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A Comparative Study of Religious Color Symbolism in the Lindisfarne Gospels and the Walters Qur'an Manuscript from the Timurid Era

By

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Abstract: Statement of the Problem: Coloration in religious manuscripts has always held a distinctive position in both Islamic and Christian art and culture. The Lindisfarne Gospels and the renowned Walters Quran, each belonging to different historical periods, are exemplary representations of this artistic tradition. This paper aims to conduct a comparative analysis of religious coloration in these two manuscripts, examining the differences and similarities in the use of colors as tools for conveying religious and cultural concepts in these two distinct faiths.

Research Objective: The primary objective of this study is to examine and analyze the differences and similarities in the techniques and applications of color in these two renowned religious manuscripts. The study also seeks to understand how these colors reflect the unique cultural and religious identities within each manuscript, and what connections exist between the choice of colors and the religious themes present in these works.

Research Questions:

1. What are the differences and similarities observed in the use of colors in the Lindisfarne Gospels and the Walters Quran?
2. What religious and cultural roles do the colors play in both manuscripts?
3. How have the artists and scribes of these religious works used colors to convey religious concepts?
4. How have the cultural and historical differences of the Timurid era and the relevant Christian periods influenced color selection in these works?

Research Methodology: This research will employ a descriptive-analytical method and comparative approach. Initially, the artistic and coloration features of the two manuscripts—the Lindisfarne Gospels and the Walters Quran—will be examined through existing literature and images. These features will then be compared and explained based on historical and religious sources.

Data Collection Method: Information will be gathered through careful study of the manuscripts available in reputable libraries and museums, accompanied by analysis of images of these manuscripts. Additionally, previous studies on religious coloration and the arts of Islam and Christianity, as well as historical and cultural sources related to the Timurid era and Christian periods in Europe, will be utilized.

Summary of Findings: The research has revealed significant differences and similarities in the use of colors in the Lindisfarne Gospels and the Walters Quran. Furthermore, the findings underscore the relationship between religious art and cultural-religious identity in the Christian and Islamic traditions, as manifested in the choice of colors used in the decoration and illumination of these manuscripts. These selections serve as symbols of cultural identity and religious thought.

Keywords: Lindisfarne *Gospels*, Timurid period *Quran*, Color, Illumination, Book design, Religion.

INTRODUCTION

Religious art is one of the most prominent and important branches of art, serving as a tool for expressing faith, religious values, and connecting with spirituality in various societies. This type of art has not only created unique masterpieces but has also been used since ancient times as a means for education, instruction, and inspiration within religious communities. Whether in painting, architecture, music, or any other field, religious art reflects beliefs, values, and religious history and is recognized as an important part of the culture and identity of every religious community. Christian religious art, as a fundamental part of the cultural identity of Christians, has had a significant impact on the culture, history, and art of the world. It has employed sacred images, symbols, and religious stories as a strategy for direct connection with theology and spirituality, to establish a deeper and more profound connection with religious concepts. The beauty of Christian religious art can be seen in the architecture of churches, paintings of Jesus, and religious music, all of which represent the depth of faith and religious beauties. This art is not only a means for expressing Christian faith and values but has also served as a source of inspiration for artists and members of Christian communities throughout history. Islamic religious art is one of the richest and most diverse artistic fields, which has had a widespread impact on the culture and art of the Islamic world. This art is used not only for expressing beliefs and religious values but also as a tool for meeting the spiritual and mental needs of individuals. Examples of Islamic religious art include mosque architecture, paintings of Quranic surahs, and calligraphy art, each reflecting the beauty and depth of Islam. This art represents the history, beliefs, and culture of Islamic societies and has always been recognized as a source of inspiration for artists and art enthusiasts in these regions. Illuminated manuscripts throughout various historical periods have been one of the most important media for conveying values, beliefs, and religious concepts. The illuminated manuscripts of the Lindisfarne Gospels are among the most important and beautiful examples of illuminated manuscript art in the medieval centuries. This book, with a unique combination of designs and valuable decorations, is not only considered an artwork but also a masterpiece of

Christian writing and authenticity. The illumination of the Quran during the Timurid period is regarded as one of the unique artistic jewels in the history of Iran. These works, with a combination of artistic beauty, comprehensive calligraphy, and stunning decorations, are considered outstanding examples of illuminated manuscript art and are recognized as masterpieces of culture and art in Timurid Iran. Illuminated manuscripts throughout various historical periods have been one of the most important media for conveying values, beliefs, and religious concepts. The Lindisfarne Gospels and a religious manuscript of the Quran during the Timurid period, known as the Walters Quran, are two prominent examples of this art, noted for their use of calligraphy, decoration, and especially color, representing religious values.

The questions posed in this research are as follows:

1. What differences and similarities are observed in the use of colors in the Lindisfarne Gospels and the Walters Quran manuscript?
2. What religious and cultural roles do colors play in both manuscripts?
3. How have the artists and scribes of these religious works used colors to convey religious concepts?
4. What impact have the cultural and historical differences between the Timurid period and the relevant Christian periods had on the choice of colors in these works?

This research conducts a detailed and comparative study of religious coloring in these two great works to achieve a deeper understanding of the role and significance of colors in conveying religious values and provide criteria for evaluating these uses.

Research Methodology

The present study is theoretical in nature, employing a descriptive-analytical approach in terms of method and substance. Data collection will be conducted through library research and document analysis. In this phase, resources related to the Lindisfarne Gospels and a religious manuscript of the Holy Quran from the Timurid era will be carefully examined. These resources include original texts, scholarly articles, historical and artistic books and papers. Using content analysis, the role and significance of colors in the Lindisfarne Gospels and the Timurid Quran

manuscript will be investigated. This analysis includes examining patterns, symbols, and relationships within the colors used. In this stage, the colors and religious symbolism present in the Lindisfarne Gospels and the Timurid Quran manuscript will be compared. Similarities and differences in the use of colors and their role in conveying religious messages will be explored. The results of the investigations and comparative analyses will be carefully analyzed, and interpretations will be offered regarding the role and significance of colors in conveying religious values in the two works studied. Final conclusions will be presented based on the analyses and comparisons made, and suggestions for future research in this area will be provided.

Research Background

Previous research has addressed individual or other aspects of the present study, but the need for a more thorough and comparative examination of the aforementioned works is still felt. Therefore, this research seeks to provide its demands and goals for a comparative study of these two important works by reviewing the background of existing research and recognizing the innovations and strengths and weaknesses of this research, and to provide a deeper interpretation of this topic. Shayestehfar (2006) in the article "The Position and Manifestation of Religion in Iranian Painting (Ilkhanid and Timurid)," has shown that in the Timurid period, foreign tendencies as well as imitation of Chinese and Christian art were diminished, and we are witnessing the growth of the original Iranian style. Also, the role of the Quran in the selection of subjects was very important in both the Ilkhanid and Timurid periods, and Quranic stories were repeatedly illustrated in both periods. Shokri and Nazari (2016) in the article "Introduction and Analysis of an Ancient Translation of the Holy Quran in a Manuscript in the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore," while addressing the translation of the mentioned manuscript, briefly described the appearance and artistic features of this manuscript and also examined its Persian script. The result is that the importance of this manuscript for correcting ancient manuscripts and old translations of the Quran has been realized, and a large number of ancient words have been listed based on it. Marashi

(2014) in the book *The Holy Quran: In Muhaqqaq Script with an Ancient Persian Translation from the Ninth Century AH*, provides a comprehensive introduction to the mentioned manuscript from a historical perspective and its identification and writing components, and its distinctions with other written copies of the Holy Quran in the Timurid era. Khalili and James (2002) in the book *After Timur, Qur'anic Illumination in the Tenth Century AH*, collected a valuable collection of written and illuminated copies of the Holy Quran from the Timurid era to the tenth century AH, and introduced and analyzed them in terms of historical characteristics and stylistic art of illumination, calligraphy and book decoration used in them. Kavousi (2010) in the book *Sword and Tambourine, the Art of the Timurid Period as Narrated by Texts*, provides a comprehensive account of the arts, artists and art patrons of the Timurid era in Iran, based on historical evidence and the study of extant copies from that period. Rafiei Rad (2020) in the article "Analysis of the Expression of Red Color in Haft Paykar by Nizami Based on Islamic Mysticism," while referring to the topic of color expression, which is examined in this text under the concept of color symbolism, has shown that the expression of red color in Haft Paykar, not based on astronomy, Mithraism or Zoroastrianism, but relying on the principles of Islamic mysticism, can be interpreted and analyzed in the form of special keywords that emphasize the acquisition of wisdom and the need for rationality in this story.

Genealogy of Terms

1-1 Book Ornamentation

The term "book ornamentation" is comprised of two components: "book" and "ornamentation." The word "book" symbolizes the significant and prominent position of written or pictorial works. The term "ornamentation" is derived from the verb "to adorn," meaning decoration, beautification, and the enhancement of appearance. Consequently, "book ornamentation" refers to the art and technique of embellishing and adorning books to increase their visual appeal and attract the audience's attention. This term stems from the view that books, in addition to conveying information and knowledge, should be aesthetically pleasing to capture the audience's interest. Traditionally, book

ornamentation is one of the diverse and traditional arts that encompasses all dimensions of designing and beautifying books. This art is as complex and expansive as the preparation and production of books themselves. In the traditional sense, book ornamentation is considered a distinct art and a unique artistic school that includes all activities related to book design, whether it pertains to external covers or internal decorations. In other words, it encompasses discussions about both the form and content of the book, representing a combination of form, content, and technique. Book ornamentation includes a variety of artistic endeavors such as writing, calligraphy, decoration, coloring, layout design, and illustration, as well as the selection of materials such as paper quality and binding techniques. The historical background of writing and calligraphy, considered one of the earliest book ornamentation activities, traces back more than three thousand years before Christ. In ancient times, these activities were primarily associated with trade and commerce. With the advent of Islam in Iran, the art of book ornamentation experienced rapid growth, eventually manifesting in the decoration and design of Quranic manuscripts. Over time, this art was influenced by religious and cultural principles, evolving across different historical periods (Rahnavard, 2009: 1-2).

1-2 Illumination (Tazhib)

The word "illumination" (in Persian *Tazhib*) is derived from the Arabic root "dhahb", meaning "gold." In Persian usage, this term refers to the adornment and beautification of objects using gold or precious metals, typically in the form of patterns, motifs, or beautifully designed inscriptions. Illumination represents an artistic and handcrafted process created by skilled artisans. This art is often applied to decorate valuable objects such as jewelry, plaques, inscriptions, and more. Gold is regarded as a radiant and valuable color in illumination, which is why illumination is often identified with gilding techniques. However, a general definition of illumination would encompass processes such as intricate patterns, coloring, the use of gold, polishing, and detailed linework with natural-hair brushes such as sable or cat-hair brushes. Illumination involves stunning decorations applied to various surfaces.

Common motifs in illumination include:

- Floral patterns (e.g., *Islimi* and *Khatayi* motifs)

- Geometric designs (e.g., knots and patterns)

- Occasionally, human and animal motifs are employed for embellishment on specific objects.

Overall, illumination is a traditional art form representing not only decoration but also the meticulous craftsmanship of cultural and artistic expression. Over centuries, this art has symbolized refinement and aesthetics in manuscripts and other works of historical importance (Mohammadi, 2010: 34).

1-3 Religious Art

Religious art is a creative expression that serves the beliefs, values, and concepts of religion, enabling them to be conveyed with greater beauty and nuance. This form of art is often associated with rituals, ceremonies, sacred places, and themes related to religious doctrine. Within religious art, spiritual meanings and values are portrayed through symbols and imagery that resonate deeply with viewers. The purpose of religious art is to evoke profound emotions and inner contemplation, enhancing the human connection to spirituality and faith. Religious art encompasses a broad range of forms, including:

- Religious paintings

- Sacred sculptures

- Liturgical music and chants

- Architecture of sacred spaces

- Religious literature and sacred texts.

Religious symbols and motifs foster an emotional and intellectual experience that draws individuals closer to their faith. As a non-verbal language, this art form translates beliefs and values into tangible forms that are accessible and meaningful to a wide audience. Furthermore, religious art plays a vital role in both individual and collective spiritual experiences. For centuries, religious art has been instrumental in shaping and preserving cultural heritage while reinforcing the identity and values of religious communities. Whether in the form of illuminated manuscripts, painted religious icons, or majestic sacred architecture, religious art testifies to humanity's enduring relationship with spirituality. Through religious art, societies have passed down their traditions, values, and religious beliefs, continually enriching this heritage. This art form remains an integral part of the cultural and spiritual fabric of communities, uniting aesthetic

beauty with deeply held convictions and creating a lasting legacy. It serves not only as historical documentation but also as a profound medium for spiritual exploration and devotion, which continues to resonate across generations.

1-4 Color Symbolism

Color symbolism refers to a conceptual and intellectual approach that revolves around colors and their impact on human emotions and psychology. This approach is widely utilized across various fields such as design, marketing, psychology, and art. Reflection on the symbolic and cultural meanings of colors connects to a variety of disciplines. In the visual arts, based on the theories of Johannes Itten, two primary concepts emerge: "Impression of Color" and "Expression of Color." Although colors, in their physical dimension, are defined as the reflection of specific wavelengths, they have come to represent tools for conveying emotions, descriptions, imagination, symbols, and other human concerns within the scope of human culture. The term "Expression of Color" emphasizes the use of colors to communicate subjective values and emotions in art, culture, and literature, contrasting the "Impression of Color" theory, which focuses on the natural appearance of colors in physical reality (Itten, 2016: 168). Religious reflection on color symbolism delves into the interpretation and significance of colors in various cultures and religions. In this context, colors are studied as symbols of spiritual meanings, beliefs, and religious values. For example, examining the roles of colors in sacred texts, religious ceremonies, and rituals, and their symbolic presence in sacred artifacts and art, forms the foundation of this reflection. Colors are analyzed for their representation of spiritual and religious ideas and practices.

This introspection extends to the exploration of:

- The use of colors in religious rituals and ceremonies.
- Their meanings in religious symbols such as flags, temples, and statues.
- The interpretation of colors in religious imagery and paintings.

Additionally, studies have examined the effect of colors on religious thought and emotions, their influence on the spiritual atmosphere during

reflection or worship, and their deeper psychological and faith-based implications. Color symbolism allows us to better understand the intersection of colors with faith-based traditions and spiritual experiences in different societies. Scholars ranging from theologians and psychologists to artists and architects have explored the role of colors in religious expressions and the cultural ties between color theory and faith. These studies not only expand our understanding of the visual language of colors but also shed light on the human-spiritual relationship within religious societies. In broader terms, religious reflection on color symbolism helps us decode the spiritual depth of colors in various religious traditions. For example:

- The use of green as a symbol of paradise in Islamic tradition.
- Gold's association with divinity in Christian iconography.
- White as a representation of purity in multiple religious contexts.

This investigation underscores the interconnectedness of human perception of colors with the natural, artistic, and religious environment, enriching our awareness of the spiritual dimensions of life and civilization.

2. Art and Book Ornamentation in the Timurid Era

The rule of Timur (Tamerlane) represents a paradoxical period in history—marked by warfare and brutality, yet exceptional progress in art, science, and culture. Timur actively engaged in cultural, religious, and artistic endeavors, promoting Islamic values and sciences such as medicine and astronomy, while also respecting scholars and mystics. After his death, his son, Shah Rukh, took the throne, relocating the empire's center to Iran. Shah Rukh's era continued to prioritize cultural and artistic activities despite financial challenges, resulting in relative instability toward the end of his reign (Kavousi, 2010: 17–22). Despite these challenges, the Timurid period is widely regarded as a golden age for **book arts and ornamentation** in Iran. From Timur's rule to the decline of Sultan Husayn Bayqara's governance, Timurid rulers placed considerable emphasis on the flourishing of bookmaking and its associated arts. Historical and artistic evidence

from significant remaining manuscripts highlights a vibrant cultural environment where book ornamentation reached unparalleled sophistication.

Historical Significance of Timurid Book Ornamentation

Before the Timurid era, the art of bookmaking and decoration had already begun to develop prominently during the reigns of smaller dynasties such as:

- The Jalayirids
- The Muzaffarids
- The Ilkhanids

Workshops dedicated to creating illuminated manuscripts flourished under patronage in these periods and were often located in the kings' courts. However, the Timurid era brought about a unique cultural renaissance where rulers themselves played a key role in encouraging competition among artists and emphasizing the centrality of book arts. For example, it was Timur's vision to position **Samarkand** as a major cultural hub that resulted in the gathering of artists, book artisans, and architects from across the empire. This centralized effort elevated book ornamentation to new heights and made it a hallmark of Timurid arts. Although coordination between bookmaking projects and court commissions was not always consistent, historical records such as the travelogue of Clavijo and the prologue by Dust Muhammad Guvashani Heravi confirm that Timur frequently encouraged the migration of talented artisans to Samarkand. For instance, after capturing Baghdad, he reportedly sent the renowned painter Khwaja Abd al-Hayy and other prominent artists to his court. This initiative laid a foundation for successive rulers to consolidate art, literature, and architecture in their territories.

Features of Timurid Influence on Book Ornamentation

The illuminated manuscripts and artistic workshops under Timurid patronage displayed specific characteristics:

- Intricate miniatures, enhanced by vibrant and symbolic use of color.
- Advanced calligraphy, often combining several scripts in one manuscript.

- Rich illuminations, with floral Islimi and Khatayi motifs.

- Enhanced binding techniques, introducing exquisite designs on external covers.

- Mastery in the choice and quality of materials like paper and ink.

This patronage and competition made the Timurid period one of the defining chapters in the history of Iranian book arts. Although there were moments of political and financial instability, Timurid cultural policies persisted as a model for succeeding dynasties. Overall, the Timurid rulers' attention to book arts was not limited to decoration but extended to creating an environment where bookmaking flourished as a multidisciplinary craft. By combining visual art, writing, and literary content, book ornamentation during this era reflected a profound cultural ethos and remains a lasting testament to the artistic achievements of the Timurid dynasty (Rahnavard, 2009: 43–46).

Introduction of the Manuscripts

3-1 The Lindisfarne Gospels

The Lindisfarne Gospels, a religious illuminated manuscript, originated along the coast of Northumberland, England, where the British Library now resides in London. Likely created between 715 CE and 720 CE, this manuscript is one of the most remarkable examples of Insular or Hiberno-Saxon² art, showcasing various elements from Mediterranean, Anglo-Saxon, and Celtic cultures. It is believed to have been produced by a monk named Eadfrith, who became the Bishop of Lindisfarne in 698 CE and passed away in 721 CE. However, since parts of the manuscript remain incomplete, it is speculated that Eadfrith may have still been working on the text at the time of his death or may have begun it earlier to honor St. Cuthbert. The gospels are intricately crafted and were originally housed in a luxurious leather binding adorned with jewels and metals, likely the work of Eadfrith the Anchorite during the 8th century. Unfortunately, this cover was lost during Viking invasions, and a replacement cover was made in 1852. The text is written in the Insular style of the era and remains the most complete representation of Insular manuscripts. A word-for-word Old English translation of the text was added between the 9th and 10th centuries by Aldred, the

priest of Chester-le-Street, making it the earliest surviving example of the Bible translated into English. The Gospels are thought to have been taken from Durham Cathedral during the dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII. They eventually passed into the hands of Sir Robert Cotton in the early 17th century. The collection was later moved to the British Museum in the 18th century and is now housed in the British Library¹ in London. The island of Lindisfarne, known as the "Holy Island," was established as a religious center around 635 CE by the Irish monk Aidan. Following the conversion of the Northumbrian royalty to Christianity in 627 CE, the area became a significant Christian hub, with the Lindisfarne Gospels contributing to the veneration of St. Cuthbert. These gospels utilized decorative techniques reminiscent of elite metalwork to captivate the Northumbrian audience, most of whom could neither read nor comprehend Latin. The Lindisfarne Gospels comprise a Christian manuscript containing the four Gospels, crafted for ceremonial purposes and to celebrate the Christian faith and the word of God (figure 1), (Table 1).



Figure 1. St. Mark - Lindisfarne Gospels (710-721), f.93v - BL Cotton MS Nero (URL 1).

Table 1. Appearance characteristics of the Lindisfarne Gospels (Source: Author).

Description	Features
Insular half-letters, a combination of Roman and Irish calligraphy traditions	Calligraphy
Tempera and gold leaf	Decorations

258	Number of pages
Four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John)	Content
British Library, London	Location

Symbolism and Visual Features

Beyond their beauty, the Lindisfarne Gospels offer insights into the religious beliefs and cultural practices of early medieval Britain. The manuscript seamlessly integrates Christian iconography with pre-Christian pagan symbols, reflecting the complex interaction between the old and new faiths during the period.

Notable Illustrations

- **The Chi Rho Page:** A masterpiece of early medieval art, this page features the intertwined Chi and Rho letters, symbolizing Christ as the "Anointed Messiah." The vibrant colors, intricate knotwork, and surrounding figures convey awe and reverence (Figure 2).
- **Madonna and Child:** Depicted within an almond-shaped mandorla, this image symbolizes Mary's role as the divine mother. The fine details in her attire and her serene expression are remarkable.
- **The Four Evangelists:** Each Gospel is introduced by a portrait of its author, traditionally symbolized with identifying icons: Matthew with an angel, Mark with a lion, Luke with an ox, and John with an eagle.

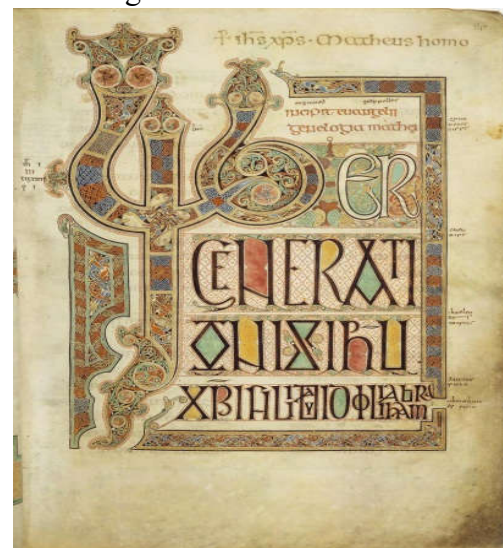


Figure 2. Folio 27r from the Lindisfarne Gospels, incipit to the Gospel of Matthew. The main text contains the first sentence of the Gospel According to Saint Matthew: "Liber generationis Iesu Christi"

fili David filii Abraham" ("The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham") (URL 2).

Visual and Material Features

- Calligraphy: Utilizes Insular half-uncial script, combining Roman and Irish calligraphic traditions.
- Decorations: Executed with tempera pigments and gold leaf.
- Contents: The manuscript has 258 pages containing the full texts of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.
- Current Location: The British Library, London.

Artistic and Cultural Impact

The Lindisfarne Gospels not only glorify Christianity but also provide a window into the dynamic interactions of cultures in medieval Britain. They are a testament to the cosmopolitan artistic spirit of the time, blending Insular, Roman, and Mediterranean elements with extraordinary sophistication.

Comparative Analysis: The Lindisfarne Gospels in Context

The Lindisfarne Gospels hold a unique place in the history of British art. However, to fully comprehend their significance, they should be understood within the broader framework of Insular art—a style that flourished across the British Isles during the 7th and 8th centuries CE.

Some notable characteristics shared by Insular manuscripts include:

- Blended Styles: A fusion of Celtic and Anglo-Saxon influences.
- Intricate Knotwork: Complex interwoven patterns, often inspired by pagan symbolism.
- Zoomorphic Designs: Stylized representations of animals integrated into elaborate patterns.

Walters Quran (W.563)

At the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, Maryland, a manuscript of the Quran, cataloged as W.563, is part of the museum's manuscripts collection. This piece dates back to the 9th century AH / 15th century CE and exhibits distinct features that speak to its historical and artistic importance.

1. Date and Origin:

This manuscript, created in 15th-century North India, showcases the artistic and cultural influences of the region. The inclusion of Sultan Bayezid II's

seal strengthens the argument for its North Indian origin.

2. Design Features:

- The manuscript contains 1,102 pages, each measuring 40 x 31 cm in large Timurid (or Sultanate) format.
- The text is written in 9 lines per page within a bordered frame, primarily in Muhaqqaq script in black ink for the Quranic text.
- Interlinear Persian translations are written in tiny, angled Naskh script in red ink for each word.

3. Illumination and Decoration:

- Exceptional illumination frames portions like Surah headings and key sections (e.g., Surah al-Fatihah, al-Nas).
- Decorated chapter titles are inscribed within rectangular panels, gilded, and adorned with blue motifs.
- Features such as floral arabesque patterns with gold and vibrant pigments reflect Timurid influence.

4. Palace Influence and Royal Seals:

- The manuscript contains Sultan Bayezid II's seal on folio 8a and remnants of a waqf (endowment) inscription by Sultan Osman II on folio 3a.
- While the seals are partially erased, they attest to the manuscript's use and admiration within the Ottoman or royal collections.

5. Binding and Materials:

- It is bound in a brown leather cover with intricate pressed designs. The flap bears gilded verses of Surah al-Waqiah (verses 77–80).
- The pages are of aged, thin paper, some leaning towards a henna-tinged hue.

Artistic and Technical Features

1. Calligraphy:

The Quran Walters manuscript uses Muhaqqaq for Quranic text and Naskh for Persian translations. Its clear organization and contrast enhance readability while maintaining elegance.

2. Illumination:

- Extensive use of gilding (gold) and pigments such as lapis lazuli denote luxury.
- Floral and geometric themes impart the manuscript an artistic brilliance typical of Timurid manuscripts.

3. Size and Usage:

The large dimensions and exquisite decorations suggest it was used for ceremonial or royal purposes rather than regular study or recitation.

4. Symbolism of Colors:

- Gold and Blue: Represent divine light and wisdom.
- Red: Embodies strength and passion for the word of God.

Through its exceptional craftsmanship, the Walters Quran demonstrates a harmonious blend of function, artistry, and spirituality (Figure 3).



Figure 3. The Walters's Quran, ink and pigments on thin laid paper, 9th century AH/AD 15th century (Timurid) (URL 3).

The Role of Colors in Islamic Philosophy and the Quran

Colors as Manifestations of Divine Signs in the Quran

Colors in the Quran are not only aesthetic elements but also serve as signs of divine power, wisdom, and identity. They are used to convey spiritual messages and to strengthen the connection between humans, nature, and the Creator. According to [Maulana Abdul Haq Vidyarthi] (<https://www.muslim.org/islam/colours.htm>), the Quran highlights the diversity of colors in nature—such as mountains, fruits, humans, and animals—as evidence of God's existence (Quran 35:27-28). This perspective aligns religious and natural phenomena, showcasing how color embodies signs of God's majesty and wisdom. Moreover, the symbolic meanings attributed to colors are

reflected through different Quranic verses, emphasizing deeper moral and spiritual truths tied to these elements of nature.

Significance and Symbolism of Specific Colors in Islam

Within Islamic philosophy and art, specific colors take on profound symbolic meanings. As analyzed by Norwardatun Mohamed Razali in the study referenced by [Nakkas Boytu] (<https://nakkasboytu.com/blogs/islamic-decor/islamic-colors>), these colors emphasize values intrinsic to Islamic spirituality and culture:

1. Green: A central color in Islam, symbolizing life, paradise, and divine blessings. It represents growth, tranquility, and eternal peace in Islamic tradition.
2. Blue: Represents calmness, honesty, and wisdom. It is often used symbolically in connection to spirituality and deep reflection.
3. Black: A complex color in Islamic art, combining meanings of humility, power, and occasionally, solemnity.
4. Gold: Reflects richness, divine light, and nobility. Its use in manuscripts and architecture emphasizes sacredness and glory.
5. White: As a symbol of purity, peace, and divine truth, white signifies the innate nature of humankind and is often associated with clarity and innocence.

Through these symbolic layers, colors in Islam transcend mere decoration and connect believers with their cultural, religious, and ethical heritage.

Colors in the Quranic Manuscript Art and Islamic Aesthetics

The thoughtful application of colors in Quranic manuscripts, such as the Walters Quran, reveals a dual emphasis on visual beauty and conveying spiritual messages. Colored decorations like golden headings, blue borders, and red highlights are common elements that focus a reader's attention on specific sections of the text while enhancing the manuscript's sacredness. According to [Nakkas Boytu] (<https://nakkasboytu.com/blogs/islamic-decor/islamic-colors>), these artistic choices reflect an attempt to balance practical readability with symbolic messaging, thus transforming art into a spiritual experience. Colors in Islamic art and texts are tools for expressing deeper philosophical and mystical themes—allowing individuals to explore

their faith and humanity through a highly aesthetic but meaningful medium.

Symbolism of Colors in the Lindisfarne Gospels

The use of colors in the Lindisfarne Gospels not only enhances their visual appeal but also carries profound spiritual and symbolic meanings. These colors contribute to the artistic and religious depth of this medieval manuscript, providing insight into the theological and artistic vision of its creators. Below is an examination of the key colors used in this manuscript and their symbolic interpretations:

Gold

Gold, used extensively in gilding and illuminations in the Lindisfarne Gospels, symbolizes “divine light”, “glory”, and the “majesty of God”. It is often used to highlight significant text or images, such as the names of saints or sacred symbols, imbuing them with a sense of grandeur and sanctity. Gold also represents “power” and “splendor”, reflecting the divine authority and magnificence of Christianity. In the Lindisfarne Gospels, this radiant color draws the reader into a sense of awe and reverence for the divine.

Blue

Blue, a color often associated with the “heavens”, conveys “tranquility”, “spirituality”, and “truth”. In the Lindisfarne Gospels, blue is frequently used in decorations to create a serene visual experience, helping the reader focus and feel peace during the study of sacred texts. It also symbolizes “purity” and the “greatness of divine truth”, underscoring the spiritual importance of the content.

Red

Red in the Lindisfarne Gospels symbolizes “love”, “sacrifice”, and “devotion”. It strongly evokes the “passion of Christ” and can often be seen in illuminations related to the Cross or Christian martyrdom. Red is also used to signal “importance” and “urgency”, drawing attention to highlighted texts or decorations. This color reinforces the depth of Christ's love and sacrifice while prompting the reader to reflect on these profound themes.

Green

Green is a key color in Christian art, symbolizing “life”, “renewal”, and “nature”. In the Lindisfarne Gospels, green represents “hope” and the promise of “salvation”. The use of this color infuses the manuscript with freshness and vitality, serving as a

visual metaphor for the renewal of faith and spiritual growth.

White

White symbolizes “purity”, “sanctity”, and “divine light” in Christian art. In the Lindisfarne Gospels, the use of white spaces not only highlights the text and decorations but also creates a sense of “holiness” and “sacredness”. The deliberate use of white provides a contemplative pause, allowing the reader to focus more deeply on the spiritual aspects of the text. White is also a symbol of “spiritual clarity”, bringing an aura of divine purity to the manuscript.

Black

Black is mainly used for the “text” in the Lindisfarne Gospels, offering high readability and emphasizing the solemnity and gravity of the sacred words. As a contrasting element with brighter colors like gold and blue, black contributes to the overall harmony and balance of the pages. Its simplicity ensures that the divine words remain central, underlining the authority and permanence of the biblical text.

The Artistic and Spiritual Use of Color in the Lindisfarne Gospels

The symbolism of colors in the Lindisfarne Gospels has profound effects on the reader's visual and spiritual experience. These effects include:

1. Enhanced Focus and Attention

- Colors like gold and red highlight key parts of the scripture, ensuring that important passages or images capture the reader's attention.

- This strategic use of color helps create a structured and meaningful reading experience, directing the reader's focus to the most significant elements.

2. A Sense of Sacredness and Reverence

- The vibrant colors and careful illuminations cultivate a sense of respect and devotion. The manuscript conveys an atmosphere of divine grandeur, elevating the spiritual experience of reading the Gospels.

3. Visual Appeal and Continuity

- The combination of diverse colors, carefully balanced on each page, enhances the visual harmony and beauty of the manuscript.

- This aesthetic appeal invites readers to engage with the text further, creating an immersive journey through its intricate details.

4. A Deeper Spiritual Connection

- Each color carries symbolic meanings that connect the reader to the spiritual themes expressed in the text. For example, green's metaphorical association with hope and salvation brings comfort, while red emphasizes the importance of love and sacrifice.

Examples from the Lindisfarne Gospels:

1. Opening Pages

- The opening pages feature highly detailed illuminations with extensive use of gold, expressing splendor and inviting divine contemplation. Shades of lapis lazuli blue and verdant green complement the gold to create a peaceful and sacred atmosphere.

2. Chapter Titles

- The chapter titles are frequently accented in gold or red, guiding the reader's attention to the beginning of each section and emphasizing the centrality of the Word of God.

3. Marginal Decorations

- Intricate marginal patterns incorporate combinations of gold, red, blue, and green, creating balance and visual harmony while encouraging reflection as the reader moves through the manuscript (Figure 4).

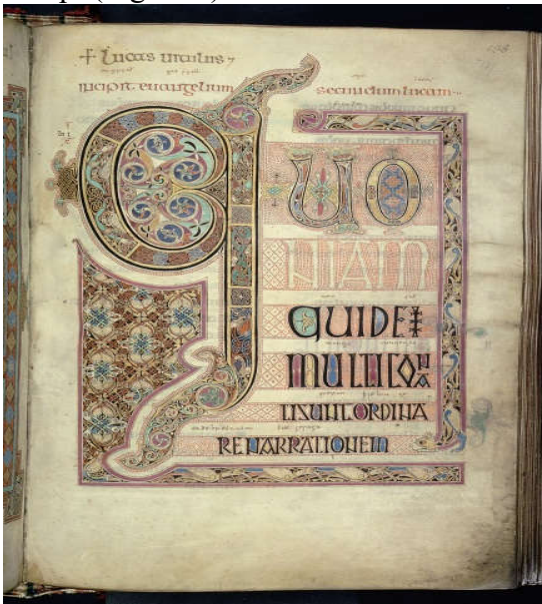


Figure 4.A page from the 'Lindisfarne Gospels' (URL 4).

The Influence of Color Symbolism on the Reader's Experience

Color symbolism in the Lindisfarne Gospels elevates the reader's spiritual and mental engagement through:

1. Fostering Focus: Highlighted words and decorations in vibrant colors draw attention to key spiritual messages.
2. Encouraging Reverence: The meticulous use of colors instills a sacred respect for the text.
3. Enhancing Visual Delight: The intricate interplay of colors makes the manuscript an artistic masterpiece, encouraging the reader to explore its subtleties further.
4. Deepening Spiritual Insight: Symbolic colors guide the reader's contemplation, enriching their understanding of the text's theological and moral themes.

The Lindisfarne Gospels represent a zenith in medieval manuscript artistry. The thoughtful integration of color not only enhances its beauty but also enriches the spiritual messages it conveys. The interplay between color, symbolism, and sacred text creates an enduring legacy that continues to inspire readers, artists, and theologians. Through its bold use of gold, vibrant reds and greens, serene blues, and the purity of whites, this masterpiece serves as a bridge between the divine and earthly realms—a timeless testimony to the power of art in spiritual expression.

Comparative Analysis of Color Symbolism in the Lindisfarne Gospels and the Walters Quran

The Lindisfarne Gospels and the Walters Quran, as masterpieces of religious manuscripts from Christian and Islamic traditions, represent the artistic and spiritual values of their respective cultures. Both manuscripts utilize color not only to enhance their artistic beauty but also to deliver symbolic and theological meanings. Below is a comparative analysis of the two works based on their color symbolism and application:

1. Gold

Walters Quran:

- Gold is used abundantly to symbolize "divine light", "purity", and "magnificence".
- It is primarily applied in marginal decorations, surah headings, and ornamented symbols, thereby drawing attention to the text's divine nature.

Lindisfarne Gospels:

- Gold represents "divine light", "splendor", and "glory", often elevating the prominence of sacred figures or text.

- It is heavily employed to emphasize important titles or depict saints and sacred imagery, reflecting its sacred use in liturgical contexts.

Comparison:

In both manuscripts, gold serves as a direct symbol of "divine radiance" and "spiritual illumination". However, the Walters Quran uses gold predominantly for decorative purposes in the margins and headings, while in the Lindisfarne Gospels, it emphasizes figures and elements of sacred narrative.

2. Blue

Walters Quran:

- Blue, especially lapis lazuli shades, symbolizes "heavenly peace", "divine wisdom", and "stability".

- It is used in "marginal ornaments" and text borders to create a sense of calm and focus for the recitation of the Quran.

Lindisfarne Gospels:

- Blue is closely associated with the "heavens" and "spiritual introspection".

- It is extensively used in illuminations to evoke tranquility and contemplation, enhancing the meditative experience when reading the Gospels.

Comparison:

Both manuscripts use blue to represent "spirituality", "serenity", and "heavens", signifying an overlap in the cultural symbolism of this color. In both cases, it supports contemplative engagement with sacred texts.

3. Red

Walters Quran:

- Red is a symbol of "intensity", "love", and occasionally "warning".

- It is used to highlight specific phrases or headings, ensuring the reader focuses on critical elements within the scripture.

Lindisfarne Gospels:

- Red is connected to "love", "passion", and "sacrifice", especially in relation to the "Passion of Christ".

- It is frequently applied to imagery of the "Cross" and narratives of martyrdom, symbolizing Christ's devotion to humanity.

Comparison:

While both manuscripts use red for "emphasis" and to highlight important themes, the Walters Quran relates red to divine love and focus, whereas the

Lindisfarne Gospels associate it with "Christ's sacrifice" and "divine love in action".

4. Green

Walters Quran:

- Green represents "life", "paradise", and "renewal", a recurring theme in Islamic art and scriptures.

- It is used to create "vivid decorations" and "floral motifs", inspiring feelings of hope, nature, and a connection to divine creation.

Lindisfarne Gospels:

- Green exemplifies "life", "resurrection", and "nature" within Christian theology.

- It is an essential color in the intricate "illuminated initials" and decorations, adding vibrancy to the manuscript while symbolizing eternity.

Comparison:

Both traditions regard green as a "symbol of life and renewal", often visualizing it as connected to "eternal salvation" or paradise. Its application is similar in adding vividness and evoking nature's role in sacred worship.

5. White

Walters Quran:

- White stands for "purity", "divine light", and "sacred clarity".

- It is used as a "background" to emphasize illumination and sanctity in geometric and floral decoration.

Lindisfarne Gospels:

- White also represents "purity", "light", and "spiritual clarity", often appearing in "negative spaces" to enhance the illuminations and text.

- White spaces create a balanced, meditative layout for the reader to approach the Gospels with reverence.

Comparison:

The use of white in both manuscripts highlights their dedication to "sacred purity", offering moments of visual pause and reverence as the readers contemplate the sacred text.

6. Black

Walters Quran:

- Black is the primary color for the "main text", symbolizing the seriousness and "authority" of God's words.

- It contrasts richly with gold and blue decorations, ensuring the "clarity" of the Quranic verses.

Lindisfarne Gospels:

- Black is similarly used for the “main body of text”, granting it “readability” and theological gravity.

- It enhances the harmonious balance between colorful decorations and sacred scripture.

Comparison:

In both works, black establishes “legibility and solemnity”, reinforcing the divine authority and sacredness of the written word.

7. Others: Purple & Brown

Purple

- The Walters Quran uses “purple” sparingly to symbolize “spiritual depth” and “regality”, often in ornamental elements.

- The Lindisfarne Gospels connect purple with “strength”, “sacrifice”, and “royalty”, frequently associating it with the “divinity of Christ.”

Brown

- The Walters Quran deploys brown for “earthly contrasts” and themes of humility.

- In the Lindisfarne Gospels, brown signifies “earthly connections” in contrast to divine illumination.

Both manuscripts use these additional colors as secondary tools, adding specific symbolic depth to their visual narratives.

Cultural Parallels and Divergences

Common Themes:

1. Transcendent Symbolism: Colors in both manuscripts act as bridges between the material and the spiritual realms.

2. Harmony and Balance: Both employ a harmonious balance of colors to achieve “visual serenity” and support “theological reflection”.

3. “Emphasis on Sacred Text”: Each text highlights key verses through rich embellishments, ensuring focus on divine revelation.

Divergences:

1. In the “Walters Quran”, colors emphasize “geometric precision” and “aesthetic mindfulness”, reflecting Islamic traditions of abstraction and cosmic order.

2. In the “Lindisfarne Gospels”, there is greater focus on figurative art, including “depictions of saints and the Cross”, catering to Christian narratives of salvation.

The Walters Quran and the Lindisfarne Gospels both showcase a masterful use of color symbolism to enhance their artistry and spirituality. While

their cultural contexts influence the choice and symbolism of colors, there is notable overlap in their shared values. Gold, blue, green, and white dominate both, signifying divine glory, peace, renewal, and purity. These manuscripts stand as timeless artistic achievements and spiritual tools, offering readers a profound connection to their faith. They remain invaluable sources of inspiration for scholars, artists, and those exploring the deep interaction of art, culture, and spirituality.

Conclusion

The present study, through a comparative analysis of the role of color in the Lindisfarne Gospels and a magnificent copy of the Qur’an from the Timurid period, demonstrates that colors, beyond their decorative function, operate as a powerful tool for expressing religious and cultural ideologies. In the Lindisfarne Gospels, colors such as gold (symbolizing divine light), blue (heaven and tranquility), red (love and sacrifice), green (life and renewal), and white (purity and divine illumination) have been utilized to depict Christian concepts. Similarly, in the Timurid Walters Qur’an, colors such as green (life and paradise), yellow (sunlight and death), blue (peace and wisdom), red (life and power), black (darkness and sin), and white (purity and justice) have been used to convey Islamic meanings. This comparative analysis reveals that artists and calligraphers in both traditions, with a deep understanding of the psychology of color and its impact on human emotions and behavior, have succeeded in creating artworks that are not only visually captivating but also enhance the understanding of sacred texts. The selection of colors in each of these works reflects the cultural and religious values of their respective societies and demonstrates how art can serve as a bridge between diverse cultures and beliefs. This study underscores the importance of examining the role of colors in religious manuscripts and artworks, as it can open new perspectives on understanding the spiritual and cultural heritage of different civilizations while aiding in the preservation and promotion of these invaluable treasures. Therefore, considering the role of color in art and religious studies is both essential and inevitable.

Endnotes

1. The British Library is one of the largest libraries in the world, located in the capital city of the United Kingdom, London.

2. Hiberno-Saxon art, or Insular art, emerged during the post-Roman period in Great Britain and Ireland. During this time, Britain and Ireland shared a fundamentally common style that differed from the rest of Europe. Art historians often consider Hiberno-Saxon art as part of the Migration Period art and Early Medieval Western art, with their combination creating a distinct style with unique characteristics.

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THE END