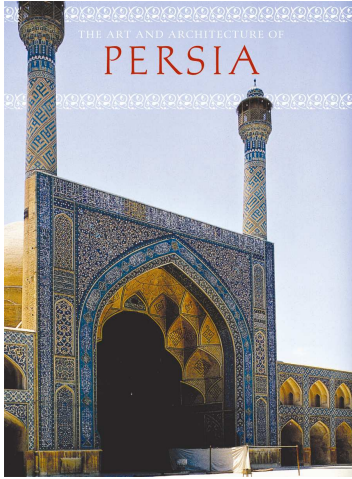


The Art and Architecture of Persia / Giovanni Curtola and Gianroberto Scarcia.—New York, NY: Abbeville Press, April 2007.—280 p.: ill.—ISBN -13: 978-0-7892-0920-7: \$95.00.



At first glance one might categorize this Abbeville Press publication into the coffee table genre of lavishly produced and beautifully illustrated books. However, even a cursory reading of the texts reveals it to be a much more substantial study of a culture. This book is, in fact, a survey documenting the art and architecture of the ancient, Islamic, and modern periods of Persian creativity, including and often focusing on the decorative arts for a significant 2,500 year period. As a survey of art, this volume is far from a synthetic and exhaustive study—highlights and episodes and fragments of cultural and aesthetic experiences are woven into a tapestry of factual information on monuments, sculpture, carpets, miniature painting and objets-d’art. Each of these formats is put into context through detailed discussions of their history and function.

Giovanni Curatorla, co-author, characterizes the production of art in ancient and Hellenistic Persia by stressing the unique manipulation of creativity by the Persians. The author writes with admiration of the Persians’ ability to collect artistic examples and rework them into their

own extremely original, precise and unmistakable manner and then disseminate the whole throughout the regions where they held influence. Gianroberto Scarcia’s essay details the recurrent perception that Persian art influenced by many cultures and, in turn, influencing others, maintained throughout its original and long-lived “arabo-mediterranean” essence. His thesis is punctuated with discussions of important sites such as Persepolis, Ecbatana, Hatra and Susa; he attempts to clarify the distinctions of this multi-cultural art and architecture produced through the ages of Assyrian, Parthian, Roman, Sasanian and Mongolian influences.

The authors tackle such bewildering enigmas as the change in attitude toward human representation which was suddenly permissible and widely practiced in book illustration. Another difficult and puzzling attribution comes with the discussion of Safavid innovation in design which then inspires reinterpretations from architectural decoration and translates them into fiber. Textiles are a major concern and clearly illustrate the dissemination of geometric pattern and decoration to the various art forms.

This volume, and the Abbeville series in which it is included, will prove particularly essential to those libraries that do not specialize in these subject areas. The beautiful photography, detailed maps and plans, useful bibliography, and informative texts combine to make the book a useful general work on Persian art and architecture, despite the weak coverage given to the modern period.

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