

Art Patronage of the Nineteenth Century Iran

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Abstract

Art patronage in Iran in the Qajar period (1795-1925) witnessed preeminent fluctuations. Elements such as the availability of materials for painting, newly opened art schools, financial support for teaching at schools, and working for newspapers and publishers all helped artists to become more self-sufficient and solidified their positions in relationships to their patrons. Such changes increased the number and type of patrons as well. Middle-class, for example, purchased lithographed images and photographs, which were affordable for and available to the public. The result was Iranian's interest in European realistic painting, which was regarded at that time as superior to traditional Iranian image making. By contrast, European patrons were looking for more traditional artworks and ancient artifacts. Their interest encouraged some artists to revive the traditional style of manuscript illumination and merge European figurative rendering within traditional Persian format (known as Persian miniature painting), thus creating a new style.

1. Introduction

The power of the art patronage in directing artists and thus in shaping the history of art in Iran in the Qajar period (1795-1925) cannot be overlooked. The best Iranian masters of art spent their lives at the courts of the monarchs. They provided commissioned works until the last decade of the nineteenth century when Kamal-al-Molk (1847-1940), the chief artist at the court of Naser-al-Din Shah (ruled 1848-1896) and Mozafer-al-Din Shah (ruled 1897-1907), left the court of Mozafar-al-Din Shah, and started painting without restraint working on noncommissioned canvases as well as commissioned ones. He was perhaps the first royal court artist to leave the court for ever and establish an independent studio.¹ Elements such as the availability of materials for painting, newly opened art schools, financial support for teaching at schools, and working for newspapers and publishers all helped artists to become more self-sufficient and solidified their positions in relationships to their patrons. The main outcome was the rise of individualism among artists allied with the needs of the Iranian society and the interest of patrons.

The artists of the nineteenth century had all the necessary constituents to conduct new experiences in art. Social and cultural changes², photography³, lithography⁴, the presence of European artists in Iran⁵, Iranian artists traveling to Europe, and patronage had a significant effect on leading visual arts toward European style realistic painting and later Realism. Artists of the second half of the nineteenth century retained the right to express themselves more freely, therefore, although patrons commissioned realistic paintings and expected to see external sameness with nature in canvases, artists went further and practiced a new style which is equivalent to European Realism.

The artists of the second half of the nineteenth century continued the investigations of the external features of nature and intended to illustrate the internal characteristics of their subject matter and their own sentiments and thoughts. Realism in the work of Iranian artists includes the representation of real events and social issues, the appreciation of a person as an individual, distinct from any class, gender, or ethnicity. They acknowledged themselves as individual artists, visible in the self-portraits, portraits of national heroes, and ordinary people in their daily life or participating in different social activities. In previous periods, most artists did not sign their works, and those who did usually signed with their first name or nickname adding words such as Kamineh, Kamtarin, or Bandeh Dargah meaning the least significant and the servant of the commissioner. Most artists of the second half of the nineteenth century started signing their canvases with their first and second name or their honorary name and the date. Yet, they still mentioned the name of the commissioner and his superiority, and used words such as Kamtarin occasionally.

Moreover, the decorative qualities are no longer seen in most canvases. Brush strokes become more visible, and the complementary palette defines the objects instead of the forceful contours and silhouettes of the previous periods. Also, negative space and background are used differently to create atmosphere.

The substantial changes in the visual culture also resulted in an increase in the number and types of patrons. Patrons of the Qajar period can be divided into two general groups: Iranians and westerners. Iranian patrons were the Qajar shahs, courtiers and aristocrats, women, and middle-class, whose desires for something different in secular and religious art led them to commission works based on European realistic painting. This type of work was regarded at that time as superior to traditional Iranian image making. By contrast, the second group, European patrons were looking for more traditional artworks and ancient artifacts. Their

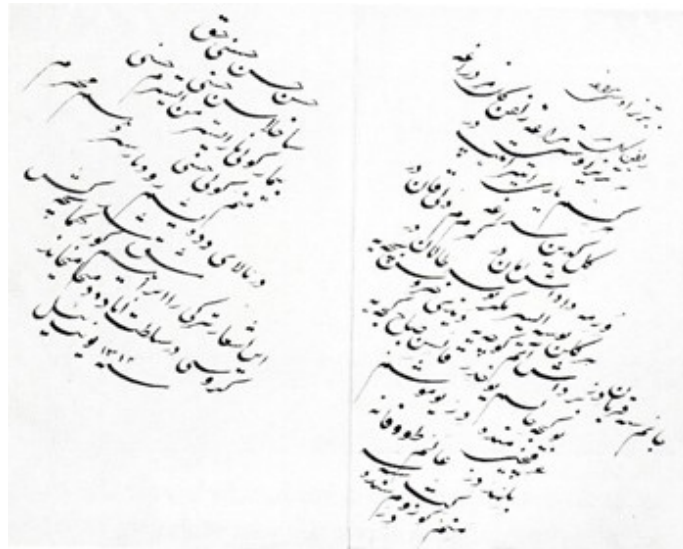
interest encouraged some artists to revive the traditional style of manuscript illumination and merge European figurative rendering within traditional Persian format (known as Persian miniature painting), thus attracting both western and Iranian patrons.

Having the authority, funds, and desire for art from the beginning of the Qajar dynasty, the shahs indeed were the main patrons and art supporters of the time. In fact, they spent enormous amounts of money on artworks and architecture for pleasure, glorifying themselves, demonstrating their highest social statues, and revealing a genuine love for art. Qajar rulers not only collected artworks but also practiced art and became proficient in painting, calligraphy, photography, and sometimes in poetry and literature. In effect, the monarchs were knowledgeable about art, knew precisely what they wanted, and could identify quality artwork. Abd-al-Rafie Haghghat, the author of *The History of National Arts and Iranian Artists*, narrates an interesting recollection of Jacob Edward Pollack, court physician and traveler to Iran, about Naser-al-Din Shah's talent in painting. Pollack notes the monarch's excellence at drawing and how he once became impatient with a court artist who was not fast enough in painting the Shah's portrait. Finally, Naser-al-Din Shah took the brush or pen and finished the portrait himself.⁶ Because artists were dealing with knowledgeable patrons they had to provide acceptable works (see figures 1 and 2).



Figure 1- Drawing by Nasser-al-Din Shah, with metal pen and black ink, of an officer in European uniform. He has written his name in Latin letters on the left side of the drawing. No date. After the death of Nasser-al-Din Shah someone has written on the upper left of the drawing: “This is the portrait of an ‘saheb mansab’ which is drawn by Nasser-al-Din Shah with ink.” From: *Qajar Studies*, Journal of the International Qajar Studies Association, Vol. III (2003): 64. Copied with permission.

Figure 2- Calligraphy of a Turkish poem by Nasser-al-Din Shah, made with a reed pen. A good example of the beautiful handwriting of the shah. At the end is written: “This Turkish poem was chanted to me by Ebrahim Kourkamanchehkesh Garousi in Saltanatabad in 1312, year of the horse.” From: Qajar Studies, Journal of the International Qajar Studies Association, Vol. III (2003): 66. Copied with permission.



The traveling of monarchs to Europe was another factor in the high level of interest in art. They planned to become familiar with the modernization process, advanced technology, and also art, which they considered as vital as science and manufacturing. Naser-al-Din Shah traveled to Europe three times, visiting museums, exhibitions, and military and industrial sites.⁷ One of the reasons for his first trip in 1873 was to attend the Vienna International Exhibition.⁸ Traveling to London after visiting Vienna, the ruler stayed at Buckingham Palace and went to Madam Tussaud’s Museum; in Paris he went to the Versailles Palace, the Louvre Museum, and Notre Dame Cathedral.

In Italy, he spent some time in studying historical sites.⁹ Naser-al-Din Shah’s third trip in 1888-89 was to the Paris International Exhibition.¹⁰ The monarch visited the exhibition the first day of his arrival and went back several times during his stay in Paris. In Holland, too, the Shah took some time to visit museums.¹¹ His successor, Mozafar-al-Din Shah, also visited historical places and museums in Europe, including the Louvre Museum and the Eiffel Tower.¹² Such visits enabled the two Qajar shahs to be aware of the arts of several countries; as patrons they were acquainted with art on an international level and demanded the types of work they liked (see figure 3).



Figure 3- Nasser-al-Din Shah with the French President Carnot. Image published in the *Le Monde Illustré*, 1873 and 1889. Courtesy of the late Dr. Farrokh Ghaffari. From: *Qajar Studies*, Journal of the International Qajar Studies Association, Vol. VII (2007): 78. Copied with permission.

Paintings hung on the palace walls were a combination of works done by Iranian, European, and Russian artists. Today, the Sa'adabad Museum of Fine Arts in Tehran houses hundreds of paintings by artists from Russia, Italy, France, Germany, England, and Belgium. ¹³ These were gifts from foreign individuals or were purchased by the Qajar shahs. Edward Granville Brown, the British scholar and traveler to Iran in 1887-88, mentions more than 180 exquisite paintings by court artist Abd-al-allah that he saw in Negarestan palace in Tehran.¹⁴ Also, according to Abd-al-Rafie Haghghat, Jacob Edward Pollack wrote in his memoirs that, during his stay in Iran, Naser-al-Din Shah ordered one of the halls in the palace turned into an art studio to hang the portraits of Queen Victoria and her husband (Prince Albert), Napoleon III, and others; these were gifts he had received from those monarchs. Then, since these canvases apparently were not enough to fill the gallery, the Shah bought colored engravings published in Berlin with such subjects as bathing girls to place in the empty spaces.¹⁵ The monarchs invited Russian artists to work in their palaces and European artists to visit the courts and stay for weeks.¹⁶ Consequently, the shahs continued the process of art exchange and East–West relations.

The Qajar monarchs were also interested in building mosques, Imamzadeh (shrines of the descendants of twelve Shi'ite Imams), Tekiyeh (buildings designed for religious rituals), tombs, and palaces in their new capital of Tehran and in other cities. Fath Ali Shah (1797-1834), for instance, commissioned one of the best architects of his time, Safar Ali Isfahani, to build the Shah Mosque in Semnan, a small city in Khorasan in northeast Iran.¹⁷ Another example is Tekiyeh Dowlat in Tehran commissioned by Naser-al-Din Shah. Western visitors of the time described “the dazzling splendor of the Tekiyeh Dowlat and the intensity of the dramatic action staged within its walls”.¹⁸ These commissions required tiles, murals, paintings, and stone reliefs that generally tended to be realistic for their patrons' satisfaction. The best example perhaps is Golestan Palace, the official residence of the Qajar royal family in Tehran, built during the Safavid era (1502-1736), by Shah Tahmasb I (ruled 1524-1576) and renovated several times during the Qajar period. Most exterior walls and ceilings of the Palace is covered with landscapes, human and animal figures, geometrical, vegetation and arabesque patterns in form of tiles, murals, stone reliefs and plasterwork (see figure 4).



Figure 4- Landscape and Arabesque Patterns, Unknown artist, mural framed by mirrors, Ceiling of a front entrance to one of the buildings in Golestan Palace and Museum, Tehran, Photographed by Mahshid Modares in April 2005.

Naser-al-Din Shah commissioned tiles indicating the figures of soldiers for the exterior walls, gates, and entrances of the Golestan Palace, symbolizing the protection of the Qajar dynasty against their enemies. Similar images can be found on the ancient Achaemenid Palace of Persepolis.¹⁹ In addition, on other tiles, figures drawn from the Iranian army greet the Shah by playing musical instruments (see figure 5).



Figure 5- Tile, Unknown artist, Exterior wall of one of the buildings in Golestan Palace and Museum, Tehran, Photographed by Mahshid Modares in April 2005.

Having a musical group for the army was an idea that Naser-al-Din Shah most likely adapted from the Sasanian reliefs at the site of Taq-i Bustan.²⁰ All these figures intend to be represented realistically through the use of perspective, light, different hues of colors, and anatomical accuracy. Moreover, Naser-al-Din Shah granted Kamal-al-Molk the permission to add sculpture classes to his art school and train the first generation of Iranian sculptors since the beginning of the Islamic period. This was a remarkable step in the improvement of this field. The monarch also commissioned statues of lions resting on pedestals located at palace entrances. Figures of lions are also seen on tiles of the palace. Such tiles and statues suggest Naser-al-Din Shah's attempts to elevate the Qajar dynasty by adopting symbols used by the authoritative Iranian kings of the pre-Islamic periods, as well as by employing some elements of the art of European countries that were in control of the world at that time.

Such commissions indicates that the Qajar shahs used specific subject matters to proclaim their authority, and, as Leyla S. Diba states in her essay "Images of Power and the Power of Images", to connect Qajar dynasty with the ancient Iranian kings.²¹ They also were eager to associate themselves with their contemporary European kings and to urge viewers to recognize the power of the monarchy. In a catalog of an exhibit of Qajar paintings in Brunei Gallery, London, in 1999, the scholar Julian Raby analyzes portraits of the Qajar shahs, specifically by Mehr Ali and Mirza Baba, the chief artists of Fath Ali Shah's court.

He explains how these two artists and their disciples continued “borrowing ideas from Europe and the Ottomans” to indicate “dynastic legitimacy” and the shahs’ supremacy. Raby believes that some core examples of this period, such as paintings by Mehr Ali, are not derived from the imagery of ancient Iran to which other scholars link them. Rather, the source was European contemporary painting. The best example is a canvas by Mihr Ali dated 1809–1810 titled Fath Ali Shah Standing with a Scepter, which is based on several versions of Napoleon in His Imperial Robes painted between 1805 and 1806.²² The truth, however, was that Qajar shahs were impotent rulers and under the full control of England and Russia. Naser-al-Din Shah made a famous statement that shows how immobilized his kingdom was: “What a damn regime! To go to the north of my country, I ought to get permission from Russia, and to go to the south, I am obliged to get authorization from England.”²³ (see figure 6)



Figure 6- Mihr Ali, Fath Ali Shah Standing with a Scepter, dated 1809–1810, oil on canvas.

Naser-al-Din Shah should probably be considered the most demanding patron and a key figure in the art patronage of the Qajar era and the most vigorous ruler in terms of promoting and learning about art. Besides commissioning paintings and tiles, participating in international exhibitions, and purchasing European and Russian paintings, he took many other steps that influenced the development of art in Iran. He studied calligraphy, drawing, and painting;²⁴ became a proficient photographer, and rewarded painters and photographers with medals, the most famous of which was the Sun and Lion medal.²⁵ During his time, schoolbooks were illustrated, and books and newspapers were published with lithographic illustrations.²⁶ Naser-al-Din Shah loved traveling and writing travel books with his own calligraphy; he usually took a photographer with him.²⁷ The Shah took the first steps toward

strategic city planning in Tehran extending the streets and building new gates and walls based on town planning in European cities.

28 He also opened museums, was interested in gathering information about Iran, and hired a few educated individuals to travel and write reports about the provinces, ancient places, and monuments and to provide maps and drawings, all of which became indispensable resources for historians.²⁹

The second group of patrons included Qajar princes, who occupied prominent positions in the government, other courtiers, politicians and merchants were also educated about art and supportive of both secular and religious art. Aristocrats hired artists to decorate their houses with murals and tiles containing figurative images and arabesque and geometrical patterns. They commissioned their portraits and other figures as well as European-style still lifes and landscapes. Some of them, such as Malek Ghasem Mirza, the son of Fath Ali Shah and the governor of Urumiyeh, in northwest Iran, collected paintings and learned photography. He became a close friend of Eugene Flandin, the French painter and traveler who traveled to Iran in 1868. Flandin was amazed by Malek Ghasem Mirza's unique collection of paintings.³⁰ Also, Mohammad Afshar, known as Sani-al-Saltaneh, the minister of the Department of Justice at Naser-al-Din Shah's court, was a gifted painter on canvas and glass, calligrapher, photographer, and poet. He himself designed a camera for a particular type of photography.³¹ Some princes traveled to Europe for visit or on diplomatic missions. One example is Askar Khan Afshar, an ambassador sent by Fath Ali Shah to Paris in July 1808. "Askar Khan [Afshar] was also an amateur of art. On the 23rd of August, he visited the various rooms of the Napoleon Museum. There he was welcomed by its director, M. Vivian Denon. While admiring the various paintings in the beautiful Apollo Gallery, Askar Khan made witty and subtle remarks."³² Some other aristocrats sent their children to Europe to study art, financed the opening of new schools, sponsored improvements in the existing schools, or hired teachers from Europe. In addition, during the Constitutional Movement of 1906-07 in Mozafer-al-Din Shah's era and the political and economical crisis of that period, when the monarch apparently abandoned the schools and art activities, the aristocrats continued supporting schools and art activities for their children's education. They also helped in the development of religious art by building or rebuilding Imamzadehs, mosques, and Tekiyehs and commissioning murals, plasterwork, tiles, paintings, and stone reliefs.

Women in the Qajar period were also patrons and were interested in gaining knowledge in different fields of visual arts such as photography. For instance, Fatemeh Soltan Banou and Ozra, two sisters who were the wives of two photographers at Naser-al-Din Shah's court, learned photography from their husbands and are the first known women photographers in Iran after Ashraf-al-Saltaneh, the granddaughter of Fath Ali Shah.³³ Women in the Qajar period were often involved in religious activities and supported religious art and architecture perhaps because they were not allowed to participate in politics and other social institutions. Some women prevented old Imamzadehs and mosques from being damaged or enlarged existing buildings for the comfort of worshipers.³⁴ Although little information about women's roles as patrons of the fine arts is available, they were probably the main commissioners of jewel boxes, mirror cases, make up cases and pen boxes painted by the best artists of the era employing realistic paintings that were common at that time. Unfortunately, the identities of the professional women artists are all unknown because they were prohibited from entering the newly opened art schools. However, based on the memoirs of Taj Al-Saltana, daughter of Naser-al-din Shah, princesses who were interested in learning painting were trained by tutors at the court.³⁵ And, the art of carpet and textile weaving and embroidery were basically the products of women artists.

During the Qajar period, the middle class became involved in art activities and should be considered patrons as well. Although the middle class was patronized as being ignorant about art, they contributed to the development of religious portrait painting and therefore its popularity by purchasing lithographed prints of the portraits of holy individuals. The realistic portraits of the Imams and the Prophet Mohammad created by the artists of Sani-al-Molk's generation fit perfectly into the Iranian society structured on Shi'ite beliefs. Many religious middle-class people were less attracted to secular art and often placed the figure of the Prophet or an Imam on their walls. For example, such images could usually be found in the shops of the main bazaars. Although initially court artists painted portraits of the Imams and the Prophet that aristocrats commissioned, eventually, these commissions were disseminated to ordinary people, thereby encouraging artists, tile workers, carpet designers, and lithographers to create religious portraits of acceptable quality and at an affordable price. Ordinary people were accustomed to the traditional arts, but their familiarity with European paintings was through lithographed images in newspapers and books and art schools, which were open to visitors when there was no class.³⁶ There they could see the works of Iranian and European teachers, students' canvases, engravings, and copies that

artists such as Sani-al-Molk (1814-1866) and Kamal-al-Molk brought to Iran from their travels to Europe.

In addition to Iranian patrons, western visitors to Iran were also interested in Iranian art. Unlike Iranian patrons, European patrons did not emphasize the new experiences of realistic paintings; they expected to see something incredibly dissimilar to European art. During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, European collectors were attracted to the traditional decorative arts of the Qajar, such as painted pen boxes and other novelties, but they showed little interest in Qajar paintings of the second half of the nineteenth century. Most Qajar-style paintings that are now part of private collections or museums were sent to European collectors and dealers or to European embassies as gifts from the Qajar shahs and politicians. The first Qajar paintings presented in Europe were mostly figurative oil paintings of Fath Ali Shah, the second Qajar shah, that were given as gifts to European politicians in Iran or were sent to European kings as mementos. One of the earliest examples is an 1806 oil entitled *Portrait of Fath Ali Shah on the Throne* by the court artist Mihr Ali. This painting was given to Pierre Ame de Jaubert, Napoleon's ambassador to Iran, and was later kept in the Versailles Palace.³⁷ Naser-al-Din Shah, the fourth Qajar shah, continued this tradition, for instance, rewarding Jules Laurens, the French artist, with four canvases in 1848, which the artist took to his native town of Carpentras, France. After his death, the paintings were donated to the Duplessis Museum in Carpentras.³⁸

One of the art collectors who left valuable information about the arts of the time and enriched the South Kensington Museum (the present Victoria and Albert Museum) in London with Iranian artifacts was Sir Robert Murdoch Smith (1835–1900). While working in the telegraph department in Tehran in the 1870s, he collected and sent Qajar paintings and other artifacts to the South Kensington Museum.³⁹ His efforts resulted in an exhibition of not only Qajar paintings, but also many other works of art in that museum in 1876. At least six oil and watercolor paintings were exhibited, one of which was a life-size figure of Fath Ali Shah in oil on calico painted in the early nineteenth century.⁴⁰ In the exhibition catalogue titled *Persian Art*, which was published in the same year, he states that Arabs “were probably never an artistic people,” yet, Iranians “never lost their taste for ... representations of actual natural objects.”⁴¹ Such an inaccurate and prejudiced statement limits the value of Smith’s statements for art historians of the twenty-first century; however, since he is one of the

individuals who was present in Iran in the late nineteenth century and witnessed the artistic activities in Iran, his accounts remain important to any study of Qajar painting.

In the twentieth century more Qajar paintings found their way into museums—the most important of which were the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, the Tiflis Museum in today's T'bilisi, the capital of Georgia, the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, and the Louvre Museum in Paris⁴²—and in galleries and private collections, such as that of the American Islamic art collector Doris Duke (1912–1993), who purchased Qajar paintings in the 1940s, 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. One example is a 197 x 116 inches (500.4 x 294.6 cm) oil on canvas ceiling painting (DDFIA 34.9) at Parke-Bernet Galleries on May 21, 1981. In this painting the European style landscapes are painted repeatedly around the canvas and framed with Islamic non-figurative arabesque patterns. Khorshid Khanoom (The Sun), the traditional Iranian motif, is depicted in the middle and on the corners. A calligraphed verse of Quran: *Nasro Min Allah wa Fat-hon Gharib* (meaning aid is from the God and victory is close) is written two times on the left and right of the canvas.

This painting is perhaps the ideal nineteenth century canvas, as it represents the perpetual demand for this type of artwork, in which the European style landscape painting, Islamic calligraphy, traditional Islamic patterns and even in some way pre-Islamic Iranian elements are integrated in harmony (see figure 7). Another example is the Amery collection, which houses the largest collection of Qajar paintings. Major Harold Amery, an English politician who served in Sudan and Egypt, and his brother Leopold S. Amery (1873–1955), the British Secretary of State in India and a writer, purchased sixty-three Qajar paintings between 1900 and 1914.⁴³ In the 1970s, the paintings in the Amery collection were purchased by Farah Diba Pahlavi, the last Pahlavi queen of Iran.⁴⁴ Almost all of these paintings are currently preserved in the Sa'adabad Museum, Reza Abbasi Museum and Golestan Palace-Museum in Tehran. Beside these paintings, in general, western interest focused on ancient art and the traditional arts of Iran, especially at that time because Orientalist sentiments was prevalent in Europe.⁴⁵ Western traders were seeking old illustrated books, tiles, ancient artifacts, calligraphy, and Persian carpets and textiles to market in Europe. Such trade had two main impacts on art and art education in Iran.



Figure 7- Ceiling, Iran, ca. 1870, Oil on canvas, 197 x 116 in. (500.4 x 294.6cm), Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art, 34.9, © David Franzen. Copied with permission.

First, Iran lost many of its artworks. These included multiple illustrated books of the *Shahnameh* by Ferdosi, *Khamseh* by Nizami, and *Kalila and Dimna*.⁴⁶ These manuscripts were transferred to private collections and museums in Europe, the United States, Russia, and Turkey. Some examples are the *Shahnameh* of Shah Abbas held in the Chester Beatty Library in England,⁴⁷ folios from an edition *Kalila and Dimna* illustrated in the mid-fourteenth century in Istanbul University Library, and folios of the story of Khusro and Shirin, one of the volumes of *Khamseh*, illustrated in 1410 and held in the British Library in London.⁴⁸ Moreover, many of the manuscripts in Iran were in court libraries and kept out of artists' hands. For instance, the *Shahnameh* of Baysunghur Mirza was kept in the royal library at the Golestan Palace in Tehran.⁴⁹ Therefore, Iranian artists of the Qajar period were unable to observe, study, or refer directly to the best examples of traditional book illustration and images. At the time that art was gaining popularity within a wider audience, and art schools were opening, Iranian society lost this chance to become truly familiar with an incredible number of ancient and traditional artifacts.

Second, Iranian society learned about the best examples of their traditional art from Iranians who traveled to Europe and visited exhibitions, auctions, and museums. Since not all of these individuals were knowledgeable about art, they brought back information based on gallery or auction catalogs, many of which were inaccurate, or museum catalogues, articles, and books, which sometimes introduced Iranian art as "Oriental." Many Iranians accepted such a nineteenth-century western point of view because they believed in the West as a modern civilization that knew better. Such factors culminated in the degradation of Iranian traditional art and the rise of the belief that Iran should follow the western path in art to become superb. This attitude continued until fairly recently in Iran, with a revival of interest in

traditional art only developing in the last decade of the twentieth century, and continuing until today.

It was just a few wise artists and politicians who realized what was happening. One of them was Kamal-al-Molk, who arranged classes for carpet weaving, traditional book illustration, and ceramics in his European-style art school, Sanayeh Mostazrafeh and encouraged students to take those classes by insisting on the value of Iran's traditional arts.⁵⁰ However, his efforts could not prevent the general change in the culture, and that affected the work of the artists who were creating traditional fine arts. Some decided to change their field and learn European realistic painting. Others created a new way to maintain their European patrons while satisfying Iranian commissioners.

This new path categorized traditional manuscript illumination as "Persian miniature paintings," which B. W. Robinson⁵¹ in his essay "Painting in the Post Safavid Period" called "superior tourist art," explaining it as "taking the form of miniatures on paper, usually a single figure on plain background, illustrating Persian types, costumes, occupations, and customs.... They are on the whole, well executed, with considerable charm and some originality."⁵² Akbar Tajvidi, a miniaturist, attributes the resurgence in popularity of this nineteenth-century tradition to his father, Hadi Tajvidi (1892–1940), one of Kamal-al-Molk's students and a talented traditional painter who won first place in "Iranian Miniature Painting" in the 1911 competition, and was hired to teach at Sanayeh-e Mostazrafeh School.

Iranian miniature painters occasionally added calligraphy to give their pieces a more traditional appearance. Those artists usually employed the same technique of traditional book illustration with watercolor and small thin brushes. Even today, miniature painting in Iran is taught in art schools as a separate major, and artists such as the sons and students of Hadi Tajvidi and Mahmoud Farshchian⁵⁴ are famous for their works. In Europe, many art dealers took advantage of the market by selling famous illustrated books or torn individual folios, the latter of which were more easily sold since the complete books were extremely expensive. This action encouraged European art dealers to consider miniature paintings excellent substitutes for individual folios or traditionally illustrated books. Some Iranian patrons, too, were thrilled to purchase such artworks (see examples here: <http://www.farshchianart.com>).

During the Qajar period, specially the second half of the nineteenth century, art patronage and the dynamic between artists and patrons changed significantly. Artists became more independent and established an art that represented the outgrowth of individualism. Art commissions were no longer limited to the royal family and upper class, although they remained the main patrons. The number and type of patrons increased; middle-class people, too, commissioned prints of the portraits of holy individuals; therefore, they played a crucial role in the expansion of religious figure painting. In addition, patrons' familiarity with and desire for European art urged artists to enhance their artworks basically based on the tradition of European realistic style. There is no evidence of women commissioning paintings, but they were probably the main commissioners of jewel boxes, make up boxes, and mirror cases that were usually painted with human figures, vegetations and animals, all intended to be realistic. European patrons, in contrast, were not seeking new experiences within realistic paintings, but rather they sought works that were executed in a traditional Iranian style. Such trade had two results on art education in Iran. First, Iran lost a notable number of its valuable artifacts; thus, artists and the Iranian society missed the opportunity to become familiar with the best examples of Iran's ancient and traditional art. Second, Iranians learned about their traditional art mostly from individuals who traveled to Europe, where Persian art was usually introduced as "Oriental." Many accepted such a nineteenth-century western viewpoint and saw Iranian traditional arts as inferior. In this manner, Iranian miniature painting during the Qajar era came to be developed as a combination of European realistic painting and traditional Iranian book illustration. In these paintings, realistic figures were depicted in Iranian-style clothing and acted within landscapes imitating the landscapes seen in the traditional book illustrations. These exotic paintings were in high demand and in a sense can be defined as examples of an approach toward Orientalism in Iran, and at the same time, they were part of the Realist movement during the second half of nineteenth century.

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