

Religious Art in Iran During the Qajar Epoch: Breaking the Boundaries

Abstract

This article investigates the murals of Armenian churches that became the first examples of the combination of figurative European stylistic features and nonfigurative geometrical and arabesque Islamic motifs in a sacred place. This quality became the main style in decorating Islamic structures during the Qajar period (1795-1925).

Paintings, murals, textiles, tiles, and stone reliefs used in Islamic buildings included landscapes and still lifes, portraits and figures of the Prophet Mohammad, the Imams, and patrons as well as narrative images describing religious incidents or legends.

This article concludes that during the late eighteenth century and the nineteenth century, the social and cultural changes in Iran and the influence of European art and culture affected religious art as much as secular art. Iranian artists of this period introduced a new style of composition in which European-style figurative images became the focal point in a section of wall or ceiling, while arabesque and geometrical patterns frame the figurative parts, therefore, decreasing the importance of the symbolic meaning of traditional patterns and colors used for centuries in Iran.