

THEME I.

ORIENT AND OCCIDENT.

ORIENTAL INFLUENCE ON OCCIDENTAL ART.

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Rapporteur:

Much has been, and is still being, written about the influence of the west on oriental art. It dates from the expedition of Alexander the Great and it can be followed throughout the centuries. But though it may have undergone the influence of western models, oriental art has nevertheless left its mark on the art of different branches of the art of many European countries. Eminent scholars have already begun to explore this new road. Their research has provided sufficient proof of the part played by the Moslem world. In the light of this new perspective we can better understand that art is not hermetically sealed and that creative influences are mutual.

The influence of Moslem art extends over a very wide field. It was not only manifested in the Mudejar art of Spain from the end of the eleventh century, well before the fall of Granada, but also in France particularly the churches of the West, Centre and South in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, by the introduction of a certain number of architectural motives and decorative themes. Such are, for instance, the horse-shoe arch with arch stones of two colours, the trefoil or polyfoil arch, the pierced modillion, the Kouffie letters and particularly the rib-vaulting of intersecting arches, one of the most original inventions and which dates in its most perfect form from the Xth century in the Cordova mosque. This type of vaulting which is oftenest found in Hispano-Moslem art of the 11th and the greater part of the 12th centuries and which inspired Christian architects, is of Oriental origin. It is true that the rib-vaulting of the Djouma mosque of Isfahan and the Mausoleum of the Sultan Sandjar at Merv are later than those of Cordova, but their sureness and skill prove that they were not the first of their kind.

It is no longer possible to ignore these influences. All the same we ought not to forget that these Moslem elements were given new significance in a new setting as part of an art very different in intentions from that which had fathered them. We can also trace the influence of Oriental art on the work of several European painters. As early as the fifteenth century the "Adorations of the Mages" by Paul de Limbourg, Gentile de Fabriano and Benozzo Gozzoli show striking parallels with the miniatures of the dynasty. Even the Kouffie characters were used ~~as~~ decoratively, as in the hems of the garments in Giotto's "Flight into Egypt" and Fra Filippo Lippi's "Coronation of the Virgin". Moreover we have seen that Rembrandt copied more than once the Grand Mogul miniatures. But all this is limited to superficial borrowing and does not spring from a veritable Moslem aesthetic which finds its consummation in the arabesque, the most pure and expressive form of art ever known. For the full appreciation and understanding of this we had to wait for the twentieth century with its abstract and non-figurative art. Thus it is that the abstract art of a Picasso and an arabesque panel bear a striking resemblance. The Moslem artists started by drawing

from nature, their decorative elements, and then as their art evolved they gradually forbade all representation borrowed from the natural universe.

is And so this progression towards the abstract, towards the absolute which ~~are~~, as it were, summed up in the three styles of Samarra, shows us that this rigorous purification is rather the result of aesthetico-metaphysical necessity than religious interdiction. And so the arabesque came into being; an interplay of lines which is self-sufficient. The most rapid glance is enough to show us its resemblance with the art of Picasso, the first great contemporary master of abstract art. This is not a question of chance. We should particularly remember that ^{that} he is Spanish and as such may be descended from the Moors, it ~~is~~ possible ^{that} in his veins flows the blood of some distant Oriental ancestry. As Guillaume Apollinaire once said, only a Spaniard of this stock could give himself up to "the demon of abstraction".

Many styles of arabesque decoration, the calligraphic compositions of the different forms of letters, and the designs of carpets ~~show~~ point to an aesthetic conception which many an abstract or non-figurative artist has tried to realise. At this point I would like to draw your attention to a fragment of Turkish ornamentation of zoomorphic origin with the disposition of its interlacing patterns, ~~first~~ ^{first} ~~af~~ ^{af} ~~ix~~ ^{ix} ~~ix~~ ^{ix} a calligraphic composition, and finally a Kilim from the village of Tchifteler. By its rhythm and linear movement the first reminds ^{us} of "The Dance" by Matisse, while the other two in their unadorned expressivity are reminiscent of certain paintings by Klee and some of the younger abstracts. In so far as the spirit and principles of these works are concerned, we find the same ambitions realised; a hatred of naturalism, the stylisation of plastic elements and a passion for abstract forms. It was only during the period of its decadence that the art of Islam fell into naturalism.

Thus the interdependence and reconciliation of the nations was ~~if~~ effected in the field of the arts long before that of political and social problems. As M. Emile Mâle, writing of Mudéjar art in Spain, so aptly puts it; "The charm of Spain is that it is the place where East met West. They fought one another furiously, but their arts fell in love and married."

And so we should bear in mind that a mutual understanding of the arts of different countries will open up a most hopeful perspective, not only for the development of art, but also for the peace of humanity.

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