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The Portrayal Style of Women in Six Qajar Muraqqas (Their Make-Up, Clothing, Jewelry, and Body Portrayals)

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Abstract

Introduction

The long historical duration of the Qajar dynasty can be divided into two distinct eras: Approximately 52 years were ruled by Agha Mohammad Khan, Fath Ali Shah, and Mohammad Shahduring the first period. The second period begins with Naser al-DinShah's reign. In this period, relations with Western countries improved and kept developing during the reign of Mozaffar al-Din Shah, Mohammad Ali Shah, and Ahmad Shah. So, the accomplishments of the second Qajar period are ascribed to Naseraddin Shah, whereas the art of the first period is associated with Fath-Ali Shah. The studies of Qajar graphic artworks usually address large-sized paintings or hand-written and printed literary manuscripts and do not discuss Muraqqas. Though, Muraqqa-making developed into a fine art during the Safavid dynasty and exists in a variety of forms. In the visual arts, muraqqa, which literally means patched clothing but in visual arts, it refers to several artworks containing calligraphy pieces, religious texts, painting sheets, and artist drawings. These pieces are bound together and covered as a book, which serves as a repository for graphic arts.

The main aim of this study is to compare the style of make-up, clothing, jewelry, and body portrayals of women in six Qajar Muraqqas. Other miner goals such as studying a few Muraqqas –which have been overlooked by previous studies– are accomplished as a result of this pursuit. Moreover, by comparing the mentioned graphic elements, we recover similarities and differences between two Qajar art styles – the portraiture of the first period and court painting of the second period– and assess their influence on Muraqqa-making in that era. Thus, the inquiry stands as to how an analysis of the style of make-up, clothing, jewelry, and body portrayals of women in six Qajar Muraqqas can illuminate both the commonalities and distinctions in the depiction of women during the two historical epochs.

Methods

Qualitative research employs an analytical and comparative approach to examine Qajar art from a historical perspective. For this study, it appeared that purposive sampling would be an effective method of selecting six Qajarian Muraqqas: one from Golestan Palace, one from the National Museum of Georgia, three from the Britain Museum, and one from Bonham's auction house. Therefore, in consideration of the study's variables, twelve works of art were selected and analyzed. Thus, this developmental study accomplished its objective through the utilization of document-based data collection, note-taking, and picture-reading methods.

Results

Frequently, princesses and minstrels are depicted in the foreground of *orosi* (a form of latticed window with stained glass) or windows in the paintings of the first period. They depict women with oval-shaped faces, unibrows, and a languishing look wearing *sormeh* (kohl eyeliner) and henna on their fingertips. All of them are pictured in brocade and pearl dresses clad in jewelry and ornamental elements. Decorative accessories such as crowns, carpets, cushions, and similar items are crafted from high-quality materials. The paintings introduce the people through objects without attempting to display their personal characteristics. Items such as decanters, cups, fruits, and vases fill the two-dimensional space of the works. The women in these artworks are usually dancing, playing a musical instrument, or engaging in other activities while holding a decanter, a cup, or the like. A more noteworthy aspect is that a type of figurative painting emphasizing

female features arises conspicuously in numerous examples of this style, virtually for the first time. Frequently, the visages and bodies are idealistically depicted with characteristics that transcend gender distinctions. This is an interesting point whose symbolic and aesthetic root can be traced in Persian literature. However, all of the depicted features serve as a portrayal of a decorative and artificial femininity.

Highly dependent on Fath-Ali Shah's support, figurative painting began to fade away in the era following his reign. Furthermore, additional painting styles experienced a surge in prominence beyond the court. When Abu'l-Hasan Sani al-Mulk came to the fore, naturalistic figurative painting witnessed a trend of innovations. In addition to accurately depicting the physical attributes of the figures, he laboriously rendered their emotional states and personalities. The adherents of Sani al-Mulk sustained this trend. Indeed, during the nineteenth century, Iranian painting endeavored to emulate notable characteristics of photography, which served as an artificial representation of the actual presence of figures. In doing so, it applied the historical technique of Iranian painting, which involved imitating isometric patterns, hues, and spaces, to photography. As royal figurative painting gained widespread recognition, women were depicted in interior settings wearing *andaruni* (inner quarter of the court where women lived) clothes like in Persian miniatures. In the second period, however, they were depicted donning outdoor attire such as chador, chaqchur, and veil. This shift occurred during the era of widespread acceptance of naturalistic and ethnographic painting and photography, which prompted a greater emphasis on outdoor existence. It is peculiar that aesthetic principles, which were emphasized during the first period, became less prominent during the second. Therefore, like previous times, Iranians selected a number of features in foreign styles, which they liked the most, and combined them in their own tradition of painting. The result of this integration was a distinct style of completely Iranian painting that can be seen clearly in the works remaining even from the earlier days of the period.

Conclusion

The findings demonstrate that Qajar Muraqqa-making represents the artistic characteristics of court portraiture in the common artistic style of the first period of Qajar's reign, influenced by the nature of that era. During the second period, court painting's characteristics are highlighted. This method aids in the determination of the age of Muraqqas and the completion of museum records regarding them. The precise dates of four out of six examined Muraqqas remain undisclosed; however, based on the available information, it appears that three of these artifacts date back to the first period, while the remaining three belong to the second. In response to the question of the study: The portrayal style of women in the first period emphasizes the ornamental items. The features are observably expressed via slim bodies and additional cosmetic items such as lip and neck moles and henna-covered hands and feet. The garments are crafted from high-end materials like velvet and silk, embellished with gilded laces. Accessories such as fans and tambourines are visible adorning their person. Meanwhile, the background is depicted in a careless and rudimentary manner, lacking complexity and, at best, consists solely of a cushion, a mat, and a few bergamots, notwithstanding the court portraiture. In the Muraqqas of the second period, the portrayal style of women is more realistic and their body is more natural. The ornamental styles and flamboyant expensive jeweleries are avoided and even women are pictured in their outdoor attire, based on Chador, Chaqchur, and Ruband (Niqab). The representation of an ideal and symbolic woman has been set aside to some extent in these instances, allowing for the observation of an elderly busker woman or a domestic from a lower socioeconomic class in two of the images. Women's clothing style, compared to previous clothes, changes according to the fashion of the era. It can be observed from headwears (Charghad versus Kolahak and Shaal Aviz) and lower part clothing (skirt and trousers versus long skirt) in indoor clothing and shoes (Qundare versus small shoes of the first period) in outdoor clothing. But the background remains devoid of specifics and features only the bare minimum of colors and lines; thus, the viewer is compelled, as with early period graphic Muraqqas, to conjure up an unspecified location both indoors and outdoors.

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