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RESEARCH ARTICLE

IMPACT OF WESTERN ART ON IRANIAN QAJAR PERIOD HOUSES' STUCCO IN GILAN PROVINCE, ABRISHAMI HOUSE OF RASHT

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ABSTRACT

The stucco art in Iran has a long history and from the Elamite era on this art could be seen in many structures. Like many other arts throughout the history, the use of stucco has had a growing trend and besides using it as mortar, it was used for covering and embellishing the structures. Also, during the Qajar era, this art was highly favored and because of the cultural interactions with Western and European countries, Qajar art and architecture adopted many influences and as a result, an Iranian-Western fusion style in the stucco art appeared. This paper investigates the stuccos of the Silk House in the city of Rasht and the influences that it has received from the European art. The Silk House of Rasht is one of the invaluable remnants from the Qajar era in which many exquisite stucco and mirror works have remained. The study presents designs and motifs that were originated from the European styles like raised stucco, the use of rosette bud motifs, and the use of flower and vase patterns in which the flowers are dangling and spreading out of the vase.

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INTRODUCTION

The history of stucco art in Iran dates back to ancient times. The oldest structure in which stuccos were used is Haft Tappeh structure in Khuzestan which belongs to the Elamite era (3rd millennium BC) (Moti'i Fard, 1391:21). The use of stucco continued in later periods of Iran's history and during the Sassanid era it experienced a rather more growing trend. In this era, the use of this art was mainly in inscription reliefs and sculptures and was used with geometric, plant, animal, and human motifs and designs (Pope, 1384:148). The use of this art proceeded also during the Islamic era and because of the ban of face portrayal, geometric and plant motifs were mostly used in stuccos and also its use for making inscriptions gradually prevailed. In the Safavid period, this art developed to a great extent. Motifs inspired by nature like flower, blossom, arabesque, etc. were used in mostly structures (Image 1 and 2).

Also miniature designs in stucco embellishments became prevalent (Moti'ifard, 1391:36) the samples of which can be seen in structures like Aali Qapu and Chehel Sotoun of Isfahan. Also, in this period the use of stucco designs beside mirror works can be observed in many houses (Azam Zanganeh, 1387).

From the nineteenth century on, this art adopted influences from European styles and a sense of realism entered the motifs for example the real patterns of red roses took the place of former elegant and quixotic flowers (Pope, 1384: 162). Designs of vases full of flowers with falling petals, five petal flowers dangling out of the vase along with arabesque patterns, designs of ivies and harp are all European inspired designs that are among the prevalent designs of Qajar period. In addition to nature inspired motifs, western motifs like chandeliers, clocks, samovar, teapots, and woman wearing a hat can be seen in stuccos of this period. Raised stucco, figure sculpting, and pillar building in structures with Corinthian, Doric, and Greek Unique styles became prevalent during Qajar period. Also, the use of pediments on top of the porches and exterior windows

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became widespread. In the Pahlavi period, the use of volume elements and sculpting with Iranian and European styles became widespread in the structures.



Fig. 1 & 2. Stucco design of Safavid Period

With regard to the use of Mirror work for decoration, based on the historical evidences, it was used for the first time during the reign of Shah Tahmasb in Safavid period in a forum in the city of Qazvin and its use continued in other structures like Chehel Sotoun Palace of Isfahan (Mishmast Nahi & Abed Isfahani, 1386). Mirror work in the Qajar period was also used in palaces, aristocratic houses, and shrines. Geometric and plant motifs were mainly used in mirror works of that era. Similarly, in the Mirror hall of the Silk House, the use of mirror works is seen along with stucco.

About the Building

One of the most valuable residential buildings of the Qajar era is Silk House which is located in north of Iran. This building belongs to the family of Haj Mirza Esmail, the governor of Rasht living during the reign of Nasereddin Shah. It was built by the younger son of the governor Mir Qasim Pirbazari. It is located in south eastern side of the Seiqalan Square at the end of Shaeri alley. The main entrance is in the southern side which is connected to the house yard through a vestibule. The main building material of this structure is bricks. The walls of the house yard are decorated by five different kinds of arcades (goat horn style, category arch, semicircular arches, fallen arches, and). The yard is also embellished with a pool in the middle and trees around. After the trees, we come to a building each of its floors consists of eight rooms. The rooms of the ground floor involves no decoration and are simple in appearance which were designed for servants and house and service works. This floor included doors to the backyard and in this way the floor separated the main yard from the back yard.

There exists two stairways in the southern side and one stairway in the northern side of the ground floor to the first floor. The first floor includes eight rooms among which Porcelain Forum is decorated with beautiful stuccos and the Mirror Forum is decorated subtly with mirror works. These forums were used for holding ceremonies and formality purposes. Two other rooms of this floor are embellished with flower and bushes patterns of stuccos and also raised frameworks of stuccos on the ceiling and walls. The other four rooms are simple in design (Image 3 & 4).

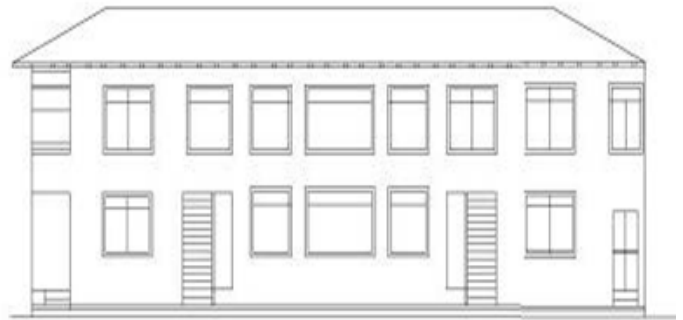


Fig. 3. Southern face of Abrishami house



Fig. 4. Abrishami House

DISCUSSION

In nineteenth century, because of the travels of the officials, traders, aristocrats, and students to the Europe, one can observe the spread of structures and embellishments with European architectural styles in many cities around Iran. Such influences could be seen especially in the houses and palaces of affluent people. The Silk House is one of the structures that belongs to this era. In this house two of the rooms contain stucco designs and two of the forums that are Mirror Forum and Porcelain Forum are embellished with mirror works and Porcelain dishes respectively and also stucco works in both of them. The stuccos in these rooms and forums are implemented on the ceilings, top of the doorways, recesses, and fireplaces. The stucco designs that are used in this house are a mixture of Iranian and European patterns that include arabesque, pomegranates, pearl strings, and flowers and vase patterns with rose, sunflowers, buds, and lotus flowers. The significant point about the stucco works of this house is that the works are implemented in the

raised forms which is one of the influences adopted from the European styles during the Qajar period (Image 5).



Fig. 5. Stucco design sample from one of the Abrishami rooms

The patterns of vase and flowers are of the European styles and in these samples the vase role is especial as the branches, leaves, and flowers are dangling out of the vase (Image 6 & 7).



Fig. 6. Stucco design sample from one of the Abrishami rooms



Fig. 7. Stucco design sample and mirror working in the Mirror Hall

These motifs are implemented in rectangular or oval frameworks in which arabesque and spiral motifs emanate from the vase below and extend to the top in a symmetrical form. This style is more influenced by the European designs (Image 8).



Fig. 8. Stucco design sample from one of the Abrishami rooms

Among the motifs that became prevalent during the Qajar period, one could mention the Rosette or European flower. In this building, this flower is depicted spreading out with its full branches and leaves (Image 9). These flowers are carved in their utmost naturalistic sense in raised and semi-raised forms.



Fig. 9. Stucco design sample from one of the Abrishami rooms



Fig. 10&11. Stucco design sample with the medallion in Chinese Hall

One other feature that needs to be mentioned is the use of Medallion in stuccos which is one of the European art traits. Also, the prevalence of stuccos with dense and fine plant motifs in this period was because of the spread of fabrics with the same motifs in Europe (Image 10 & 11). A stucco with European motifs which show a bunch of grapes with plant designs (Image 12).



Fig. 12. Stucco design sample from one of the Abrishami rooms

Conclusion

During the time of Qajar Kings especially Naser'eddin Shah, because of the interactions with the west, architecture and the related fields like Mirror, Tile, and stucco works adopted many influences and as a result one could observe an elegant mixture of Iranian and European styles in Qajar palaces and houses. Silk House which is one of the residential houses of the Qajar period in Gilan Province and the city of Rasht, includes a blend of Iranian and European styles in stucco. The Embellishments show the influences of Western art on the Iranian arts of Qajar period and since the affluent people like the Shahs enjoyed these arts, in addition to the Shah's palaces, one could see the mentioned arts in the houses of aristocrats and affluent people.

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