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Iconology of Layla and Majnun Painting Illustrated on Seljuk Pottery*

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Abstract

Problem Statement: Layla and Majnun is a classic story of love most notably expressed by the great poets. In addition, various scenes of this love story have been painted by Iranian painters. According to researches, the first painting of Layla and Majnun at school illustrated on Seljuk pottery and then repeated in different Iranian schools such as Herat and Shiraz. This paper investigates the structural and conceptual aspects of the scene of Layla and Majnun at school painted on Seljuk pottery. Since, Erwin Panofsky interprets the subject of artworks by studying the literary texts and the thought of a nation during a particular era, this article attempts to answer this question: What is the relationship between the dominant Iranian thought during Seljuk era and the painting of Layla and Majnun at school illustrated on Seljuk pottery?

Purpose: Ahmad Ghazali (d. 520 AH/ 1126 AD) is a prominent Iranian thinker whose view about love had profound effect on Iranian mystical thought in Seljuk era. So, the main purpose of this research is to find out the relationship between Ahmad Ghazali's thought and the painting of Layla and Majnun at school illustrated on Seljuk pottery.

Research Methodology: The data have been obtained through a documental and librarian method. In this research, information collected through documentary and librarian, historical-analytical method is based on the iconology of Panofsky's approach.

Result: Visual and conceptual patterns of Layla and Majnun painting illustrated on Seljuk pottery reflect Ahmad Ghazali's thought about the essence of love, in addition to Nizami poems.

Keywords: *Layla and Majnun, Ahmad Ghazali, Iconology, Seljuk pottery.*

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Introduction and problem statement

Throughout history, pottery has been a valuable tool for expressing human imagination and beliefs. During Seljuk era, the art of pottery progressed dramatically and despite all prohibitions, the painting of romance stories expanded. The narrative of Layla and Majnun is one of the most popular love stories that its different events have always painted by Iranian artists such as bringing Majnun to Layla's tent with chains, Majnun's mourning in Layla's tomb, visiting Layla and Majnun in the desert, and meeting Layla and Majnun at school. This paper investigates the structural and content aspects of the first painting of Layla and Majnun at school illustrated on Seljuk pottery. According to the unique features of this work, it is important to study Ahmad Ghazali's thought because of his views about love. Therefore, finding relationship between Ahmad Ghazali's attitude and the painting of Layla and Majnun at school illustrated on Seljuk pottery is an issue that has been examined in this article.

Research Methodology

In this research, data are collected through documentary and library and the research method is historical-analytical.

Theoretical Foundations of Research

A theoretical foundation of this article is based on Panofsky's views and has been accomplished through three stages of pre-iconography, iconographic analysis, and interpretation of iconology. The reason for the application of this method is its specific feature in recognizing the implications of artwork.

Review of literature

Layla and Majnun love story has provided great art research in various branches such as painting, calligraphy, theater and etc. In the field of painting, the article titled "Mourning for Layla's Husband, a comparative study between Nizam's poem and Sheikhzadeh's painting" confirms the connection between painting and literature (Rahnavard & Montazeri, 2009). Also, the article titled "Interpretation of Layla and Majnun's motifs used in

Ghiyāth al-Dīn's works, based on iconology theory" evaluates the motifs of Layla and Majnun by popular cultural factors in Safavid period (Fazl-Vaziri & Tondi, 2017). Another article is called "Semantic criticism: a comparative study between literature and painting by emphasizing on Layla and Majnun love story" that some paintings of Layla and Majnun were investigated by Garmas and Eco's approaches to signs and semiotics, in addition to adapting text and image (Mohammadi Vakil, 2009). But reflection of Ahmad Ghazali's thought on the painting of Layla and Majnun at school illustrated on Seljuk pottery is emphasized in this article.

Seljuk pottery

In Seljuk era, the art of pottery progressed dramatically. In addition, the potters became more and more successful in making two groups of glazed and enamel dishes (Goshayesh, 2005, 231). Also, some Sassanid motifs were repeated such as riders, trees, dancers and angels. So, tendency to the traditions of Iranian art became popular (Pakbaz, 2006, 576). This research attempts to analyze the paintings of Layla and Majnun at school illustrated on Seljuk pottery, based on a case study of a particular methodology by an iconology approach. So, a brief description of this approach is necessary.

Iconology

Erwin Panofsky, a historian of German art (1892-1968), studied the historical, social, cultural, and political backgrounds associated with the work in order to obtain the meanings of art, and sought religious, philosophical, and diverse tendencies in a period, country and nation (Panofsky, 1972, 16). Panofsky proposed three steps to discover the hidden semantic layers in artwork. His plan starts with the pre-iconographic description stage and includes the description of the image with the visual patterns of the work (Orrelle & Horwitz, 2016, 6). The second stage is an iconographic analysis that deals with images, stories, and allegories instead of the motifs. This analysis recognizes the specific issues or concepts transmitted through literary sources or oral tradition

and taken for granted (Panofsky, 2017, 44). The third stage is the interpretation of iconography, which Panofsky called iconology. Iconology is associated with the hidden symbolic values of the images. Pervasive values and symbols which are based on the basis of the thinking of a nation, period, class, religion, or philosophical manners, and its culture and worldview are affected (Orrelle & Horwitz, 2016, 6).

Iconology of Layla and Majnun Painting Illustrated on Seljuk Pottery (school scene)

In Studies in Iconology Panofsky details his idea of three stages of art historical understanding: pre-iconography, iconographic analysis, and interpretation of iconology. So, the painting of Layla and Majnun at school illustrated on Seljuk pottery is analyzed based on Panofsky's views Fig 1.

Pre-iconography description: Fig. 1. Represents a group of children grouped around their teacher (Cuartola, 2006, 103). The teacher is painted in the center of picture with long beard and hat, while his hand has a twig. There is an open book at the top of his shoulder. This classroom shows twenty-four immature girls and boys seated around the teacher. The visual patterns are simply formed and in accordance with the principles of Islamic law. Indeed, the linear

perspectival system is not used. Also, the figures are painted in Seljuk style. All of them have round faces, stretched noses, small mouths, arched eyebrows, and linear eyes. According to the objective patterns, the teacher looks to the left and attracts the attention of the children. The kids also observe the left side, just a boy who is painted above the scene and behind the teacher looks to the right and the girl's face. These two children pay attention to each other and make love, while their classmates are busy learning. The classmates have pages in their hands on which the word "wise" is written. It is worth noting that Seljuk potter illustrated the classroom without using physical elements of architecture, but in different Iranian schools, the details of school building are painted. Fig 2, 3 & 4 are some examples of them that the tangible architectural features such as pillars, minarets, domes and glazed tiles are depicted. Also, internal and outer space, the atmosphere of school and mosque are illustrated.

Iconography analysis: By observing Seljuk pottery and studying related literary sources, it can be understood that this picture refers to Nizami Ganjavi's Masnavi. The love story of Majnun (Qais ibn Maluh ibn Muzahem) and Layla (Bente Sa'd) of the Bani Amer tribe is an example of Arab love story



Fig.1. Layla and Majnun at school illustrated on Seljuk pottery, Kashan, late 12th century AD Source: Cuartola, 2006, 103.

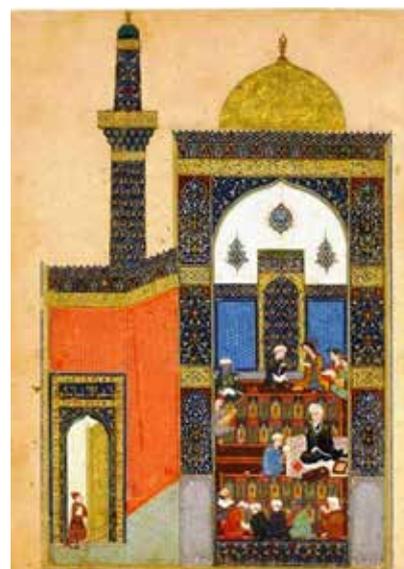


Fig.2. Layla and Majnun at the School of Herat, Herat, 1427 AD, Mirkhalil Illustrated. Source: Azhand, 2010, Vol. 1, 283.

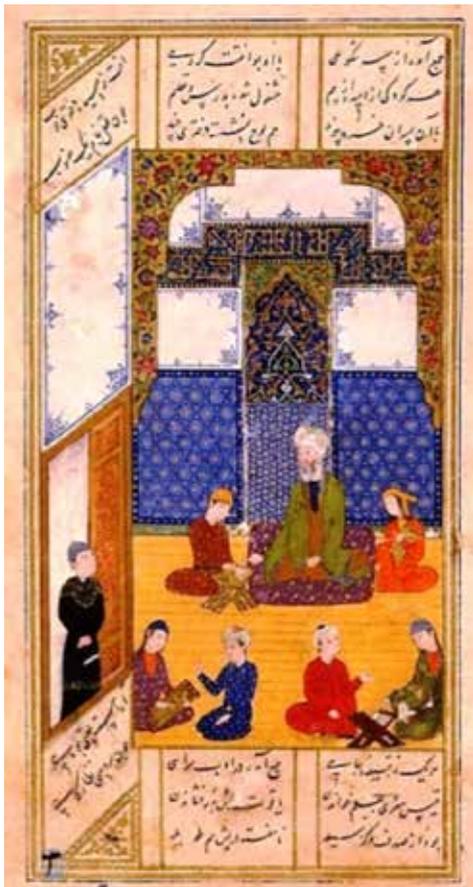


Fig.3. Layla and Majnun at the school of Herat, about 1430 AD Source: www.arthermitage.org.

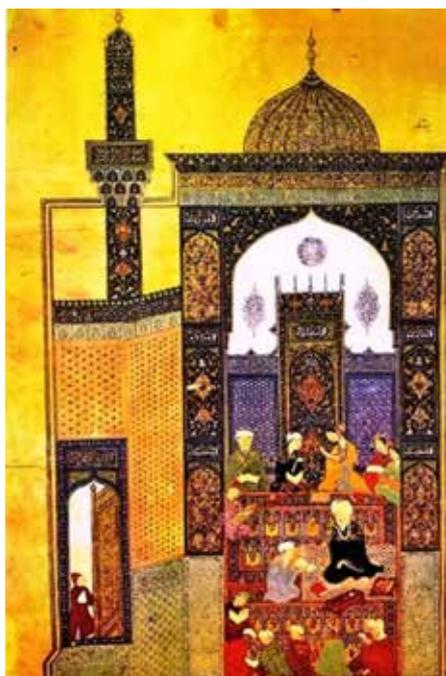


Fig.4. Layla and Majnun at the School, Nizami, Shiraz, about 1476 AD Source: Azhand, 2010, Vol.1, 472.

(Safa, 2012, Vol 2, 803). According to Arabic literature, the love story of Layla and Majnun was painful and mortal (Corbin, 2016, 256). In the early centuries of Islam, the story of Layla and Majnun was just a folk Arabic narrative, but gradually penetrated into Iranian poetry such as Rudaki, Baba Taher Uryan, and Nasser Khosro. In the 6th century AH/ 12th AD Nizam , an famous Iranian poet, promoted this romance story to the level of a literary masterpiece (Moayed, 1992, 531). According to Nizami poetry, this romance story happened at school and in childhood.

When Majnun was 7 years old, his face became more beautiful. His father sent him to school and was happy with this event.

After describing Layla and Majnun’s beauties and perfections, Nizami describes their childish romance story at school.

*When all their classmates were busy learning
They were paying attention to each other
They just read about love*

*When the classmates were writing new words
They were talking about kindness and love*

(Translated from Nizami poetry ,Servatian, 2015, 324)

Nizami expressed Layla and Majnun love story at school. Seljuk potter also used the symbolic elements to reveal the love story of Layla and Majnun at school. So, the relation between Iranian painting and literature becomes obvious.

Interpretation of Iconology: According to Panofsky’s views, this stage related to the symbolic values used in artworks. Panofsky believed that symbolic values formed by thought of a nation in a particular era, class, religion or philosophical manners. The pervasive values and symbols also affect culture and worldview of a society. Therefore, in order to perceive the content of the painting of Layla and Majnun at school illustrated on Seljuk pottery, identifying common Iranian thoughts in Seljuk era is necessary.

Ahmad Ghazali (d.1126 AD) was a Persian mystic, writer, and eloquent preacher. He is best known in the history of Sufism for his ideas on love, expressed

primarily in the celebrated work entitled *Sawaneh*. He presented his thoughts about the concept of love. In the theory of Ahmad Ghazali, lover and beloved are united with love (Corbin, 2016, 258). He described the different steps of love from beginning to end. Also, he mentioned about the love story of Majnun and Layla in one of his books called *Sawaneh*: at the beginning of creation, there was only love (Ghazali, 1989, 22). He considered the difficulties of the path of love and said: The tribe of Majnun said to the tribe of Layla that Majnun has gone to the desert due to Layla’s love. So, the tribe of Majnun requested them for a meeting. But, the tribe of Layla replied that seeing Layla’s shadow ends to Majnun’s death. When Majnun saw her shadow he became unconscious and fell to the ground. According to Ghazal’s attitude, in the first stage of love, there is just anxiety. When lover achieves enough experience, he will forget his existence. According to Ghazali’s views by the perfection of love, communication with others will be cut off. Finally, he does not pay attention to the outside world and calmness will be emerged (Ibid, 23). So, in the end stage of perfection of love, Majnun can see Layla as a heavenly love and does not care about

blaming others (Sattari, 2018, 349). In the perfection of love, lover and beloved are pleased because of revealing the essence of love (Ghazali, 1989, 115). Ghazali believed that the union between love, lover and beloved is the truth of love. This step of love is separated from science because lover and beloved could obtain spiritual power without material affairs (Ibid, 49).

Ahmad Ghazali denied lust and erotic love. He believed that Layla and Majnun’s love was satisfied, pleasant and chaste. According to Ahmad Ghazali’s view, Layla and Majnun’s love was virtual and pure. He emphasized the virtual and pure love. He believed that virtual love prepared Majnun for accepting the divine responsibility (Sattari, 2018, 174) (Table 1).

Discussion

According to Ahmad Ghazali’s views, it seems that the painting of Layla and Majnun at school illustrated on Seljuk pottery refers to the virtual and pure love. Seljuk potter, portraying Layla and Majnun at school and consciously writes the word “wise” on the pages to show the importance of science and knowledge for Iranian girls and boys equally. However, in this

Table. 1. A Comparative study of Arab’s deep natural love, Ahmad Ghazali’s and Nizami’s view of the love of Layla and Majnun illustrated in Seljuk pottery. Source: authors.

| | Arab’s deep natural love (pre-Islamic Arabs) | Ahmad Ghazali (died in 1126 AD) | Nizami (died in 1210 AD) | Seljuk pottery (Late 12th century AD) |
|--|--|---|--|--|
| The Beginning of Love | Terrestrial, human nature, physical | Divine nature | In childhood and school | In childhood and school |
| The stages of love | Painful, frustrating, deadly | Difficult but, happy and hopeful | Painful, frustrating, deadly | happy and hopeful |
| Consummation | endless | Consummation means unity of lover and beloved with love | endless | Probability of the consummation is induced by drawing Layla alongside the Majnun |
| The role of science relationship with others | ***** | Out of science Lovers and beloved are disconnected from outsiders | Out of science Layla and Majnun are free of course, teacher and classmates. | Out of science Layla and Majnun are portrayed in school and among teachers and classmates but they are disconnected |
| The end of love | Death | The perfection of love means the union of lover and beloved with love | Death | Layla is with me and I’m with Layla, That is, the union of lover and beloved with love |

image, Layla and Majnun do not pay attention to the teacher and their classmates just observe each other. According to Ghazali's perspective, in the perfection of love; lover and beloved are satisfied and pleased. This image also shows no sadness in the face of Layla and Majnun despite the parting of the narrative of the story. It seems to paint Layla next to the Majnun and Majnun alongside Layla implies the union of lover, beloved with the essence of love.

Conclusion

In this essay, the painting of Layla and Majnun at school illustrated on Seljuk pottery investigated based on Erwin Panofsky's view. The results showed that the visual patterns related to Seljuk art (round faces, stretched noses, small mouths, arched eyebrows, and linear eyes). Also, the theme of image related to Nizami's poem which derived from Arabic painful love story. It seems that Arabic mortal love story was transformed by Ghazali's attitude and then reflected on Seljuk pottery. The romantic illustration of two immature children at the class by painting symbolic elements refers to Ahmed Ghazali's thought about the union of lover, beloved and love. Painting of Layla next to Majnun and Majnun next to Layla at school on Seljuk pottery reveals the inner meaning of virtual immortal love and the connection between Iranian thought and literature in Seljuk era.

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