan Palace Museum, Iran.



Shahnameh (Ruyzoghori). Iranian and Turanian Armies in Battle, (c. 1430), Golestan Palace Museum, Iran.



Jami' al Tawarikh. Chingiz Khan Drinks Milk Water, (c. 1396), Golestan Palace Museum, Iran.



Siya Gulam. Performing Dörmek, fl. 1490-1507?, Topkapı Sarayı Library, Turkey.

Conclusion

The Timurids employed art as a medium to convey two political messages:

- The first is directed towards the ethnic majorities of the Empire. The goal was to establish legitimacy of the Timurid government. By depicting pieces integral to Persian identity in a Central Asian fashion, the Timurids create a sense of cultural understanding between these key ethnic groups within the empire. Ultimately, the Timurids justified themselves as the rightful rulers of this diverse Persia by doing so.
- The second message targets the ethnic minorities. The Timurid Empire viewed these groups as a threat to their rule, therefore the goal was to instill their dominance and prevent rebellions through fear. Pieces, such as the one from *Siya Gulam*, depict minority culture as imprisoned, establishing their subjugation.

Works Cited

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Rachel T. Howes (History) for guiding and supporting this project.