



FORGERIES III. OF ISLAMIC ART

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Medieval Arabic and Persian literature contain numerous anecdotes about the forging of manuscripts, but it was only in the late 19th century that forging Persian works of Islamic art became a widespread phenomenon. In a few cases this activity may have been due to a genuine reverence for the past. In most cases, however, it was a response to the high prices paid by museums and collectors, and of all types of Islamic art, Persian art seems to be the one most often forged.

Illustrated manuscripts comprise one of the most popular categories for forgery, undoubtedly because the illustrations appealed to Western tastes. Sometimes forgers simply fixed up the illustrations in old manuscripts. This is the case with the well-known copy of *Manāfe'-e ḥayawān*, the Persian translation of 'Obayd-Allāh b. Jebrā'īl Ebn Boḳtīšū's (q.v.) Arabic bestiary, *Ketāb ṭabā'e'al-ḥayawān wa ḵawāṣṣehā wa manāfe' a'żā'ehā*, in the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York (MS. M. 500). According to the colophon, the manuscript was copied at Marāḡa in the late 690s/1290s, but the latest study (Schmitz, 1997, pp. 9-23) suggests that restorers added thirteen paintings as well as overpainting or inpainting many more of the 103 miniatures in the



manuscripts. On stylistic grounds, Schmitz suggested that this work was done shortly before the manuscript was offered for sale in the opening decade of the 20th century (Schmitz, 1997, p. 12).

In other cases, restorers added paintings to an unfinished manuscript that had blanks in the text block awaiting illustration. This is the case with a copy of the *Šāh-nāma*, purchased in 1929 from a London art dealer by the New York Public Library (Spencer MS. 2; Schmitz, 1992, pp. 105-11). According to the colophon, the manuscript was copied by Moḥammad-‘Alī for Moḥammad-Šarīf in 1023/1614, probably at Shiraz (ibid, p. 105). Many of the forty-four paintings are immediately recognizable as Safavid pastiches of the illustrations in a famous manuscript, the Bāysonḡorī *Šāh-nāma* (q.v.), made for the Timurid prince Ġiāt-al-Dīn Bāysonḡor (q.v.) in 833/1430 and now in the Golestān Palace Museum in Tehran, and the Spencer manuscript was thus cited as key evidence for a Timurid revival in the Safavid period. The latest research (Schmitz 1992, p. 106) shows, however, that many of the paintings use pigments first isolated in the 18th or 19th century, such as chrome green, Naples yellow alizarin, and barium sulfate, and on stylistic grounds she suggested that the paintings were added to the manuscript in the first quarter of the 20th century. This new dating, in turn, can be used to redate other single paintings in the same style, including two depicting a standing youth in the collection of Sadruddin Aga Khan in Geneva (Ir.M.80) and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (M73.5.24; Schmitz 1992, pp. 106, 108). It also brings under question the whole notion of a so-called Timurid revival in the Safavid painting. In yet other cases forgers created whole manuscripts, as with a copy of the *Andarz-nāma* dated Jomādā I 483/July 1090.

Textiles form another major medium of forgery. The most discussed type is a large number of complex drawloom silks attributed to the patronage of the Buyid dynasty. They have been the subject of a long and vitriolic debate since some fragments were uncovered at Ray in 1925. A study of their inscriptions carried out in 1989 raised such grave doubts about their authenticity that a group of 16 were selected for radiocarbon analysis using an accelerator mass spectrometer (Blair, Bloom, and Wardwell, 1992, pp. 1-41). This testing confirmed the doubts raised by the epigraphic analysis and showed that only a handful of textiles, mainly but not exclusively those associated with the 1924-25 finds at Ray and with inscriptions naming known historical figures, is medieval in date (10th-12th century). Most are forgeries produced in the early 20th century just after the initial finds. Some, including those with very



strange iconography and over-informative inscriptions, were made after 1950 since they contain radioactive isotopes produced by nuclear explosions and tests.

Forged carpets, especially Safavid animal carpets and Kermān vase carpets, have also appeared on the art market since the 1920s, but they are generally easier to detect than the notorious Ushak and Transylvanian carpets produced by the Romanian masterweaver Theodor Tuduc (Erdmann, pp. 81-85; Bennett, pp. 86-88). Silk carpets woven in the 20th century based on 17th century textile patterns have also been accepted as genuine Safavid work, as with a small fragment showing a falconer and now in the Meyer-Müller Collection, Zurich (“The Falconer,” *Hali* 53, 1990, p. 113).

Among metalwares, the piece whose authenticity has been questioned most frequently is a silver salver in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts bearing the incised name of the Saljuq sultan Alp Arslān (q.v.) and the date 459/1066-67 (*Survey of Persian Art*, pp. 2500-1 and pls. 1347-48), partly because of the long and muddled titles in its inscription (Blair and Bloom 1996, p. 372). It can be compared to several other questionable objects of gold and silver that appeared on the art market in the 1940s and 1950s. Appendix III in Atıl, Chase and Jett (1985) lists several in the Freer Gallery of Art.

These metalwares were designed to be taken as medieval pieces, and should therefore be distinguished from the begging bowls of steel overlaid with gold that were made in the late 18th and 19th centuries on the model of those by the renowned early 17th century Safavid craftsman Hāji ‘Abbās. One in the Hermitage (*Masterpieces of Islamic Art*, no. 118), for example, bears his name, but it also carries the date 1207/1792-93 and its decoration is not Safavid but consistent in style with the date.

Ceramics have also been forged and faked since the late 19th century (Watson, p. 39). Curators in Europe were already aware of these forgeries at the beginning of the 20th century and reiterated dire warnings in the *Mittheilungen des Museen-Verbandes*, a journal devoted to fakes and forgeries that was privately circulated among museum staff. In the 1901 volume, for example, C. H. Read, then director of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, warned of the fake Persian lusterwares in circulation, and a report the following year describing how two potters in the Persian pavilion of the 1900 Paris World Exhibition had been making reproduction Persian tiles and warned that their work might soon be taken for genuine medieval pieces



(Watson, p. 42). Faked and forged examples of *champlevé* ware also appeared in the 1920s and 1930s. This type of ceramics was known variously as Garrus or Yastkand ware, after the district or town in Kurdistan where many examples were reportedly found. Dealers called them *gabrī* wares, mistakenly believing that they were connected with Zoroastrians, and many of the faked or forged bowls are decorated with bizarre figures. Museums and collectors traditionally pay higher for complete pieces, and many faked ceramics have been made by cobbling together genuine fragments from several different pieces.

Virtually no category of Persian has been immune to faking, particularly after the 1931 Exhibition of Persian Art in London made Persian art popular and expensive. Woodwork was no exception (Blair 1992, pp. 43-44), as with a pair of carved and painted doors in the Freer Gallery of Art (no. 35.1; *Survey of Persian Art*, pl. 1461). The carving is odd, with peculiar sharp edges; the inscription is bizarre, with unusual interlacing and decoration. A carbon-14 test carried out in 1951 provided a modern date. Some rock crystals, too, are questionable, as with a pendant in the Abegg Foundation in Riggisberg (no. 6.15.66) and a mace head in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (1981.86; Blair 1998). Many of these pieces are associated with the patronage of the Buyid dynasty (Bloom, forthcoming).

Scholars use different methods to uncover fakes and forgeries. Traditional art historical criteria include stylistic, iconographic and paleographic analysis. More recently, other scientific methods have been introduced, including pigment analysis, thermoluminescence dating, petrocarbon analysis, and radiocarbon dating. None of these scientific methods, however, can be used without establishing a standard of authenticity, and a combination of methods is often most useful in establishing fakes and forgeries.

In most cases forgers were simply reacting to market demand. As soon as the few textiles excavated at Ray sold for relatively high prices in the 1930s, forgers responded by producing more and often larger or complete pieces. Once an object was swiftly and definitively shown to be a fake, as was the case with the *Andarz-nām*; however, the forgers turned to other media. Art historians are often reluctant to state their doubts publicly, perhaps assuming that silence implies condemnation of authenticity. Forgers continue to be ready to supply the burgeoning art market.



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