



Application of Saffron in Calligraphy and Book-Layout, Case study: Some Hand written Iranian Manuscripts

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Abstract

Saffron has some coloring characteristics which make it suitable to be used in the art of book-layout. In this research I have tried to introduce a number of saffron-flavored hand-written Iranian manuscripts with a variety of religious and literary topics as well as their specialized features and place of preservation. As will be discussed in detail, saffron has been utilized for the page layout, marginal decoration as well as for other instances. Finally a detailed review has been given about the proposed content analysis, period and the manner of using saffron in these invaluable works.

Keywords: Hand written manuscript, book layout, pigment, saffron.

Introduction

A greater part of our cultural heritage is in manuscripts, books and documents which have been left behind by our ancestors and that remain memorabilia for centuries. Lapse of these copies means lapsing from our past. As such, it is our responsibilities to know materials forming those manuscripts and to provide the best conditions for their preservations by applying actual restoration materials. Materials used in layout those books include both organic and mineral colors. Among organic colors, one can point to saffron.

Saffron is produced from dried stigma of plants scientifically called *Crocus sativus* L. and is considered as the costliest spice in the world. Its higher cost is due to activities involved in its planting, keeping and harvesting as well as segregating processes¹.

Each stigma of saffron has a weight of about 2mg and 2-3 cm or more length. Stigma has deep red color and each flower contains three stigmas. Saffron pigments, in fact, are from carotenoid containing carboxyl. Color characteristic of saffron is due to its crocetin. A number of researches have showed that 94% of total saffron crocetin is in glycoside form whereas 6% of the remaining exists in the form of free crocetin².

Saffron has a lot of applications including food preparations³ and layout of books. The book layout is attributed to a collection of art that is used in decoration and preparation of hand written manuscripts. History of book designing and illustrating of manuscripts in Iran goes back to Sassanid and Manichean eras. Advancement of Manicheans in the book layout caused this tradition to continue from the Iranian antiquity to centuries after the emergence of Islam. In the medieval time, the most flourishing period of book layout and painting are attributed to between 8th and 11th centuries AH.

From the beginning of the seventh/thirteenth century, Iranian miniaturists created illumination for illumination on books of poems and other publications with numerous pictures⁴.

According to the definition, handwritten manuscript is a manuscript which was written by hand⁵. From the application point of view, the word manuscript is used for old handwritten books and hand written is a version that was prepared for publication.

Presenting names and specifications of codicology of works, the current research tries to respond to the following questions: i. What are the period and thematic contents and definitions of proposed hand-written manuscripts laid out with saffron? ii. What is the manner and method of using saffron in those works?

Methodology

To reach to this aim, the lists of Iranian manuscripts preserved in Iranian libraries were surveyed. Among them some manuscripts in which saffron was used for decoration, were selected. The names, general features and one sample picture of them are presented as following:

Moragha: Place of Preservation: Golestan Palace Library; Access Code: 1443; Author's Name: Mohammad Hassan Gharib al-Vatan - Mohammad Shafi Tabrizi - Ali Akbar; Specification: The work consists of pieces of colored cardboards decorated with golden and some of the marginal fragments with enameled. The text is oil plated. The script contains prayers and small verses from the holy Qur'an written in *naskh* style with saffron, white, black, green, gold and red colors; Date of Calligraphy: 1194AH/1780, 1230AH/1815, 1252AH/1836 (12th and 13th centuries A. H.), figure 1.



Figure-1

Two pages from *muraqqa* script from the Golestan Palace Library with access code 1443. It includes small Qur'anic verses and prayers in the form of *naskh* with saffron, white, black, green, rosewater and red lead colors

Jonge Sher: Place of Preservation: National Library of Iran; Catalogue: 7344; Transcription Note: Author's name on page no. 5; Type of Paper: Indian buff and western; Design: Some pages with scattered ink, small figures scattered on the margin of pages with gold and saffron; Binding Note: Worn out volume, repaired section, decayed. Work Specifications: 17 pages, different lines, size of lines, line variations and 215x125 formats. Introduction to Copy: Collection of satirical poems, ode, five-some and quatrain poems from different Persian poets including Hafez, Saeb, Bu ali Sina (Avicenna), Anvari, Ferdousi, Maulavi etc., figure 2.

Haft Orang, Place of preservation: Ayatollah Mareshi Najafi Library, Qom. Access code: 12576/1; a work of Nur uddin Abd al-Rahman Jami dates back to 898, Author's name: Darvish Tufanshah;. Specifications: This is very fine work, corrected at the margin and contains 8 studded beautiful epigraphs from early 10th Century AH with beautiful illustration with golden, sky-blue, green, saffron, black, mustard color background and floral designs of diverse nature. Pages have saffron strips and four-columned tables in sky-blue, gold and black, humility is little from the beginning and one of the leaves is attached for the sake of revision that has not inscribed but epigraph has been affixed to it. Date of writing: 4 Muharram al-Haram, 905 AH; Type of paper: Eastern; Number of pages: 269; Number of lines: 23, Volume of text: 13/5x24, figure 3.

Divan-e-Jami: Place of preservation: Ayatollah Mareshi Najafi Library, Qom; Access code: 12576/2; Author's name: Darvish Tufanshah;. Specifications: *Nastaliq*; Topics and symbols: Vermilion, sky-blue, gold water and saffron; Type of paper: Eastern; Number of pages: 179, Number of lines: 26; Specifications: Very attractive and ancient, contains 5 studded beautiful epigraphs from the early 10th century AH with beautiful artistic illustration with golden, sky-blue, green, saffron, black, mustard color background with beautiful floral designs of diverse nature; Date of writing: 4 Muharram al-Haram, 905 AH, Volume of text: 13/5x24, figure 4.

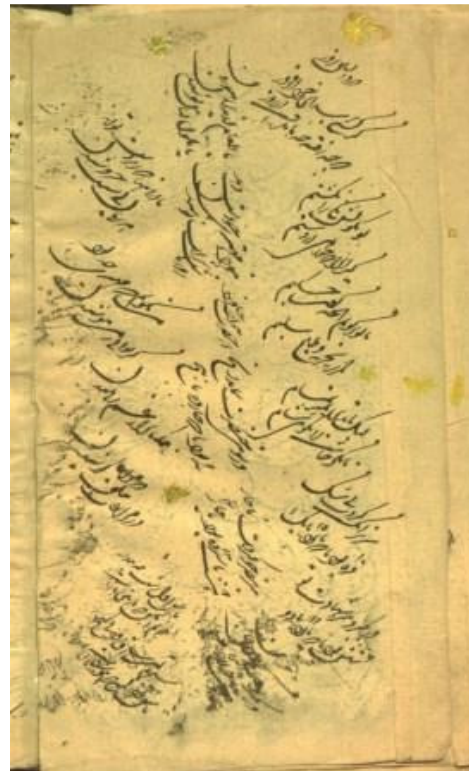


Figure-2

A page from *Jonge Sher*, National Library with catalogue no. 7344; some of the pages smeared with ink, small designs scattered at page margins with gold and saffron



Figure-3

Two pages from Jami's *Haft Orang* at Ayatollah Marashi Najafi Library with access code 12576/1, beautifully illustrated with golden, sky-blue, green, saffron, black, mustard color background with beautiful floral designs of diverse nature. Pages have saffron strips and four-columned tables in sky-blue, gold and black



Figure-4

Two pages from *Diwan –e- Jami* at Ayatollah Marashi Najafi Library with access code 12576/1, *nastaliq* script, topics and symbols in vermilion, sky-blue, gold water and saffron

Vosul al-Akhyar ela Osul al-Akhbar : Place of preservation: Ayatollah Marashi Najafi Library, Qom; Access code: 12043; Author: Sheikh Izzuddin Hussein s/o Abdu Samad Harsi Amoli;. Specifications: Some lines in the begging are missing but later parts are renovated. On the second page, a new rectangular seal “Jalal Hatami” is seen; Topic and symbols: Vermillion, saffron and black and topics bolder than the text, western paper, figure 5.



Figure-5

Two pages from *Vosul al-Akhyar ila Osul al-Akhyar* at Ayatollah Marashi Najafi Library with access code 12043, *nastaliq* script, topics and symbols in vermilion, saffron and black

Meftah Mafatih al Futuh, Place of preservation: Ayatollah Marashi Najafi Library, Qom. Access code: 11651/4. 9th Century by Nezam uddin Abd ul Qadir, son of Hassan Royanee Lahiji, Specifications & types of script: Fine *naskh*, written margin; Titles and symbols: Vermillion; Type of paper: Eastern, sealed stiffness, in the narrative with the signature of Tabrizi

with saffron not clear that this book was written in 1059AH /1649 and pages are diligent, Number of pages: 27 from 109 to 135; Number of lines: 17; Volume of text: 81/2x15; Size: 18x22; Type of cover: Paper back; Date: 13th Century, figure 6.

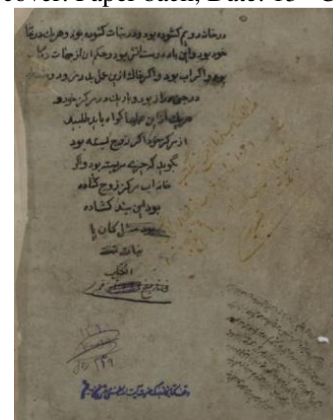


Figure-6

The last page from *Miftah Mafateh al Futuh* from Ayatollah Marashi Najafi Library that has an access code of 11651/4, a memorial unclear along with signature of Tabrizi (inside colored ellipse) using saffron has been written.

Divan ebne Yamin Farivmadi: Place of preservation: Malek National Library and Museum. Access code: 4836; Specifications: Cashmere paper, green sheep leather cover, designed with saffron; Date of writing: 11th Century; Volume: 2, figure 7.

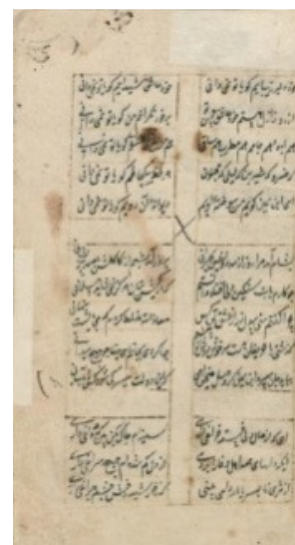


Figure-7

A page from *Divan Ibn Yemin Farivmadi* from Malek National Library and Museum, Access code: 4836 decorated with saffron

Tohfe Shahi: Place of preservation: Library of Great Islamic Encyclopedia; Access code: 523; Author: Emad uddin Ali Sharif Qari Esterabadi; Specifications: *Nastaliq*, Topic and symbol: In vermilion, a single tabulation in saffron; Number of pages: 20; Number of lines: 18; Date of writing: 11th Century; Volume: One, figure 8.



Figure-8

Two pages from *Tohfe Shahi* at Library of Great Islamic Encyclopedia, access code: 523, *nastaliq*, topic and symbol in vermilion, a single tabulation in saffron

Mokatebate Allami: Place of Preservation: Library of Great Islamic Encyclopedia; Access code: 756; Author: Abul Fazl known as Allami (1150-1603), younger brother of Abul Fazl Faizi, second son of Sheikh Mubarak Nagori Deccani; Specifications: *Nastaliq* of Indian style, 11th century, initial few pages are eroded and renovated again. Three-way tabulation in black and saffron, fillet and vermilion sign on page 93; Number of lines: 19; Volume is covered with brown goat leather, stamped, obliterated, consummated, figure 9.



Figure-9

Mokatebat Allami from Library of Great Islamic Encyclopedia, access code: 756, *nastaliq* of Indian style, three-way tabulation in black and saffron

Conclusion

As a whole, the manuscripts taken into account in the proposed research belong to the periods between 9th and 11th centuries that are related to Timurid and Safavid. Among these works, a limited number of saffron coated manuscripts are present in the proposed libraries and by the same reason, finding them among pile of manuscripts become hardly feasible. It can be decisively said that the application of saffron was very common during the aforementioned periods. In the current research, the author did not come across with saffron manuscripts related to past centuries with literary and religious themes, however, in a separate research on Qur'anic copies, she could encounter with copies related to 3rd Century. As such, a comprehensive study is needed to prove the use of saffron in a wider span. About the period between 9th and 11th centuries that the present study deals upon, one of the copies is *moraqqa* (scrapbook) being preserved at Golestan Palace Library. About this work, it can be said that artistic scrapbook works in comparison to other written sources plays important role in the book layout domain. Preparing *moraqqa* (album) was considered as one of the important artistic traditions of the Islamic world. Based on the available resources, *moraqqa* or scrapbook is traceable up to 8th century AH⁶. *Moraqqa* is being related to 12th and 13th Centuries.

It is important to mention that with this limited number of manuscripts, it is impossible to explain the relationship between the way of using saffron and the era of this usage, because with this limited number, the statistical analyses are not significant. As a whole, this research is an introduction to the next practical studies using laboratory techniques to prove or deny the presence of saffron in illumination and design of this book.

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