

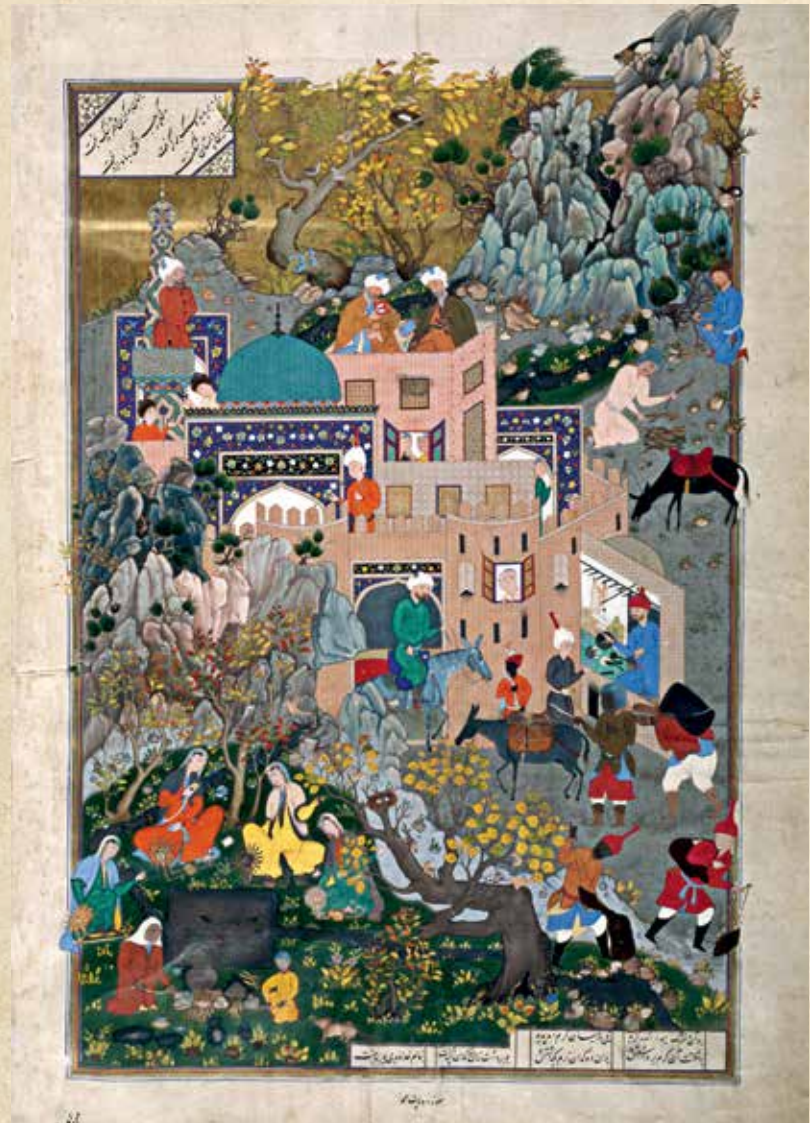
ARCHITECTURE in 16th century Tabriz school of miniature art

Daughter of Khavtavad and a worm. "Shah-name" manuscript of Shah Tahmasib I. Artist: Dost Muhammad Tabriz, 1520-1540. Agha-Khan's collection. Geneva

Architectural decor was pivotal in the Tabriz miniature art since its inception in the early 14th century.

Following a lengthy interval caused by a forced relocation of Tabriz craftsmen to Herat, the capital of the Timurid state, **Tabriz re-emerged as a center of art during the reign of Sultan Yaqub (1478-1490), the ruler of Aq Qoyunlu.** In the last decades of the 15th century, the well-known "Khamasa" (five poems) manuscript, abundantly illustrated by genre scenes with numerous everyday details, was created by Nizami in 1481 (Topkapı Palace museum in Istanbul). The miniatures depicting visits to the palaces of Seven Beauties by **Bahram Gur (Bahram V)**, in particular, those featuring Bahram in red, yellow, green and sandalwood palaces, are particularly remarkable. The images feature magnificent high-rise palaces decorated by ceramic tiles, carpets and other luxury items against the backdrop of a beautiful landscape. During the reign of **Shah Ismail** in the early 16th century, the manuscript was adorned by other miniatures. Two of these items, "**Iskandar and the shepherd**" and "**Iskandar and Nushaba**", are particularly worth mentioning.

Nearly the entire space in the former is occupied by a palace; Iskandar, i.e. **Alexan-**



der the Great, is having a conversation with a shepherd on the roof. A host of dimensions seen from different angles as well as multicolored mosaics and paintings have turned this miniature into one of the best samples for researching the art of Oriental architecture, while the group of images at the foot of the palace, including a shepherd, a herd of sheep and a dog guarding them, displays a splendid picture depicting a particular genre.

Architectural decoration, which was crucial for Tabriz miniature art of the 15th century, retained its significance in **Safavid miniature paintings. The latter mainly dwelled upon the principles developed by its predecessors.** In these miniatures, buildings seem to lack significant bulk and mass at first glance without the modeling and light-and-shade effects. At the same time, they display the brilliance of their own colors emitted by multi-colored earthenware tiles used in cladding. However, some miniatures contain elements of the linear perspective, which **produce the impression of placing an architectural object in space, realizing the idea of creating a building in bulk**, although the latter is immaterial due to the lack of a sufficient perspective and light-and-shade. Such architecture lacks both sunlight that would highlight the protruding parts of the building and a shadow that would indicate its darkened sections. The rest includes lines running toward the skyline, which are definitely not enough to make a breakthrough in the uniplanar layout of the composition and construct the building inward. It is hard to believe that the buildings in miniature paintings were made with the use of bricks or stones as they appear extremely light and intangible as if the law of gravity and weight does not apply in this regard. These objects rather seem to have been woven using golden and colored threads as if one is observing

Kay-Khosrow is trying to trap a demon who seized Bahman Castle. The "Shah-name" manuscript of Shah Tahmasib I. Tabriz, 1520-1540. David's collection. Copenhagen



a precious fabric in a garden amid graceful cypresses and blooming trees.

The earliest Safavid architectural images dating back to the beginning of the 16th century were created in accordance with the style of the previous century, i.e. the so-called **Turkoman Tabriz style**, and are quite archaic. Walls, floors and carpets were depicted in a single plane. The latter are seemingly hung up and further the walls.

The abundant and diverse ornamentation that completely covers up the miniature painting further disrupts the alternation of images and their sequence. The numerous **"Shah-name" miniatures for Shah Tahmasib** and other pieces could serve as examples of this



"Khosrow is seated on the throne". "Khamasa" by Nizami Ganjavi. Tabriz, 1524. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

courtyard and a swimming pool in the center. The palaces are strictly frontal premises, while the carpets and pools depicted from a bird's eye view enhance the evenness of the image and reduce the slight effect of depth created by the lateral walls of the palace and the background of the niche ("ayvan"). The entire architectural edifice is abundantly decorated by ceramic lining with shining bright colors and a wide variety of patterns, including mostly geometric images but also vegetational ones, as well as a frieze with calligraphic inscriptions. Fancy carpets and pillows continue this polychromy on the floor. The building is occasionally decorated with blossoming trees in the garden, while the decor smoothly transitions to the indoor part from the exterior.

Despite compliance with the canons of the previous century, the depiction of architecture **during the golden age of the Tabriz Safavid style in the 1530s and 1540s** assumed distinct features in the course of evolution. This trend is already noticeable in the **"Diwan" by Hafiz dating back to the 1530s** with its "ayvans" and palaces. Scenes of the Shah's meetings and entertainment unfold in front of those structures. However, the real talent of Tabriz artists in depicting the architectural decor is revealed in the miniatures pertaining to the mentioned "Khamasa" and "Shah-name" for Tahmasib.

art. In these items, the proportionality relation was disrupted and the figures were depicted disproportionately large in comparison with the architectural patterns.

The abundant traditions of architectural decoration of the Timurid and Turkoman schools of art started to be applied in Tabriz in the 16th century. These two styles have provided excellent examples of luxurious palaces and exquisitely elegant tents. **This combination of academic Timurid and emotionally charged Tabriz Turkoman traditions in the Khamasa miniatures dating back to 1539-43 and "Shah-name" for Shah Tahmasib dating back to the 1520-30s** is particularly remarkable. These samples have yielded a multitude of images portraying magnificent residences of the Shah. These structures include halls with entry to a

A conventional compositional scheme with slight variations is traced in numerous miniature paintings of this type. As a rule, **a miniature painting is divided into several planes that envisage the development of space.** The first layout was developed by creating a courtyard with a round-shaped pool, while the second one had a slightly raised floor. As for the third one, the depicted wall was installed deeply and pierced by windows and converging lines. These elements are aimed at creating a recess in the niche under the arch. They were reinforced by the portal of the facade, which compresses the space in the arch and between the steps in the area where any given function takes place. The portal is usually comprehensively decorated. For example,

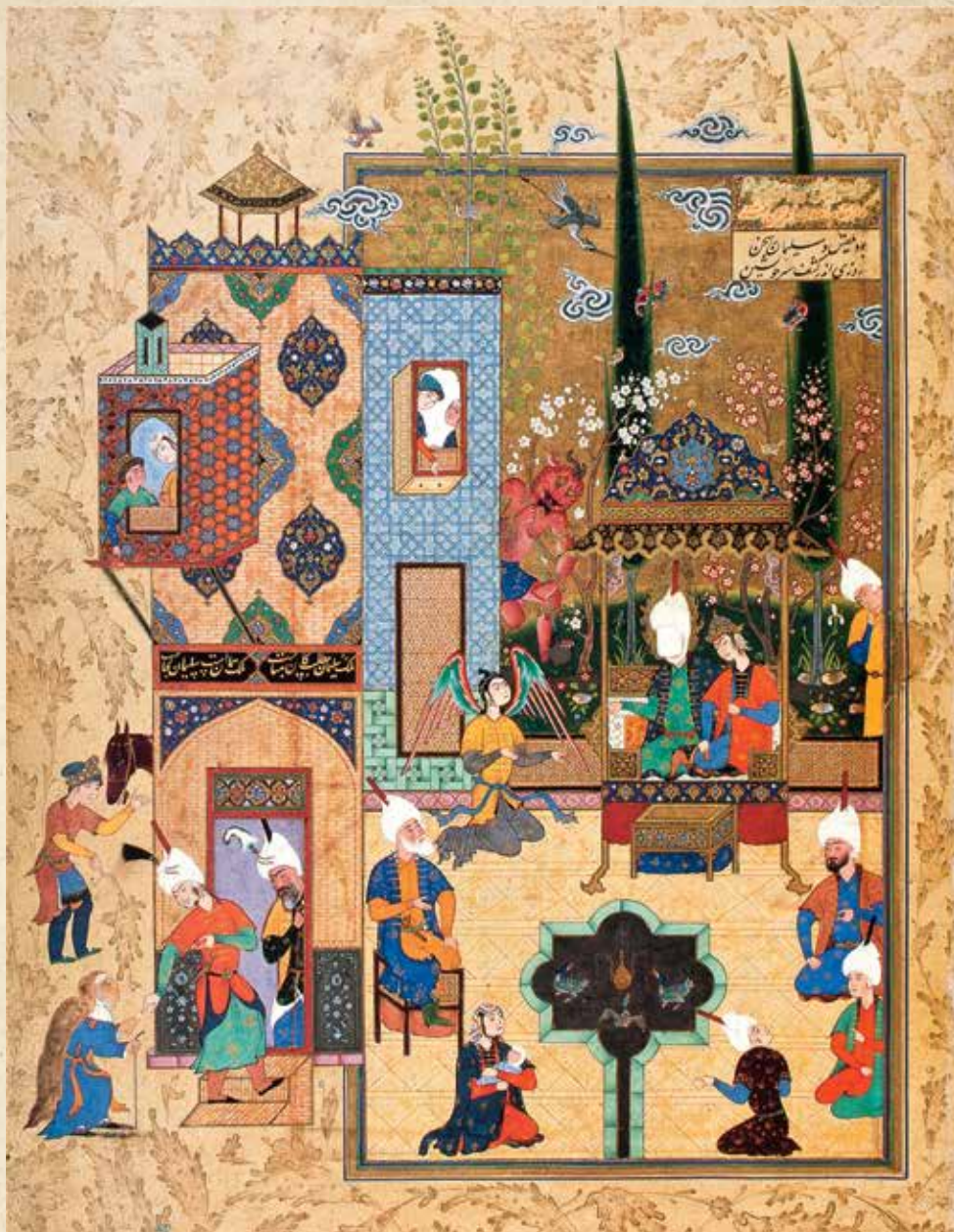
a mural depicting hunting horsemen is used in the upper part of the wall in the recess, while the lower part of the wall is adorned with ceramic cladding. The entire exterior of the "ayvan" is decorated with geometric or floral patterns.

In certain works of the Tabriz school of art, such as the "**Faridun's courtyard**" miniature, the action takes place in a pavilion opening onto a courtyard with a garden behind it, which is decorated in line with the 15th century style. **The attempt to portray the third dimension** is sensed in this piece clearly. Thus, the garden lattice changes its direction at an angle, while its door with an open wing is depicted obliquely.

Finally, another frequently encountered feature that facilitates creating the expanse effect and is not inherent to the 15th century art is the appearance of a servant deep inside the palace. His body remains outside the building, while his hands with a tray brought for the prince are already inside.

"Khosrow on the throne" from "Khamsa" dating back to 1539-43 is worth mentioning in this respect. Khosrow was depicted sitting under an arch supported by another one perpendicular to it. Two other walls, located deep inside and on the opposite side, are missing, although they are required as footing for the lantern that underscores the entire structure. **In order to create the effect of depth visibility between the garden and the courtyard, the artist depicted only two panels, i.e. the frontal and lateral ones.** The garden with services for the ruling elite is visible through them.

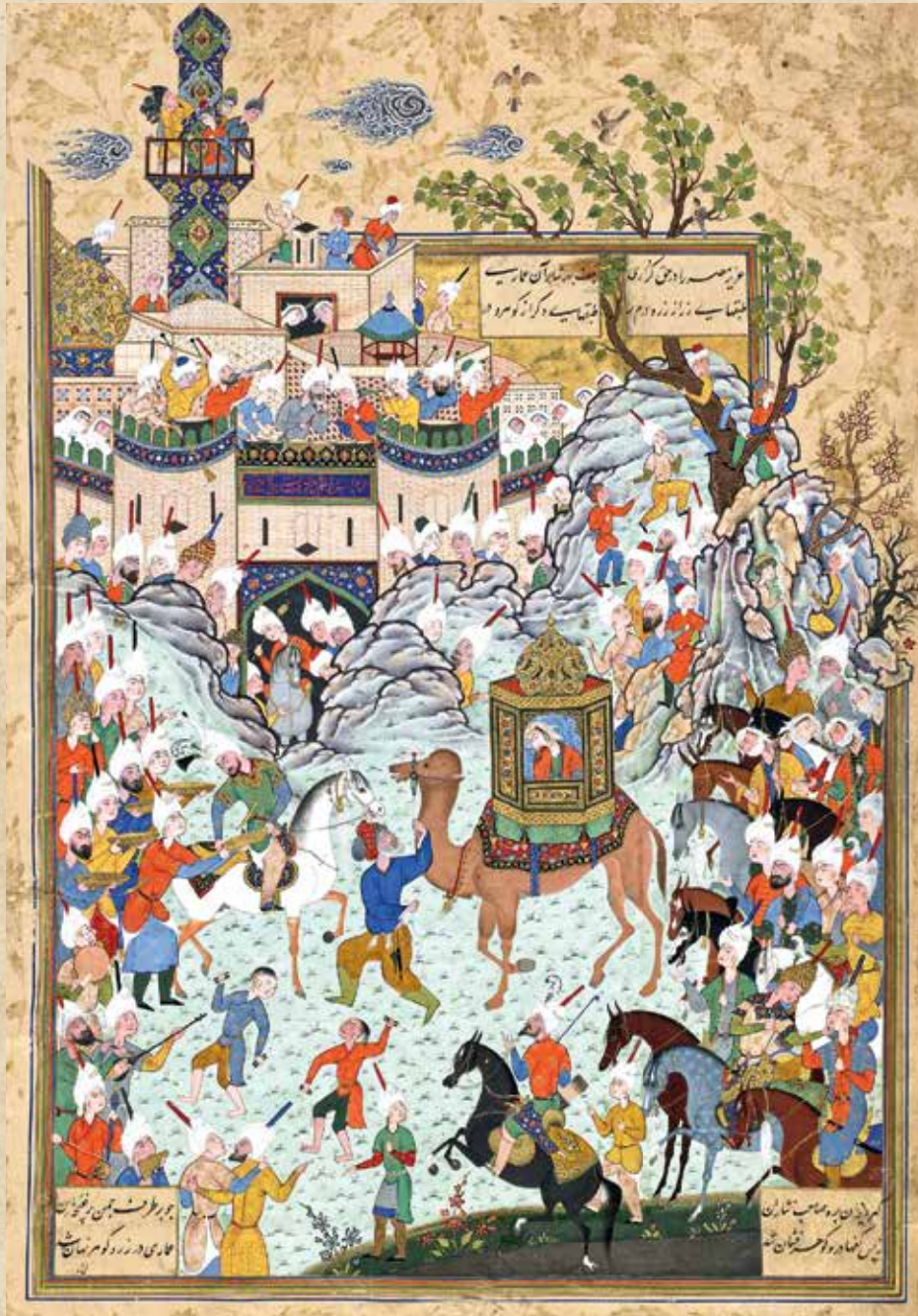
"The wedding procession of Zuleykha and Aziz". The "Seven Thrones" manuscript by Abd al-Rahman Jami. Tabriz-Mashhad, 1556-1565. Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.



The magnificent pavilion with a portal decorated with sparkling gold and bright colors, frames Khosrow and Shirin's throne. It is strictly frontal.

Nevertheless, the painter sets out completely different objectives in the miniature called "**Khosrow listens to the music of Barbed**". This is no longer a semi-official scene portraying the throne, but is purely a scene from the Shah's private life. **The displayed decor loses all of its formal strictness, depicting the Shah's private possessions.** There is a small pavilion to the right and Khosrow is depicted sitting under an

"Prophet Sulaiman and the Queen of Sheba": Abd al-Rahman Jami. The "Seven Thrones": Tabriz-Mashhad, 1556-1565. Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.



arch in a frontal image. A fence connects the building with a light mansion at a slant. Both buildings expand into the garden and the courtyard. Various architectural elements, depicted in several images, produce the effect of a third dimension.

Royal palaces were not the only source of inspiration for the painters of Tabriz and they were interested in more modest dwelling as well. The miniature painting titled "Scenes of urban life" (1540-45) is one of such

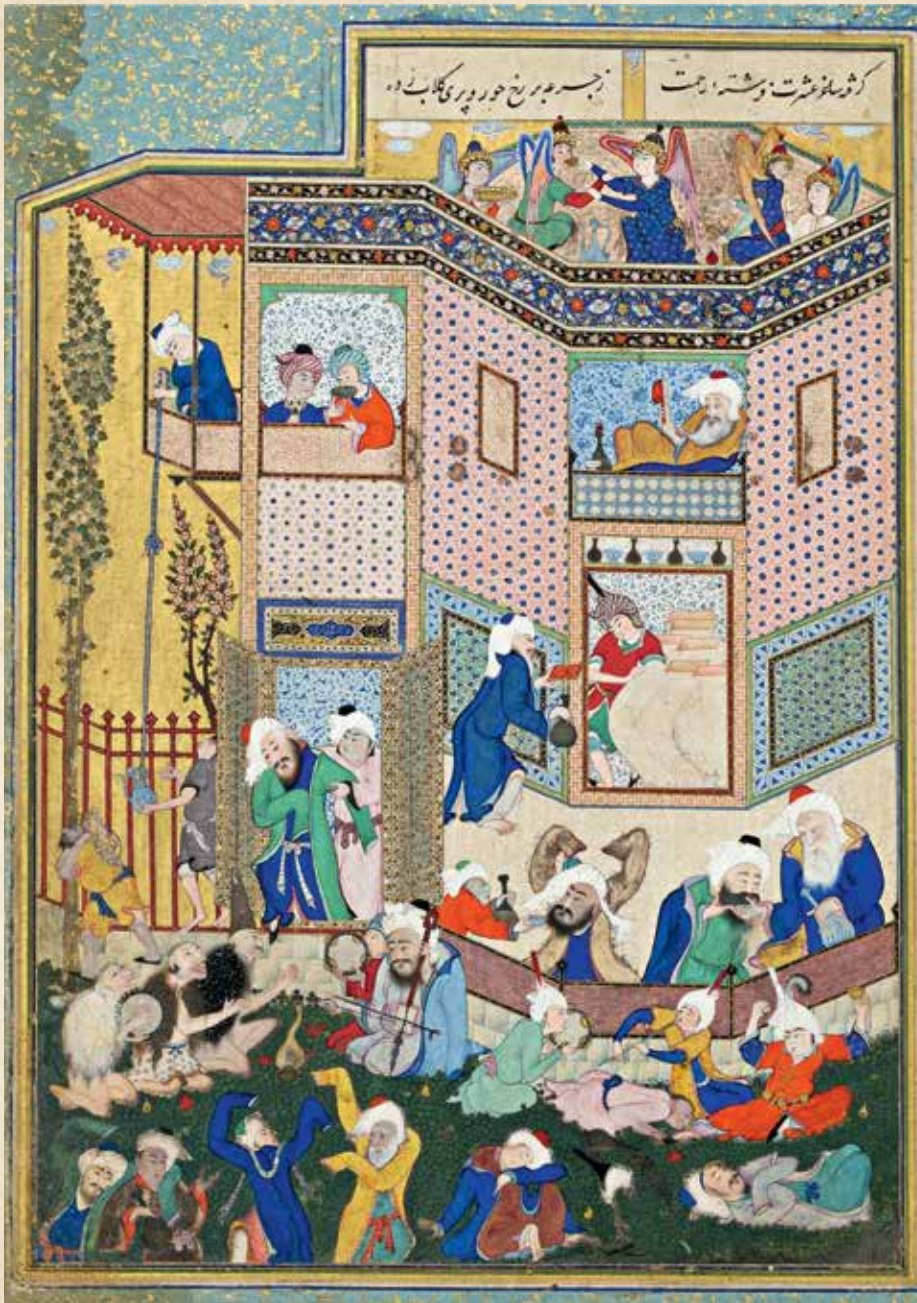
samples. The painting, which features an entire city block, is divided into two parts. The Shah's palace is located nearby. The small structure in the foreground is most likely a kitchen as servants carrying trays are exiting it. People are lined up across from the fountain to fill jugs with water and there are a couple of grocery stores nearby. The dome and minaret of a quarterly mosque rise above the ground at a distance, while houses with courtyards, terraces and gardens are depicted behind them. **The artist did not go as far as addressing issues in perspective** and various images were simply piled on top of one another. However, a vivid picture of people's life in the city was created skillfully.

In the **"Wedding of Yusif and Zuleykha"** miniature (1556-1565), a multifaceted building emerges and a feast takes place inside its broad central segment. Colorful ornamentation completely covers up the building, making the image dynamic. Apparently, the palace vibrates in the radiance of colors and a lace of lines. This **method of ornamentation is atectonic** and its purpose is to distract the viewer's attention. Such a depiction of structures produces the impression of architectural abundance, which is

not typical for the Tabriz school of the first half of the 16th century. Possibly, the miniature was created in Qazvin.

The style of the Tabriz school is clearly traced in the Mashhad miniatures, which suggests the appearance of Tabriz craftsmen in the workshop of **Ibrahim Mirza**. In the miniature titled **"Flight of the turtle"** derived from the **"Haft awrang"** manuscript (1556-65), which was created for Ibrahim Mirza, there is a luxurious camp of the Shah with a host of richly decorated and embroi-

"Heavenly and earthly drunkenness": Artist: Sultan Muhammad; "Diwan" by Hafiz Shirazi. Tabriz, 1530-1531. Joint possession of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Freer Gallery of Art.



dered tents. The **"Anwar-i Suhaili"** ("Kalila and Dimna", 1593) manuscript includes a miniature painting by **Sadiq-bay Afshar** of the same style that depicts a view of a modest little village.

A great view of a major capital city that is most likely, Mashhad, is displayed by the miniature called the **"Wedding processional of Aziz and Zuleykha"**, which actually depicts the matrimony of Ibrahim Mirza with a daughter of Shah Tahmasib.

Moreover, Tabriz miniature creators developed a **plethora of paintings featuring the interior and exterior parts of various buildings**. These included vegetational ornaments, islami patterns, hunting scenes, images of fantastic creatures, such as dragons, winged angels, fairies, as well as lions tormenting deer, monkeys, birds, etc.

The incredible skills of Tabriz artists, who **developed methods of foreshortening and light-and-shadow modeling using a play of volume, colors and illusory inward development**, while maintaining frontality and double dimensionality, are admirable. Thus, Tabriz artists created their own method of architectural decoration, which is more comprehensive and scalable, nearly creating the third-dimension effect. As a result, architecture assumed more resounding colors and complied with the traditions of the Tabriz school of miniature art dating back to the 14th century, decorating the walls of buildings with diverse rainbow colors in ceramic polychromy. ❀

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