

## Visual Analysis of the "Martyrs of Mena Disaster" Image

### Abstract

Illustrating numerous political, religious, cultural, and literary themes, Persian-Islamic miniatures are regarded as the visual translation of culture and thought of a chequered history, which has been influenced by various events and developments. One of such miniature works is 'Martyrs of Mena disaster' painting created by Reza Badrossama. Here the artist has portrayed the deadliest incident in the history of Tamattu' Hajj, i.e. the death of Hajj pilgrims performing the Stoning of the Devil ritual in 2015; An incident that the artist claims to have inflicted a terrible pain upon his soul, thus making him spend a whole year to create this piece of miniature hoping to keep the memory of the incident alive in the minds of future generations.

According to Islamic aesthetics, an artwork is not just created to astonish or surprise the audience but to convey a moral truth. Regardless of how sublime a conceptual value is manifest in a work of art, the artist's objective is not realized until the audience grasps the meaning of his or her mental message and visual expression.

Conducted through a descriptive-analytical method based on reliable library sources, including visual and electronic data, as well as findings of field studies, this paper examines 'The Martyrs of Mena disaster' miniature. The study aims to determine which visual elements were employed by the artist to portray the aftermaths of this great disaster. It is of course assumed that the artist has utilized numerous visual elements so as to convey multiple messages embedded in the work through Persian-Islamic patterns and motifs. Therefore, to reject or confirm such a hypothesis, a literature review was conducted. However, no independent study has been made to read and understand this work of art since Sept. 19, 2016, when it was unveiled in Isfahan Museum of Contemporary Arts.

The results of the study indicate that although the artist could have created this work through the use of symbolic and conventional visual elements; nevertheless, he has consciously used unique visual elements to influence

the audience's perspective and express the implications of the Mena disaster from different aspects. Therefore, the element of dot- containing the concept of scream and re-birth- has been used to convey the feeling of martyrdom and rebirth of the spirit of the Hajj pilgrims. Curved lines have been employed repeatedly to emphasize the element of spirituality in this reproduction. Besides horizontal and vertical lines used as the frame, the artist has used vertical lines in portraying Kaaba in the center of the painting to represent the concepts of power, uprightness, strength, persistence, balance, and stability

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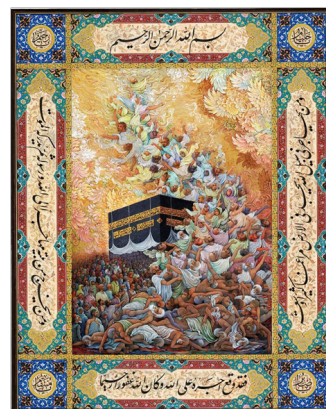
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that are symbolic characteristics of Kaaba in line with the patience and endurance of the pilgrims performing the Stoning of the Devil ritual.

Regardless of the symbolic meaning of Tawaf (circumambulation), the gentle curve and the circular form of this line expresses the delicacy of ascent of the spirits of the pilgrims. Some of the artistic elements incorporated in the painting include circular surfaces, giving dimensions to Kaaba, soft texture of the angels' wings, rhythm of patterns of the deceased and stacked bodies of pilgrims, Tazhib (illumination) and calligraphy of Quranic verses in the margins, and the balanced composition of the miniature using spiral patterns.

Warm colors have been used both in central part of the painting and the Tazhib around it so as to evoke a sense of warmth on the day of the incident, thirst of the pilgrims, and concepts of Khauf and Raja (fear and hope) resulting from the disaster. Moreover, the color gold is used in different parts of the painting to portray the beams of mercy and forgiving bestowed upon the lifeless bodies of the Hajj pilgrims. Although in reality all Hajj pilgrims wear the white Ihram garb, some of the clothes are painted white to represent the purity of the martyrs whereas others are painted in light green and blue garbs to lessen the anguish portrayed in the painting. The color vermilion has been used in the illumination in order to both strike a balance between warm and cold colors and to symbolize the love and martyrdom of the pilgrims.

Therefore, all these elements give meaning to concepts of circumambulation and martyrdom, patience and endurance, spirituality and grace of ascension of the spirits, peace, abstraction, and perfectionism, while conveying the intensions of the artwork such as incompetence of the House of Saud and the wrong that they have done to the pilgrims of Masjid al-Harām, conspiracy of these rulers, the hidden layers of their heretical animosity toward Muslims, salvation and ascension of these martyred pilgrims.

**Keywords:** Miniature, Hajj pilgrims, Mena Disaster, Visual Elements

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