MANUSCRIPTS

THE WORLD HISTORY OF RASHID AL-DIN

Rashid al-Din Fadlallah (c.645–718 AH/1247–1318 AD) was a Muslim convert from a Jewish family in Hamadan. His father was an apothecary and he himself trained as a physician, entering the service of the Ilhan Abu Bakr (1265–82). On Ghurani’s accession in 694 AH (1295–96 AD), he gained an enduring position at the summit of state affairs, until finally provoked by the Mongol system of dividing power among viziers led to his disgrace and execution in 1318. Excessively rich, Rashid al-Din Fadlallah endowed pious institutions throughout the Ilkhanid domains. Among these, his multi-functional funerary complex, the Rahi’ Rashidi, at Tabriz, which included a scriptorium to produce and distribute copies of his works, was the most splendid. Yet he was not merely a great administrator: his interests included theology, agriculture, horticulture and especially history, and he was commanded by Ghurani to compile a history of his reign. This was presented to his successor, Öljetii (c.1304–16), who commanded him, as a memorial to Ghurani, to enlarge the work to provide a history of all the peoples with whom the Mongols had come into contact. This was the farni al-Tawarikh (compendium of chronicles), which was to be in four parts: (1) the history of the Mongols from Tengiz Khan to the death of Ghurani; (2) a history of Öljetii, followed by a long universal history from Adam, the biblical patriarchs and the ancient kings of Persia to Muhammad and the caliphs; (3) the ‘Five Dynasties’ of the Arabs, the Jews, the Mongols, the Franks and the Chinese; and (4) a geographical compendium.

The history of Öljetii and the geographical compendium are lost, and the principal illustrated section appears to have been the world history, now in two different facsimiles (one in Edinburgh University Library, the other in the Khariti manuscript), which were subsequently rebound in the 19th century. Together they comprise about half a manuscript of 400 folios or so, recording the history of the non-Mongol peoples of Eurasia. The very possibility of its compilation reflects the cosmopolitan culture of early 14th-century Tabriz, where texts in Latin, Arabic, Persian, Syriac, Mongolian, Chinese and Sanskrit were available and everything from Chinese handscrolls to Old Testament and Gospels from northern Europe could be used as appropriate illustrative material. Interestingly, for some of the scenes from the life of Muhammad, the painters had recourse to adaptations of Christian scenes, which suggests that illustrated copies of the life of the Prophet may not have been available. They made great use of chinoiserie motifs, and their use of wash and line rather than opaque watercolour gives a superficial similarity to recently excavated Yuan tomb-paintings in Inner Mongolia. However, their elongated figures, expressive features and incised gestures are more in the tradition of later Byzantine painting. The use of silver (now oxidised) for the modelling of faces and their features is likewise very un-Chinese.

180 - The emperor Xiaozong of the late Liang
from farni al-Tawarikh by Rashid al-Din
Tabriz, dated 714 AH (1314–15 AD)
ink, transliterated and opaque watercolours,
gold and silver on paper
43.5 x 30 cm (framed): 9 x 12 (detail)
MS 252 A5, v.14, fol.5d
Published first 1991, K14
OF RASHID AL-DIN

15 AH(1247-1318 AD) was a Muslim

The history of al-Khwarizmi and the geographical compendium are lost, and the principal illustrated section appears to have been the world history, now in two different languages (one in Edinburgh University Library, the other the Kharaz manuscript), which were haphazardly rebound in the 18th century. Together they comprise about half a manuscript of 900 folios or so, recording the history of the non-Mongol peoples of Persia. The very possibility of its compilation reflects the cosmopolitan culture of early-14th-century Tabriz, where texts in Latin, Arabic, Persian, Syriac, Mongolian, Chinese and Sanskrit were available and everything from Chinese handscrolls to Old Testament and Gospel from northern Europe could be used as appropriate illustrative material. Interestingly, for some of the scenes from the life of Muhammad, the painters had recourse to adaptations of Christian scenes, which suggests that illustrated copies of the life of the Prophet may not have been available. They made great use of chinoiserie motifs, and their use of wash and line rather than opaque watercolour gives a superficial similarity to recently excavated Yuan tomb-paintings in Inner Mongolia. However, their elongated figures, expressive features and mannered gestures are more in the traditions of later Byzantine painting. The use of silver (now oxidized) for the modelling of faces and their features is likewise very un-Chinese.
183 - Battle of the Pandavas and the Kauravas, a scene from the Indian epic, the Mahabharata
from Jeraj al-Tawakhli by Rashid al-Din
from Teheran, dated 715 AH (1316-17 AD)
ink, translucent and opaque watercolour,
gold and silver on paper
20.5 x 23.5 cm (painting)
MS 777, E 36
Published: Meiss 1995, fig. 30.32

184 - The execution of Jalal al-Din Firuzshah II
(r. 1200–96), the Khajji, sultan of Delhi, by his
rebellious nephew
from Jeraj al-Tawakhli by Rashid al-Din
from Tabriz, dated 714 AH (1314-15 AD)
ink, translucent and opaque watercolour,
gold and silver on paper
13 x 21.5 cm (painting)
MS 771, E 27
Published: Meiss 1995, fig. 30.32
184 - The execution of Jalal al-Din Firuz Shah II (r1290-96), the Khalji sultan of Delhi, by his rebellious nephew
from Iznik al-Tawakkili bi-Rashid al-Din
from Tabriz, dated 714 AH (1314-15 AD)
ink, translucent and opaque watercolour, gold and silver on paper
13 x 25.3 cm (painting)
MS 722, fol. 212a
Published: Behr 1993, fig. 23, 422

185 - The nobles of Kashmir enthrone a faqir
as King Yashashara (r 939-46)
from Iznik al-Tawakkili bi-Rashid al-Din
from Tabriz, dated 714 AH (1314-15 AD)
ink, translucent and opaque watercolour, gold and silver on paper
11.5 x 25.3 cm (painting)
MS 727, fol. 198
Published: Behr 1995, fig. 40, 423

186 - Ravana, king of Lanka and king of the demons, lies dead before Rama, a scene from
the Indian epic, the Ramayana
from Iznik al-Tawakkili bi-Rashid al-Din
from Tabriz, dated 714 AH (1314-15 AD)
ink, translucent and opaque watercolour, gold and silver on paper
12 x 25.3 cm (painting)
MS 723, fol. 90
Published: Behr 1995, fig. 38, 424