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Original Paper

The Technical Study of Paper-support Textile Inscription of Mulla Ismail's Mosque in Yazd, IRAN

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Abstract

Quranic inscriptions are among the decorative elements commonly used in Islamic architecture. This is largely due to the fact that among the Islamic visual arts, calligraphy is the most related with holy Quran. Through calligraphy, the Holy Speech is represented before the viewers' eyes. In addition to immediate conveying of the holy message, the Islamic calligraphy meets, spiritually, an aesthetic function as well. Calligraphic inscriptions, containing various arts such as calligraphy, gilding as well as cover embellishment, comprise a major part of Persian artistic and historical works. In respect of historical studies, thus, Quranic inscriptions have always been on focus. In this connection, one of the major arts implemented onto fabric surfaces has been inscription the fabric support of which painted, mainly in water color, with geometric and floral patterns. Created in different eras with various techniques and materials, inscriptions are among the most important architectural decorations giving a special effect to historical buildings. Typically, the best examples of tile inscriptions can be found in the great mosque (or Masjid-e-Jami) as well as in the Shah Mosque (also known as Imam Mosque) of Isfahan. Similarly, among the brick and plaster inscriptions, those found in Lajeem Tower, Masjid-e-Jame Isfahan and in Peer Bakran Shrine respectively, are noteworthy. Also, the inscriptions used in the Red, Kabud, and Modavar Domes of Maraghe, represent a salient instance made of brick-and-tile fretwork. Meanwhile, wooden inscriptions in Masjid-e-Jami of Abyane, Kashan are delicate ones. Fabric-made inscription of Masjid-e-Mulla Ismaeel, Yazd, implemented on a paper support, is one of the architectural decorations survived from Qajar era. Mullah Ismaeel Mosque was built by Akhound Mullah Ismaeel Aghdaie in Yazd, at the time of Fath-Ali Shah Qajar. The shrine of Mullah Ismaeel, placed in a room at the southern side of the mosque, is a structure with Qajar architectural features. At the three sides of the southern platform of the shrine, the Holy Quranic Verse of Jomo'a (Friday) has been inscribed in a horizontal rectangular frame in Sulus Jali calligraphic style, decorated with arabesque margins on the plaster support around the frame. The inscription in question lacks a specific date and therefore, it is very difficult to determine its date. However, the plaster-made inscription implemented at either sides of the fabric-made inscription, bears a date, dating back to Qajar era. This inscription, mounted on the wall, includes floral motifs as well as Quranic verses. The historical era was attributed to Qajar time considering the features of the stone inscription installed in the mosque entrance. In terms of scientific research, scant attention has been given to the mentioned inscription

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and to similar works in Iran. In general, not many of such examples have survived the major part of which belongs to Safavid and Qajar era. Examination of such inscriptions, in terms of the kind of fabric used and colors and binders applied, can reveal important results helping to classify the various materials used in fabric-made inscriptions in different eras. Material identification of historical objects has a great importance for better understanding and reproduction process of ancient arts as a basic prior to applying the appropriate conservation method. Identification of materials such as paper, binder and pigments can help to distinguish a historical era and to have a better understanding of that era. For example, this can help to identify which techniques, or more importantly which materials, were used to apply a fabric-made inscription in Qajar era. A paper-based work, for instance, consists of other materials, other than paper itself, such as pigments, ink, binder, etc. Thus, it is first necessary to identify the chemical ingredients used in the work, as well as their interactions, based on the result of which, the most appropriate methods can be adopted and best materials applied in order to restore the work(s) in question. The present research mainly focused on identifying the materials used to make paper, binder and color applied in discussed inscriptions. The results, based on commonly used methods as well as instrumental techniques (such as FTIR and SEM-EDS) indicated that the binder and the support used were mainly composed of carbohydrates. Also, the fabric used was made of cotton and the paper of pulp (obtained from worn out clothes). The pigments applied were organic and the painting technique was watercolor. To implement the inscription, in practice, the artist first would stick the fabric onto a paper support. Then, to draw the desired lines onto the fabric surface, the fabric was burnished. Finally, the inscription was painted and mounted on the wall.

Keywords: Inscription, Mulla Ismail's Mosque, FTIR, SEM-EDS, Spot Tests.

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