A Comparative Visual Analysis of Nineteenth-Century Iranian Portrait Photography and Persian Painting

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3. POSE, GESTURE AND OBJECTS HELD BY THE SITTER

> Once I feel myself observed by the lens, everything changes: I constitute myself in the process of *posing,* I instantaneously make another body for myself, I transform myself in advance into an image.
>
> Roland Barthes[188]

One might inquire into the origin of the traditional kneeling pose in early nineteenth-century Iranian photography. One can rule out that this pose has found its way into Iranian photography through the apparatus and art itself (as in the use of chair, for example). Beyond the cultural habit of the time, sitting over floor mats, it seems that this particular position, along with the pose of holding various objects by sitters, is inherited from Persian miniature paintings. Another topic that I will research in this chapter, is the difference of pose and objects held by men and women in painting and later in photography. In order to achieve this, I undertake an exhaustive visual analysis of the pose and objects held by the sitters both in the Persian painting tradition and in nineteenth-century Iranian photography, with the aim of defining similarities and differences between the two techniques.

3.1. Gesture, posture and pose

The terms gesture and posture are closely related in meaning. What is a gesture and what is a posture?

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (2nd edition, 1989) defines gesture as a "movement of body or any part of it that is expressive of thought or feeling". In this sense, gesture includes any kind of bodily movement or posture (including facial expression) which is a message to the observer. The literary theorist Fernando Poyatos defines gesture as a conscious or unconscious body movement made mainly with the head, the face alone, or the limbs, learned or somatogenic, serving as a primary communicative tool, dependent or independent from verbal language; either simultaneous or alternating with it, and modified by the conditioning background (smiles, eye movements, a gesture of beckoning, a tic, etc). Further, he defines posture as a conscious or unconscious general position of the body, more static than gesture, learned or somatogenic, either simultaneous or alternating with verbal language, modified by social norms and by the rest of the conditioning background, and used less as a communicative tool, although it may reveal affective states and social status (sitting, standing, joining both hands behind one's back while walking, etc).[189]

The topic of gesture and posture has undergone much research. Since the Renaissance there have been many physiognomists, such as the Swiss J.C. Lavater (1741-1801), who have attempted to codify the facial expressions of emotion and

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[188] Barthes 1981, p. 10.

[189] Poyatos 1981, p. 375.

character. He was certain that the wise physiognomist who studied and used the science of physiognomy with discernment could read the internal from the external, the character of humankind from the countenance and from its correct graphic representation.[190] The notion that inner human character could be interpreted through facial expressions persisted throughout nineteenth-century portraiture in all visual media. The conviction that a clear correspondence existed between inner moods and outward appearances also informed scientific experiments on human gestures and facial expressions, such as the photographs of mental patients taken by Dr. Hugh Welch Diamond in the 1850s, by the French doctor Guillaume Benjamin Duchenne de Boulogne (1806-1975)[191] or by the French physician and neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot (1825-1893)[192]. Also in the nineteenth-century Charles Darwin's (1809-1882) *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals* gave new support to the view that physical expressions might be biologically inherited.[193] Like Diamond, Duchanne, and Charcot, Darwin's works emphasized facial expression as an infallible indicator of psychological states.

Most modern writings on the subject however start from the assumption that gesture is not a universal language but the product of social and cultural differences. In the words of the English historian Sir Keith Thomas, there are many languages of gesture and many dialects.[194] As the French sociologist Marcel Mauss states, for example, it has been suspected for a long time that certain standing and sitting postures might be culturally significant.[195] Further, the anthropologist Gordon W. Hewes arguments that human postural habits have anatomical and physiological limitations, but there are a great many choices the determinants for which appear to be mostly cultural.[196] The ways in which we sit, kneel or stand are determined not only by the human anatomy but foremost by culture. The peoples of the world differ in posture styles just as they do in styles of clothing, housing, cooking and music.[197] Postures and related motor-habits are intimately linked to many aspects of daily life: they affect the design of our clothing, footgear, furniture, dwellings, offices, vehicles, tools and machines. Moreover, they speak an eloquent language in social intercourse. Most of us look to postural cues as well as to facial expressions and speech itself, in our never-ending efforts to interpret or evaluate people's motives, moods or behaviour.[198]

Here I would like to stress the difference in meaning of the terms posture and pose. The second one is more limited than the first. Pose is applied when considering photographs or paintings: the sitter's pose. Posture is a wider term used in a more

[190] Stemmler 1993, p. 151.

[191] Duchenne was a physician at the Paris hospital *La Salpetriére* and treated people suffereing from epilepsy, neurological problems and insanity. His *Mécanisme de la physionomie humaine (The Mechanism of Human Physiognomy),* published in 1862, was accompanied by an atlas with 84 photographs of human subjects whose facial muscles were stimulated by electric current.

[192] His *L'iconographie photographique de La Salpetrière (Photographic Iconography of the Salpetrière Hospital)* was a three-volume work that contained photographs of hysterics, published in 1880.

[193] "Introduction" by Thomas Keith, in Bremmer and Roodenburg 1991, p. 2.

[194] Keith 1991, p. 3.

[195] Mauss 1979. Original in French: "Les Techniques du Corps", in *Journal de Psychologie, Normale et Patologique,* Paris, Librairie Félix Alcan, 1935, pp. 271-293.

[196] Hewes 1955, p. 231.

[197] Hewes 1957, p.123.

[198] Hewes 1957, p. 123.

general context.

In its general sense, posing can be considered as a way in which the "subject" responds to the implied presence of the beholder. In the words of the Turkish photography historian Fulya Ertem, it is by assuming a posture, an imaginary self, in front of any captivating gaze. When in front of the photographic camera, posing can be seen as a reaction to the camera's deadly capture.[199] The French theorist Roland Barthes, extending the pose to inanimate things, also describes it as an "instant, however brief, in which a real thing happened to be motionless in front of the eye. I project the present photograph's immobility upon the past shot, and it is this arrest which constitutes the pose".[200] Posing is thus a moment of immobility where the poseur turns him/herself into a frozen image. It can also be considered as a moment where the poseur tends to imitate a certain image he/she has in his/her mind in order to project it onto his body and gesture. However, the American film theorist and art historian Kaja Silverman in *The Treshold of the Visible World* claims that posing is not imitative of a pre-existing image, it is imitative of photography itself, as she says that the pose does not only arrest the body, "hyperbolising the devitalising effects of all photographic representation" but also resembles "three-dimensional photography".[201] Much like Silverman, the American post-modernist critic Craig Owens also says: "What I do when I pose for a photograph? I freeze.... as if anticipating the still I am about to become; mimicking its opacity, its stillness; inscribing, across the surface of my body, photography's mortification of the flesh".[202] Silverman refers to the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's description of the phenomenon of mimicry in his *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis* and argues that for Lacan, although mimicry is the behaviour of certain species of insects, which seem to adopt the shape and natural colour of their environment for protective reasons, mimicry is more an attempt to become part of a particular picture rather than an attempt to imitate a pre-existing image.[203] Mimicry is thus a reproduction in three-dimensional space with solids and voids: sculpture-photography, as the Czech philosopher Vilém Flusser calls it in *Towards a Philosophy of Photography.* [204]

For me the study of gesture and pose through photography is of more than purely antiquarian interest, since I believe that gesture formed an indispensable element in the social interaction of the past and it can offer a key to some of the fundamental values and assumptions underlying any given society; it gives us important clues to understand the mentality of that time. Behind the apparently most trivial differences between gesture and comportment there lie fundamental differences in social relationship and attitude. In the words of Keith, to interpret an account for a gesture is to unlock the whole social and cultural system of which it is a part.[205]

The anthropologist Weston Labarre argues that many of these motor habits in one culture are open to grave misunderstanding in another. So much of the expression of emotion in our culture is open to serious misinterpretation in another. There is no

[199] Ertem 2006, p. 10.
[200] Barthes 1981, p. 78.
[201] Silverman 1996, p. 202.
[202] Owens 1992, p. 210.
[203] Silverman 1996, p. 201.
[204] Flusser 2000, p. 50.
[205] Keith 1991, p. 11.

“natural“ language of emotional gesture.[206] Nevertheless, he states further, in the language of gesture all over the world there are varying mixtures of the physiologically conditioned response and the purely cultural one, and it is frequently difficult to analyze and segregate the two.[207] Some research has shown that there are different gestures for the same meaning in different cultures and it has often been suggested that teachers of foreign languages should consider gesture not only so that students learn to speak the language but also that misunderstanding of gestural usage be avoided.[208] The emerging field of gesture studies is actually especially concerned with the exploration of the relationship between gesture and sign language, and how the gesture varies according to cultural and language differences. [209]

In this chapter, I will explore whether this cultural dependence of pose or gesture is visible in nineteenth-century portrait photography. I will analyse if there is a noticeable difference between the pose or gesture of the person depicted in Western portrait studio photography and Iranian portrait studio photography, and consequently also difference in meaning.

When analyzing photographs, one must assume that it is possible to distinguish between postures imposed upon the subjects by the photographer and those, which are habitual or indigenous. As Hewes states, there are pictures in which the subjects have certainly been arranged in a line for the purposes of photographic composition, but in which seemingly indigenous postures also occur. [210] In the cases in which the Western photographer imposes his wishes, in a probably unconscious way, he will at the same time impose typical Western poses that will probably change the natural native ones that the person depicted would do. As the photography historian William C. Darrah concludes when considering *cartes de visite* from nineteenth-century, there are four basic descriptive aspects of a portrait: pose, background, lighting and characterization, the latter being partly a result of the first three.[211] There are only three types of studio poses: head or bust, seated and standing, although there are many variations of each. The seated figure may be half-length to full length. The standing figure is usually in full length. From 1860 to 1890, portraits were roughly equally distributed among the three posing types, although heads were somewhat more popular in the early 1860’s and again in the 1870’s.[212] The seated pose was favoured by many photographers because the subject was more relaxed and it was easier to imply activity. The popular standing full pose was fraught with difficulties. The subject was obliged to stand motionless for a minute or more while the final adjustments were made in exposing the negative. An iron head clamp, adjustable for height, with a tripod base, held the subject firmly in position.

This classification is valid for Western photography, but for Iranian photography I would add another pose: kneeling, as an alternative way of sitting. This pose is commonly found in Iranian studio portrait photography in the nineteenth-century and, under the influence of Western poses on the studio, the seated pose is

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[206] Labarre 1947-8, p. 55.
[207] Labarre 1947-8, p. 57.
[208] See: Wylie, L., *Beaux Gestes: A Guide to French Body Talk,* The Undesgraduate Press, Cambridge, 1977; Monahan, Barbara, *A Dictionary of Russian Gestures,* Hermitage, NJ, 1983; Diadori, Pierangela, *Senza Parole. 100 Gesti degli Italiani,* Bonacci, Rome, 1990.
[209] See: Kendon 2004. Adam Kendom is a leading authority on the subject and is the editor of the journal *Gesture,* an important referent to everybody interested in human communication.
[210] Hewes 1955, p. 234.
[211] Darrah 1981, p. 26.
[212] Darrah 1981, p. 26.

also to be found at a later stage. I will demonstrate the evolution of the pose from the ground to the chair, from kneeling to the sitting position in my visual analysis of Persian painting and of nineteenth-century portrait studio photographs. Therefore, it is relevant to briefly explain how chairs appeared, evolved and were imported from other countries. In order to do so, I will introduce the ideas and research of the American architect Galen Cranz concerning the origins and role of the chair in our lives and will reflect after that about its role in the studio.

All around the world, the chair and chair sitting has become a symbol and sometimes evidence of Westernization. Chair-sitting and furniture go hand in hand, though is difficult to tell which is cause and which effect, whether the habit of sitting on a support led to the invention of chairs or *vice versa.* Interestingly enough, even if the object was discovered in Asia as we shall see further below, it was in Europe that it took the main role, as far as furniture is concerned, in the life of common people. Conversely, when Gandhi wanted to make a point about the importance of retaining traditional culture, he chose to sit cross-legged on the floor, self-consciously rejecting the chair and the modernism that goes with it. In non-Western cultures, the specific connotations associated with chairs are different, but the chair is still used to communicate status differences. In the words of Crams, when it was introduced to China in the second century A.D., the Chinese called it the "barbarian (their word for anything foreign) bed". It connoted informal use because of its years of association with military camps, temporary travel furniture, and garden use. It was more like a cot, and for years was never used indoors. People sat on it tailor-fashion (cross-legged), showing contempt, indifference, or extreme confidence. Nine hundred years later, a new seating type evolved: the folding chair with a back. This chair then became acceptable and was used by all, but the language of dignity and honour retained the use of the term "mat" rather than "chair".[213]

The word "chair" comes from the Greek. It is a contraction of *cathedra*, which is in turn a compound of *kata,* meaning "down", and *hedra,* from "to sit". A chair is a piece of furniture with a back, and usually four legs, on which one person sits. But so is a throne. However, the word "throne" has a different origin. It comes from the Indo-European base *dher,* meaning "to hold or support". The throne supports, while the chair is a place to sit down. A throne suggests the palanquins on which a potentate might be carried, while the underlying meaning of a chair is quite different. Physically, almost anyone can sit down, whereas only a very privileged few can be carried.[214] Neither thrones nor chairs originated in classical Greece; they are far older. Chair sitting was already a widespread practice in ancient Egypt of 2850 B.C. The oldest physical chairs we have come from the tomb of the young pharaoh Tutankhamen, who died in about 1352 B.C.[215] Chairs, stools and benches were in use in Egypt and Mesopotamia, therefore, at least 5.000 years ago. While commoners and slaves sat on stools or benches, the kings, priests and other exalted personages in ancient Egypt used chairs. The Chinese began using chairs fairly late in their history: 2.000 years ago they sat on the floor, as the Japanese and Koreans do today. In southern and Southeast Asia chairs have never become items of common use. Even in the Middle East and North Africa the Islamic peoples seem to have returned to sitting on the floor possibly because of the cultural prestige of the nomadic Arabs.[216] No less

[213] Cranz 2000, p. 29.
[214] Cranz 2000, p. 31.
[215] Cranz 2000, p. 31.
[216] Hewes 1957, p. 127.

widely practiced than chair-sitting is the deep squat. Ranking slightly behind chair-sitting and the deep squat is the cross-legged sitting posture that we call sitting in the "Turkish" or "tailor" fashion. Sitting on the heels with the knees resting on the floor is the formal sitting position for both men and women in Japan, and is the regular prayer position in the Islamic world and many other cultures in Eurasia. We shall see examples of all of these positions in paintings and photographs.

We need anthropologists to remind us that almost everything including how we hold our bodies should be understood in its cultural context. An Indian might squat to wait for the train or bus; a Japanese woman might kneel to drink tea or to eat; and an Arab might sit crossed-legged to read a book. Hewes, as I have already noted, emphasized that postural variations are culturally determined. Sitting, like other postures, is predominantly regulated all around the world according to gender, age, and social status. In mosques, Muslims sit and kneel on richly carpeted floors. Carpets are butted one against the other. Carpets do more than protect the knees; all who enter a mosque (or home) take off their shoes, ostensibly so that no dirt is brought onto the carpets where people will put their hands and faces. I will come back later to this matter while analyzing the paintings and photographs selected for this chapter. Among habitual chair-sitters over the world, there are a surprising variety of cultural differences in sitting posture, many of which can be classified on the basis of the way the legs or ankles are crossed.[217] Here it is useful to show a part of the postural typology used in the compilation of data for Hewes' article (fig. 94). As Hewes explain, these drawings are for the most part based on photographs in the ethnographic literature.

Figure 94

[217] Hewes 1957, p. 125.

Interestingly, from the corpus of photographs that I have analyzed for this chapter, both Western and Iranian, it will be evident that this variety of chair-sitting postures is not to be found in the photo studios where the typical Victorian sitting pose is more widely used: the two legs lying parallel next to each other (see posture number 30 and 31 in Hewes' drawings); even though, in Iranian photographs, due to the lack of experience of poseurs at that time with chair sitting, some very peculiar leg-poses appear as we shall see later in this chapter while analyzing some photographs, resulting in a more varied and interesting repertoire than the uniform Western one. In this case the role of the photographer was definitive in imposing, or at least influencing, a definite chair-sitting pose in the photographer's studio. The most common sitting posture, though, in nineteenth-century Iranian photography is number 103 in Hewes' drawings, sitting on the heels with the knees resting on the floor.

3.2. Pose and gesture in Persian painting tradition

In this section, I explore which are the traditional poses used in the Persian painting tradition. A fundamental topic that I consider is how has the use of the chair in Western portrait painting influenced the transition from the traditional kneeling pose to the sitting pose in Persian painting and later on in photography. Further, my aim is to solve the question of whether there is some difference in the poses in which men and women are depicted.

Men in painting

There are many examples to be found in Persian miniature painting that depict people in the Persian traditional pose, that is, sitting on their heels with the knees resting on the floor (posture 103 Hewes). *Sultan-Husayn Mirza Bayqara,* a wonderful miniature from Herat, ca. 1500 (fig. 54) introduced already in the previous chapter, presents the sultan sitting on his heels, one hand holding a *mandil*, or handkerchief, on his knee and the other in front of him with a forefinger extended in a speaking gesture. He is wearing a turban with a plume of black heron feathers. *Seated figure holding a cup,* mid seventeenth-century, presents a figure in the same pose both because he is seated on his heels and because of the position and pose of the arms and hands (fig. 55). *Riza-i 'Abbasi painting a picture of a European man* by Mu'in (pupil of Riza-i 'Abbasi (ca.1565-1635)), shows Riza as an older man with a greying moustache, wearing spectacles and a turban shaped in elaborate seventeenth-century style but made of a simple fabric. He is sitting on the ground with a low stand in front of him, but the picture is propped on a bent knee, as if to bring it closer to his face. His subject is a European man in a cape and a black brimmed hat: nothing could be more representative of the European presence in seventeenth- century Iran. Other than the stand, a few books, and pens and an inkwell on the ground before him, the tan-gold paper provides a timelessly neutral background, and the image thus becomes a universal one, of an aging painter plying his craft (fig. 56).

There are also many examples of this kind of pose to be found in Qajar painting portraiture. Fath 'Ali Shah (d. 1834), the second of Qajar Rulers, is depicted on the next portrait seated on his heels (fig. 95). He is the most recognizable, and historically verifiable, personage of any Iranian monarch up to the era of photography. In the words of the Islamic art historian Eleonor Sims, 'his fine slender figure, his pale complexion and blazing black eyes under wide black brows, and

specially his long and magnificent black beard, are instantly recognizable, whether they are on the tiniest of enameled gold pendants or the largest of oil-painted canvases or rock reliefs'.[218] He especially made use of the medium of oil on canvas for a number of large paintings of himself between 1798 and 1815. The one that I want to analyze, the first of such portraits, was painted in the year after his ascension in 1797. It is signed by Mirza Baba, Fath 'Ali Shah's chief painter from the very beginning of his reign. 'For the first of the large single-figure oil paintings, Mirza Baba appears to have isolated the Shah from the among his courtiers. Fath 'Ali Shah still kneels, in the old-fashioned position, on a carpet spread on a *takht* with a low wooden balustrade behind him. His posture is erect and he is holding a jeweled mace that, together with his level gaze, gives the sitter an effect of great majesty. The seventeenth-century European prop of the draped curtain on one side of the picture is utilized, but the background is essentially a neutral shadowed space that increases his majestic isolation'.[219] Mirza Baba repeated this kneeling image of the Shah several times and others further repeated it, although later portraits by other painters made use of the standing pose or seated the Shah in a European armchair-throne, as we will see shortly.

The next portrait is also an oil on canvas painting depicting Fath 'Ali Shah, circa 1798, and it is attributed to Mirza Baba (fig. 57).[220] In keeping with its early date, the composition follows the conventions of the Perso-European school (pose of the arms, spitoon, and elaborate jeweled regalia). Further, the overall design and the ruler's features are based on the previous portrait that I have just analyzed. Here, as stated by Diba, 'Mirza Baba probably painted the face, rendered with his distinctive soft modeling and heavily shaded eyes, and assigned another painter to complete the rest of the painting'.[221] The ruler's pose and the decorative treatment of his robe conform to the two-dimensional conventions of "miniature painting", as noted by Diba: 'the oblique angle of the carpet, however, suggests spatial recession, and the ruler's shadow on the shutter implies a light source to the right. Typically, the rendering of the shadows is not consistently applied: the glass vase in the background cast a shadow to the righ't.[222] I will analyze in-deph this topic of understanding of the space in chapter four. In the next portrait, also of Fath 'Ali Shah, we find again the traditional Persian pose, kneeling on a carpet with a cushion behind him, holding a mace (fig. 59). This portrait is the latest in a series of dated paintings depicting Fath 'Ali Shah seated on a carpet. The painting is signed by Mihr 'Ali and is dated 1813-14. Mihr 'Ali produced the most impressive full-size portraits of his patron, Fath 'Ali Shah. When faced with his work one can immediately realize that this painter was provided with the best materials and opportunities in order that he should produce really lavish representations of the Shah, which could be admired in each of his buildings. Conscious of the role of these paintings, Mihr 'Ali has missed no chance to include all the jewellery and finery in the king's possession, and next to this, he chose the most powerful and imposing attitudes to give these images their particular awe-inspiring effect. This way of working was most probably the reason Fath 'Ali Shah had him as his favourite painter.

[218] Sims 2002, p. 275.
[219] Sims 2002, p. 277.
[220] For translation of the calligraphic inscriptions found in this image and also in figs.53 and 60, see chapter 2 on text and photography.
[221] Diba 1999, p. 180.
[222] Diba 1999, p.181.

The sitting and the standing poses are also to be found among Qajar portraits. *Fath 'Ali Shah Seated on a Chair Throne* (fig. 96)*,* attributed to Mihr 'Ali[223], circa 1800-1806, was intended as a gift to Emperor Napoleon. Oddly enough, this painting has no calligraphic inscriptions. The work is one of the three life-size paintings showing the ruler seated in a jewel-encrusted and enameled chair throne, as stated by Diba. In conformity with the function of a state image intended for public display and designed to inspire a sense of awe in the viewer, Mihr 'Ali depicted Fath 'Ali Shah as impassive, rigidly posed, and ablaze with jewels. The image epitomizes poetic descriptions of the rulers' imperial aura and sunlike splendour, to which the sun-shaped roundel surmounting the throne back alludes.[224] In addition to the throne, each element of the rulers' attire symbolizes his imperial nature. The severity of this iconic image is skillfully counterbalanced by the grace of the ruler's features and the delicacy of his tiny feet, shod in floral-patterned hose and upturned slippers, combine to create an elegant image with just a touch of humanity. Notice that in all these portraits of Fath 'Ali Shah, he is invariably depicted looking to the front with a slight tilt to the left. *Prince Muhammad 'Ali Mirza, Dawlatshah,* signed by Ja'far and dated 1820 (fig. 53), is also an example of the seated pose used in Qajar painting portraiture from 1800 onwards. In addition to the throne, each element of the ruler's attire symbolizes his imperial nature: the crown surmounted by an exquisitely fashioned aigrette with black heron feathers; the sword of state covered in priceless pearls and hard stone gems; the royal armbands set with diamonds and the long belt typically associated with the Qajar tribe. *Portrait of Fath 'Ali Shah Standing,* signed by Mihr 'Ali and dated 1809-10 (fig. 97), depicts Fath 'Ali Shah standing and holding a jeweled scepter in his right hand. An inscription in *Thulth* script besides the crown informs us of the identity of the person depicted: *al-sultan Fath 'Ali Shah Qajar.* Under this inscription, there is another one in *Nastaliq* script and between panels that reads: *Bih kam-i pak-i parvadigar, zadi naqsh in namwar shariyar/ Chu in afarinish bar arasti, chunan afaridi ki khud khwasti* (free translation: with the help of God this painter has painted a portrait of this famous king, and if he has achieved this creation in this way is just because of God's wishes). Also in *Nastaliq* script in the lower left corner, we can read: *In pardeh tasvir-i-timsal-i-shamayil-I shashanshah bihmal ast; kih dar huzur bahir al-munavvar aqdas mulahized; shamayil muhr mayil mubarak shudeh va bidun-I taghyir raqamzad-i kilk-i khujasteh salk shud; kamtarim ghulam Mihr 'Ali amad, fi sanah 1024* (free translation: this painted canvas of the face and portrait of the king is unique because the king himself is unique and further compliments for the king. The inscription finishes with "the lowest servant Mihr 'Ali, in the year 1024). As stated by Diba, this work is the earliest known portrait of Fath 'Ali Shah standing: evidently Mihr 'Ali suggested here a new type of royal portrait.[225] The choice of pose for the king, with one arm raised and the other on his hip, produces a particularly grand effect, further increased by the king's extensive black beard and the mass of jewellery that he wears topped by the enormous crown with its three black feather aigrettes. The signature of the artist is to be found at the lower left corner. Mihr 'Ali found this pose highly successful when he used it for a later version of this artwork.[226]

[223] Robinson 1967, p. 336.
[224] Diba 1999, p. 181.
[225] Diba 1999, p. 183.
[226] To compare the image, see: Falk 1972, p. 35.

In the following, I will analyze the objects held by the sitters in Persian miniature painting and Qajar portrait painting. I explore if there is a difference in the objects held by women and men in these works of art. When analyzing nineteenth-century Iranian portrait photographs, we can find several recurrent elements, such as the man holding a flower, as one of the more interesting and particular ones. The fact that the man is holding a flower is quite an unknown and bizarre element in Western portraiture. Flowers tend to be something more related to women than men, especially in that genre. But not in the Persian painting tradition as we shall see. It is actually quite easy to find such portraits of men holding roses in various periods. Two typical examples among the many to be found are *Youth with Flower* (fig. 98) from the seventeenth century, a precisely drawn representation of a courtier or a dandy, which may have been a sketch for a larger painting, and *A Man in a Landscape* (fig. 99) from the sixteenth century. Iran has been often called "the land of the rose and the nightingale". Persian Sufi poets have used the rose extensively, almost obsessively. The symbol of the rose conveys allusions to concepts such as beauty, love, poetry, divine Unity, music and belovedness, while the nightingale symbolizes multiplicity and diversity. In the words of the Iranian scholar Hossein M. Elahi Ghomshei, artistic creation contains in miniature form the entire story of Creation. The rose plays a part of absolute Existence in this story and the nightingale - with its songs, infinity diverse in their tonality and pitch, hymning the praise of the beauty of this divine Existence-cum-Rose - expresses possible Being. Incessantly, Beauty - the rose of the beloved – brings into existence myriads of lovers (nightingales); every moment she contemplates herself through the eyes of these lovers, hearing them sing praises.[227]

Another interesting element is water, normally present in the image in the shape of a pond. See, for example, figure 100, where a messenger offers to Sam (grandfather of Rustam) a painted picture of the new-born Rustam, seated cross-legged and garbed in a miniature version of his grandfather's clothing.[228] This kind of miniatures with a pond of water placed in the bottom centre of the image is very common and this kind of composition would be used later on also in photography, as we shall see below. Interestingly, and especially in photography, water has a close relationship to reflection and mirror. Photography is often compared with a mirror in theories of photography. The motif of the mirror is one of the most fascinating ones used in Persian poetry, especially in mystical thinking. The meaning of the mirror in Persian literature has been deeply analyzed by Johann Christoph Bürgel and Priscilla Soucek. Rumi is one of the Persian poets that has used more the motif of the mirror in his poetry. Annemarie Schimmel[229] and Eva de Vitray-Meyerovitch[230] have investigated the role of the mirror in the imagery of this poet.

[227] Elahi Ghomsei, on-line publication.

[228] This page is an illustration of one chapter of Firdousi's *Shahnama*: Rudaba's travail at the birth of her son, the hero Rustam, was great and only alleviated by the Simurgh's divine assistance. But once Rustam had made his appearance in the world, his parents and maternal grandparents were overwhelmed with joy and also awe, for at birth he was the size of a child of twelve months. To convey the wonder of this elephantine-like child to his paternal grandfather Sam, Rudaba's servants sewed a life-size silken doll and limned Rustam's features of his face; they then put a spear, a mace, and a bridle into his hands and, setting the doll on a chestnut horse, sent it to his grandfather Sam in Mazandaran (quoted from Sims 2002, p. 319). This scene, as we can see in the miniature, is rarely (on a free-way) illustrated.

[229] Shimmel 1978.

[230] De Vitray-Meyerovitch 1972.

There are, to be sure, many more motifs that bear a symbolic meaning in Persian miniature painting, but I have only referred to the two that are to be found in nineteenth-century Iranian portrait photography.

If we consider now Qajar portrait painting, the Qajar imperial attire and regalia consist of several key elements that can be easily identified. These elements have a uniquely Qajar flavour to them during Fath ‘Ali Shah’s reign. As we can see in figures 53, 57, 60, 92, 93 and 94 they include crown, throne, sword, mace, dagger and jewels. The Qajar throne was also an essential element of Fath ‘Ali Shah’s imperial regalia. Crown and throne aside, as they are obviously the most symbolic of all the regalia, we can say that in general the arrangement and collection of elements chosen by Fath ‘Ali Shah and his predecessor, Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar (1742-1797), as part of their imperial image is important. In the words of the Iranian scholar Manoutchehr M. Eskandari-Qajar, ‘each element is, of course, symbolic, and each element works to complete the image that is to be projected. It is in the particular arrangement of the elements that Fath ‘Ali Shah also achieved the unique look of Qajar imperial attire and regalia’.[231] In addition to the above, a mace (*gorz),* a jewelled dagger, a studded belt with pendant and the Qajar hanging belt form the essential elements of Fath ‘Ali Shah’s official regalia, as we have seen clearly in the group of painted portraits presented. The sword and the mace allude to the ruler’s justice and the regalia and furnishings evoke an image of wealth. Some of these objects also became part of the regalia shown in photographic portraits on a later stage, as in the case of the sword.

Woman in painting

Most of the portraits painted by artists during the Qajar Era were of men. Nevertheless, there are enough portraits of women to deserve a close analysis.[232] It is relevant for my study to analyze the pose of the women depicted in these paintings and see if there is any relationship of the pose and gesture of women in the Persian painting tradition and in nineteenth-century Iranian portrait photography. In all periods of history the prescriptions for the physical behaviour of women have been different from those of men. This has been reflected clearly in Qajar portrait painting and also in photography as we shall see shortly. According to the art historian S. J. Falk, this subject, girls, apparently resulted from a desire for decoration that would suit the purpose of the building for which the painting was intended.[233] We can find images of women playing different instruments, dancing with castanets, and sometimes just resting or drinking. But without doubt, the most impressive group of pictures is that which depicts women-acrobats and tumblers who played a prominent role in the entertainments provided at court. These images number among the most striking images from the Persian painter’s repertoire of female types. Girls balancing on their hands and even on knives are specially interesting since those contortions of the human body have no precursors in earlier painting. *A girl playing a sitar* (fig. 101) by the painter Muhammad Sadiq and dated 1769-70 depicts a woman playing a sitar. The arched eyebrows, aquiline nose, narrow kohl-rimmed eyes, elongated body proportions, and stiff treatment of the wide trousers were, as stated by Diba, typical

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[231] Eskandari-Qajar 2003, p. 84.

[232] For a good insight in this topic, see: Najmabadi, Afsaneh, “Reading For Gender Through Qajar Painting”, in Diba 1999, pp. 76-89.

[233] Falk 1972, p. 10.

elements used in this idealized representations of women.[234] Those were, actually, the Zand painting canons.[235] The lady's countenance and body correspond, indeed, to the classical canons of Persian beauty as interpreted in the Zand period: moon-faced visage, joined eyebrows, etc. The woman depicted here is dressed in the costume of the period, which so often consisted of enormous patterned trousers made of thick carpet-like material, and a much lighter chemise that usually open at the front in addition to being transparent.

According to Diba, 'the role and status of women entertainers in Middle East societies is a perplexing phenomenon. Performing, especially in front of men, was not regarded as highly respectable profession, although its practitioners were not necessarily considered outcasts'.[236] As stated by the scholar Sarah Graham-Brown, in many instances women entertainers were professionals brought into the harem to perform on special occasions, or sometimes they were actual members of the harem, usually concubines of the rulers, who were trained in the arts of singing, music, poetry and dancing.[237] The half-filled crystal decanter and porcelain tableware with several delicacies typically appear in representations of women during this period. The wine and apples are both attributes that act as visual equivalents for poetic metaphors: in Persian culture, apples represent love and fruitfulness, while wine is a favoured metaphor for earthly and divine love. In *A woman balancing on a knife* (fig. 63) the acrobat's body is flattened against the picture plane, twisted like pretzels to maintain a balance that flouts all laws of gravity and perspective. The watermelon on the right bottom corner of the painting gives to the final image an interesting balance in composition. The wooden balustrade is also one of the typical elements found in these kinds of paintings as part of the studio setting. As is usual for Qajar paintings of beauties, the picture is neither signed nor dated (there is one word: *Khatun,* which means dame or lady), but its style and the young woman's clothes belong to the first quarter of the nineteenth-century. Note that the women depicted on these paintings are always barefoot and the soles of their feet have been painted with henna. Like many other Qajar canvases showing women, this one seems to be one of a series of paintings that once decorated a palace. I have seen several such portraits that show women balancing on knives, elbows or hands. The same facial type is repeated in all of these canvases, which were clearly created by the same artist. Their joined eyebrows, almond-shaped eyes, puckered lips, and flamboyant hairdos reflect the late Zand-early Qajar ideal of beauty, as I have already stated before. Although Qajar representations of women were rarely signed or dated (in clear contrast with those of men), these paintings present marked affinities with similar subjects executed by the painters Ahmad and Muhammad, providing a dating range from the late 1820s to the early 1840s. Such paintings of women were displayed in the public as well as private quarters of palaces and residences. These representations, in a society where women were secluded from the male gaze, understandably puzzled nineteenth-century European observers, who failed to grasp the abstract nature of these representations

[234] Diba 1999, p. 157.

[235] In the Zand Period (1750-79), the subject of painting evolved from the cosmopolitan and imperial themes of the late Safavid (1501-1722) and Afshar (1736-47) periods to poetic and intimate subjects. Zand paintings are characterized by a heavier silhoutte and livelier compositions. Quoted from Diba 1999, p. 147.

[236] Diba 1999, p. 207.

[237] Graham-Brown 1988, p. 174.

and mistook them for actual portraits.[238] These female acrobats are not found in photography but the women musicians, especially playing the sitar are very common, as we will see in the next section. I will come back to this kind of women painting portraiture when I analyze the objects held by the sitter in a section further below.

The women depicted in Qajar paintings, interestingly, hold musical instruments or, in some cases, little knifes when performing some acrobatics, or a glass of wine or bottle, as we can see in figures 62, 63 and 101. These elements are also present in photographic portraits of women, as I shall show with some examples.

In sum, as we have seen, there is a chronological evolution from the traditional Iranian pose to a more westernized pose, chiefly symbolized by the use of chairs in the painter's studio and, later, in the photographer's studio. The plain of the painting rises from a low one to an upper one in order to be able to fully depict the person sitting on the chair. This transition happens over a longer period of time in painting than in the case of photography. The first chairs to be found in Qajar painting portraiture date from the beginning of the eighteenth-century. Before this date, only the kneeling pose is to be found. This traditional Persian pose widely used in miniature and Qajar painting, can be described as a person kneeling on the floor, on a carpet, and normally with a cushion at his/her back. The hands rest relaxed on the sitter's lap and quite often grapple some kind of typical object: *tasbih* (set of coral prayer beads), mace (in the case that the person depicted is one of the Qajar rulers), a book, a handkerchief, etc. Interestingly enough, later on, after 1800, in Qajar portrait painting, only men were sitting on chairs or on a throne if the person depicted is one of the Qajar rulers. Women were kneeling, standing or performing acrobatics. A possible explanation of this difference is that in the portraits of men, the sitters were real, belonging mostly to the highest levels of court society, whereas those of women were idealized portraits of anonymous women, more exactly of a prototype of women that took part in the court as entertainer. Around the same time, the standing pose is also to be found, but is not as widely used as the sitting pose. There is clearly a different treatment of female and male portraits. Gesture reflects differences of gender as well as of class. Women portraits in the Qajar era were abstractions that represented anonymous women whereas those of men were always high-ranking society members that could be identified by the calligraphic inscription that is always found within the pictorial space. This conclusion agrees with the statement of the Iranian scholar Afsaneh Najmabadi that the subject of women in Qajar painting present us with a curious picture: we have an abundance of representations of women from the realm of male fantasy and pleasure, but very few representations of real women.[239] The objects held by the sitter are rich in sociological input. While Persian miniature painting, due to its direct relation and dependence on Persian literature, is more prone to use elements that bear symbolic meaning, Qajar traditional portrait painting, as well as photographs, are more directed to stress the social status and power of the sitters. This consideration has a great impact on the treatment of the object held by the sitter. There is a clear difference between the objects held by men and women. Objects held by men are more related to the outer appearance of the sitter, more related to the public sphere of society, while the ones held by women are more related to the domestic sphere, a place governed by women. However in either

[238] Diba 1999, p. 213.
[239] Najmabadi 1999, p.76.

case, through the objects held by the sitters, both photographers and sitters constructed their photographs showing a part of the reality of their life, what they were interested in and where they were coming from or their social status.

3.3. Pose and objects held by the sitter in nineteenth-century Iranian portrait photography

In this section I explore which are the poses used and which are the elements present in traditional Persian paintings that may have been inherited by nineteenth-century Iranian studio portrait photography. Next to this, I study how Western aesthetics and studio paraphernalia have influenced the traditional pose of Iranian sitters in portrait studio photography. Due to this influence some hybrid poses may be found among Iranian photographs and my aim is to define them. The last topic that I research in this section is whether there is a difference in the poses used by men and women in photography, as it was the case in Persian painting.

The two first photographs considered here share an almost identical pose: a man sitting on his heels with his knees resting on the floor (posture 103 Hewes, p. 78), the typical Persian pose, with the hands almost in the same position, one of them holding an object: in fig. 70 the *mullah* (religious priest or leader) holding a *tasbih*, as in traditional Persian painting (see figs. 54 and 55). The other hand rests on his lap. In fig. 67, the man is holding a water-pipe with the left hand and his right hand rests in his lap in the same way as in the previous photograph. The parallel between the composition and aesthetics of these photographs and the paintings analyzed in the previous section is remarkable and leaves little doubt of the influence of the paintings on the photographs. We can also find a remarkable amount of photographs of groups of people kneeling on the floor, like groups of musicians or jesters (see figs. 102 and 103). The first one depicts three men with one serpent and the calligraphic inscription at the centre reveals them as a *luti bashi*[240] and two *margir*s (trainers of serpents). Next to this information appears the date in which the photograph was taken. The inscription on the right reveals the place where the photograph was taken (*Akhaskahne Mobarake-ye Madrese-ye Majsus Nezam*) and the inscription on the left reveals the name of the photographer (*Dar al-Khalafa-ye Naseri-Khanezat Mohammad Hassane Qajar*) as Mohammad Hassan Qajar. In the second image, a group of four musicians is depicted in front of the well-known Reza Akkasbashi's backdrop with the Victorian house printed on it. Actually, all photographs by Reza Akkasbashi are immediately recognizable by this backdrop and since the sitters are always Iranians, an odd and intriguing de-contextualization of the subject with the atmosphere is also immediately noticeable. The inscription reveals the men as a group of musicians from Kashmir (the second part of the inscription is illegible). Notice that in this kind of images, the viewpoint of the photographer is also lower one than normal. This points to the fact that the photographer could be kneeling also (or at least bending) on the floor and the camera would be much closer to the floor that when taking photographs of people standing up. I have found one photograph that supports my hypothesis (fig. 104). Both photographers are Iranians, the one on the left is Yaagub Akkasbashi from Tabriz and we can notice that the level of his camera is

[240] *Luti Bashi* is a group of men that belong to a *Zurkhane,* literally, the *house of force.* Members of the *Zurkhane* followed a strict code of conduct. Imam Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet, together with Rustam, the legendary pre-Islamic Iranian Hero, were inspirational figures for its members.

much lower than the common one (see the photographer on the right, also Iranian). This kind of pose, sitting on the heels and knees resting on the floor is also to be found in nineteenth-century photography in other countries in Asia, like in Japan (see figures 84, 87 and 88 from the previous chapter) and India (fig. 92).

The four photographs that I have just discussed are only a few examples of the many to be found in nineteenth-century Iranian photography. We can also find many examples of photographs in which the person depicted is sitting on a chair. I would say that this change in pose is more a fashion in the photo-studio, a direct influence of Western aesthetics, rather than a mirror of the social reality of the time. The uncomfortable and non-relaxed manner of several Iranian sitters shown in the photographs (see, for example, fig 105, where Anis al-Dawleh, Naser od-Din Shah's [reigned 1848-1896] favourite, is depicted), seems to reinforce my hypothesis that the chair found its way into the Iranian studio earlier than into Iranian daily life (I will come back to this photograph later on in this section for further analysis). We can also see this in fig. 71, by Abdul-Ghassem Nuri. This photograph was already analyzed in-deph in the previous chapter, especially regarding the inscriptions that are present on the emulsive surface of the photograph. Here the sitter is a *mullah* and is depicted seated in a chair in a photograph that is entirely reminiscent of the aesthetics and composition of Victorian studio photographs, in a rigid pose that contrasts with the more relaxed pose that we have seen in other images such as figures 67 and 70. The next portrait (fig. 106), taken by Reza Akkasbashi, depicts a young man in the typical pose of the Qajar portraits of men holding a sword, sitting on a chair with a very self-conscious look, like it was the case in the late Qajar portrait paintings of his ancestors. Actually the jewelled dagger, the studded belt with pendant and the Qajar hanging belt are all regalia and clothing present in the Qajar painting portraits as well. These are elements clearly inherited from the Qajar portraiture tradition and many such photographic portraits can be found (compare this portrait with figures 96 and 53). Notice the self-conscious look on the face of the young man, with an eyebrow raised resulting in a quite arrogant and proud pose. The calligraphic inscription below the portrait reveals the identity of the sitter as Jomein-al-Dawleh. As we have already seen in the previous section, Fath 'Ali Shah was responsible for the aesthetics and regalia used in Qajar painting portraiture and Naser od-Din Shah played the same role but in the new medium of photography. He tried to show his power and that of his country through the photographs that were taken mostly by court photographers of him and his family. The photograph that we have just seen is a good example of this kind of court portraiture and we can see that it has a flavour of those kind of portraits painted in Fath 'Ali Shah's time. The sword and the conscious pose are two of the elements inherited from that painting tradition. A good example of this is a hand-coloured photograph of Naser od-Din Shah (fig. 107) taken and painted by the Italian photographer Luigi Montabone (d. 1877). He is wearing an astrakhan hat with aslanted top typical of the mid Qajar period, decorated with the royal aigrette ("jiqqeh") and the clothes and especially the jewellery have been made obvious with the help of the colours.

The term hybrid gesticulation or pose, as the scholar David Efron has pointed out, is used when the same individual may, if simultaneously exposed over a period of time to two or more gesturally different groups, adopt and combine certain gestural traits of both.[241] So, a person that has been living for a long time in a foreign country

[241] Efron 1972, p. 160.

and, therefore, has been exposed to different cultures, after some time will adopt some of the gestural and postural traits of her/his country of adoption and they will be present next to other poses and gestures typical of her/his own culture. The more different these two cultures would be, the more peculiar hybrid poses may appear. I would like to add that the fact that new furniture imported from the West is introduced into the lives, and into the photo studios, of people in so-called non-Western countries will lead to the appearance of new poses that will often be hybrid poses themselves. A very striking example is that of a person sitting on his heels or knees on a chair using the surface of the chair as if it were the floor. The pose is exactly the same, but the space where it appears has changed. Another peculiar example is that of climbing, squatting or kneeling on other pieces of studio furniture, like a balustrade or a column. In fig. 108, we can see a child who is sitting in a deep squat pose on a balustrade, in what seems to be a recreational reaction of the sitter to the absurd studio paraphernalia which seems to stress, even more, the absurdity of such imported studio furniture. Fig. 109 is also interesting, since most probably the photographer placed the flowerpot on the chair giving the chair a new use that was not originally intended by Europeans when they introduced the chair in the studio. Also in the work of European photographers active in Iran in nineteenth-century we can track these kinds of hybrid images, like the photograph taken by the Italian photographer Montabone where the child is sitting on a chair but in a kneeling pose (fig. 110).

When we compare the photographs where the Iranian sitter is kneeling with those where the sitter is sitting, we can appreciate that the person depicted seems more relaxed in the ones with the traditional pose, resulting in a more natural pose. It appears to me that in the kneeling pose the hands of the sitter are more natural than when he/she is sitting on a chair or standing up. When they are sitting, the pose is very rigid: the legs lay heavy one next to the other (no crossing legs) and the hands lie quite still on each leg. Nevertheless, we can also find other kinds of hand poses, a direct influence of the typical portrait of the French photographer Nadar (1820-1910): one hand is placed under the jacket of the sitter giving him, somehow, a respectable appearance. In many photographs taken by Naser od-Din Shah, this kind of pose is used. There is a parallel indigenous pose for the hands, also widely used in miniature painting and Qajar portraiture, in which one of them is placed under the belt.

In the following, I investigate if there are common elements used both in the Persian painting tradition and in nineteenth-century photography. I also study possible differences between the objects held by men and the objects held by women in photography as I have already done with painting in the previous section.

Flowers being held by men are a recurrent element to be found in nineteenth-century Iranian portrait photography. There are two kinds of portrait photographs that depict men holding flowers. The first are ordinary men holding flowers (see figs. 111 and 112), the second are mullahs or religious men (see fig. 113). Interestingly, in this kind of photographs the mullahs are always the ones who hold flowers in their hands, whereas the servants who are standing do not.

There is a third kind of image where men are depicted not holding the flowers but wearing them as part of their outfit! The men depicted were jesters. Naser od-Din Shah was fond of the company of jesters[242] and there are many photographs of jesters in the Golestan Palace Library Photo-Archive. Many of these images depict jesters

[242] For an interesting research about the role of jesters in Naser od-Din Shah's society, see: Martin 2006.

with funny, often ridiculous, ornamental elements that reveal their role as entertainers in Naser od-Din Shah's court. Abol-Ghasem Ghaffari was a well-known jester at that time, whose head and shoulders are wrapped in flowers (see fig. 114). It seems that to decorate jesters with flowers was a favourite game among the Shah and his courtiers. Another image on this theme is the one that depicts Aqa Mohammad Khajeh, eunuch of Naser od-Din Shah's court and better known as Faghir ol-Ghameh (see fig. 115). This image has more interesting elements in it. The first is the backdrop (it is the same, by the way, that was used in the previous photograph) that is clearly noticeable, the elegant chair that contrasts with the tile floor and the jester depicted on the photograph, who shows a contended pose and who wears quite a weird outfit. Namely, this just seems to be a topic that was of interest to Naser od-Din Shah but that has no further connection to painting.

Many photographs of groups are organized around a small water pond (e.g., figures 116 and 117). The use and function of those pools in photography may be related to their use and function in poetry and could then be explained by Schimmel's statement that there are very few verses in the poetry of the greatest masters of Urdu, Turkish and Persian poetry that do not reflect the religious background of Islamic culture; it is, as she puts it, like the pools in the courtyards of the mosques, in which the grandeur of the huge building is mirrored, its beauty enhanced by the strange effects of tiny waves of verdure springing forth from the shallow water.[243] This metaphoric element is probably well rooted in the Iranians' subconscious, with poetry and its images being so important to Iranians even today that its presence in photography as well could be easily understood.

Another interesting and recurrent element are pots of flowers in nineteenth-century photography, especially in Shiraz, in the studio paraphernalia, both outdoors and indoors. Shiraz, city of roses and nightingales, is an important city for poetry since some of the greatest Persian poets (such as Hafiz and Saadi) are buried there and their tombs have become shrines for Iranians. I find a stronger connection between miniature painting and photography in Shiraz, and therefore also between poetry and photography, than in other parts of Iran. The reason may be the special place of Shiraz in the Persian poetic tradition. We can see this clearly in many images, such as the one presented here (fig. 118). In this photograph we can see a group of men, both religious and secular, kneeling, sitting or standing surrounded by many pots of flowers that are present even within the window frame next to two of the men depicted. The Iranian photographer from Shiraz Mirza Habibollah Chehernegar (1896-1942), who was fond of using flowers and pots of flowers in his compositions, took this photograph. He was a son of Mirza Fathollah Chehernegar (1877-1932).[244] We already saw a photograph that depicts a child and a pot of flowers placed on the chair as part of the studio paraphernalia resulting in an interesting and different image (fig. 109).

A recurrent element to be found in many photographs is the water pipe, which was simply a logical presence, being such an important part of Iranian daily life at that time. Other elements to be found with no other purpose than giving information about the person depicted are *tasbih* or books such as the Koran or of beloved poets. Some give us information about the person depicted through the pose and gesture

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[243] Schimmel 1975, p. 288.

[244] An Iranian photographer born in Shiraz and one of the members of a family that had several generations of photographers. The first photographer of this family was Mirza Hassan Akkasbashi (1854-1916). For a very good selection of his photographs and of other members of his family and also biographical information, see: Sane 1990.

without needing objects, like fig. 119, where a young man is depicted in the pose of the Muslim prayer, with hands opening up to the sky. Notice the small prayer carpet on the bottom left and the two books (most probably one Koran at least) and the Shi'a Muslim prayer's stone.

Women in photography

The topic of women is an interesting one and deserves some close attention and analysis. There is an interesting example to analyze, a full page of one of Naser od-Din Shah's (reigned 1848-1896) albums hosted in Golestan Palace, fig. 120. In this page we can see five photographs, all of them taken by Nasser od-Din Shah himself, as well as some texts written under each image. The way that the photographs are arranged is quite interesting and gives us a lot of information about the structure and hierarchy of the imperial *andaroun* or harem, in this case, Naser od-Din Shah's harem and extensive family. In the centre of the page a photograph of himself is placed, sitting on a chair and under it the text reads "my face". Circling this photograph, we can see three photographs of some of his wives: the one on the left side of the page is Turani, photographed ten days after her wedding, as we can read in the text written under the image; the photograph on the right side of the page depicts two women sitting on a brench, Bimesal Khanum and Bigam Khanum as the text under them reveals. Under the frame of the page, we can also read that Naser od-Din Shah has written, "my face with 51 years"; and there is more text that is illegible, at least for me. The last photograph is the one placed in the upper part of the page in which the eunuch Agha Mohammad Khajeh is depicted. It has been pasted to the album in a very strange way, the man rotated 90º to the left. The reason for doing so is unclear to me at the moment; perhaps it is because it was the only way to fit this portrait in the page. Note that the poses of all women are rather unnatural, sitting on chairs with legs crossed at the ancles' height, a pose that reminds us of those used when they sit cross-legged on the floor. It is also interesting to observe the way the hands are placed: the one on the right shows the woman with a hand placed on her heart (this means, as stated by the American scholar Carol M. Sparhawk in her article *Contrastive-Identification Feature of Persian Gesture*[245]*,* "your servant". It is a widely used gesture among Iranians still today.) The other two photographs show the women with a pose that Nadar popularized, that of placing one hand crossed on the chest under the jacket or shirt. In just this single page, we can find an indigenous pose as well as a Western one. Note the dress of the women, quite shocking for an Iranian court at that time. As with court fashions in men's clothing, women's dress changed sometimes rather dramatically as the layers of long trousers shortened to a series of skirts, as noted by C.J. Wills, who worked in Persia from 1866 to 1881 as a doctor attached to the telegraph offices at Hamadan, Isfahan and Shiraz: "Their feet and legs were bare; their skirts were bouffes by a number of underskirts such as are usually worn by the ballet on our operatic stage; but instead of these undergarments being white and gauzy, they were of silk and of all colours.[246]

When taking into consideration the portrait photographs of women, we can immediately identify some elements borrowed from Qajar portraiture not only in the pose of the woman depicted but also in the objects that she is holding. Due to the traditional Islamic attitude towards portraits of women, there are not many

[245] Sparhawk 1981, p. 449.
[246] Wills 1891, p. 50. For more information about him: Scarce 1981.

photographs of women to be found. Interestingly enough, Naser od-Din Shah took photographs of all his wives, most of them in formal poses, but also we can find others in a more intimate poses. Since his photography was only meant to be seen by himself, it is of great interest, from both a historical and an aesthetic point of view. The existence of these photographs provides an interesting bridge between the perception and the reality of harems and that of Naser od-Din Shah in particular. But what is especially interesting and important to point out is that this reality, like those of the Orientalist painters and photographers, is maybe staged too. Nevertheless, the actors are real and the photographer is the master of the harem himself. The reality depicted is a staged reality for the purpose of that picture alone and for the pleasure of the photographer alone. Not many of these images have been printed, but one of them is especially interesting as far as the pose is concerned: that of Anis al-Dawleh, one of his favourites, in the reclining odalisque-like pose (fig. 105). This reclining pose, very much favored by Orientalist paintings, is used here by Naser od-Din Shah in the form of some kind of astonishing mirror representation in which this native photographer represents his own people in the way that the Westerners perceive them.[247] This phenomenon has been named "self-orientalizing" by the Iranian scholar 'Ali Behdad and as he defines 'it is the practice of seeing and representing oneself as Europe's Other'.[248] Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that the photographs of women analyzed here were taken exclusively by Naser od-Din Shah. In this sense, I disagree with Behdad's conclusion further in his paper regarding this topic. He states that 'there is an "indigenous" tradition of photography in Iran, but this tradition, as I will discuss later, is not organic. By this I mean, it is indebted to, and mimetic of, Orientalism's aesthetic values and ideological assumptions more than to its Iranian and Islamic tradition.[249] This maybe true when analyzing the work of Naser od-Din Shah and some Iranian court photographers, but it is certainly wrong when taking in consideration the work of local or bazaar photographers who were more exposed to their Iranian traditions such as Mohammad Nuri and Mirza Fathollah Chehernegar (1877-1932). I have already analyzed the work of these two and other Iranian photographers and there is, indeed, a clear influence on them from Persian miniature painting.

I have never seen printed images of fully naked Iranian women taken by Iranian photographers in books, but I have seen them while researching the photo-archives of the Golestan Palace Library in Tehran. Interestingly enough, I found three portraits of fully naked women, something quite unusual to find, since most of the prints of photographs have been given some make up due to censorship.[250] I have found in different books several printed photographs of women with transparent

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[247] The word *odalisque* appears in a French form and originates from the Turkish *odalik,* meaning "chambermaid". During the nineteenth century odalisques became common fantasy figures in Orientalist painting.

[248] Behdad 2001, p. 148.

[249] Behdad 2001, p. 145.

[250] Since the Islamic Revolution took place in Iran in 1979, in Fine Art and Art History Universities there is a especial training on making-up of art works for artists that will work for the government later on as censors. This information was given me to me by some Iranian artists who remember how some artists have mastered to transform some famous Western paintings of naked women in their full dressed version ones. That is the reason why there are so many books about impressionists and so few about figurative painting. I myself saw many prints of photographs in Golestan Palace Library that had been heavily over- painted with a black pen in order to hide the naked parts of women's bodies. An interesting work inspired by this is the one done by the Iranian photographer Shadi Ghadirian. See: Rose, Issa, ed., *Shadi Ghadirian. Iranian Photographer,* London, Saqi Books, 2008.

blouses that reveal clearly their breasts and bellies. Most of the images of women present a hybrid approach mostly represented by the chair in which she is sitting. In clear contrast to this, in all of the Qajar portrait paintings that I have studied, the women are either kneeling on the floor or standing. I have not found any chairs in those paintings. See, for instance, fig. 121, which is actually an album page where two photographs of women have been placed together. The two are actually wives of Naser od-Din Shah and that he photographed himself. I have seen many of these images of his wives that are placed in different albums hosted at the Golestan Palace Library. All women sit in the same richly carved rococo wooden chair and are photographed in exactly the same way, frontally and hieraticly. Often the feet are cut out, as in these two photographs, and there is not too much space above their heads. The woman sitting on the left is holding a sitar and reminds us of the typical Qajar painting portraits of women playing instruments (see fig. 101). In the photograph next to the previous one, the woman is depicted with a transparent blouse that clearly reveals her breasts and her belly (see the woman on the right side of fig. 121). This kind of chemise is the same style as the ones used in some Qajar painting portraits (see fig. 101), but the long thick trousers have been changed by the ballerina-skirt that became fashionable in Naser od-Din Shah's harem at a later stage. As stated by Najmabadi, a figure that appears repeatedly in Qajar art is the bare-breasted woman. Allthough nude females as well as females whose breasts are visible through sheer clothing do appear in Safavid and Zand art, the bare-breasted woman, or woman with breasts emphatically displayed through style of dress or association with fetishistic objects, seem to be a heavily accented theme in Qajar painting.[251] One interesting detail is that in all photographs of women that I have found, they all wear socks and shoes, whereas in the paintings the women are barefoot and the soles of their feet are painted with henna. Notice that the normally joined eyebrows that many of the women were fond of in this case presents a variant that shows two thick and long eyebrows with a black painted point between them. This might be a special fashion, but I have no factual information regarding this. Above both photographs there are two calligraphic inscriptions that reveal the identity of the women: Fatimeh Sultan Tarchi (Fatimeh The Tar Player) on the left and Zahra Sultan on the right. When the woman depicted passed away, there was always a calligraphic inscription on the left side of her image that informs the observer of this: *mord,* the Persian word for dead.

When women are holding objects, these are usually musical instruments. I have not found women holding books or religious objects. Interestingly enough, I have not found photographs of women holding flowers!

The Western photographer's representation of Iranian women was quite different than the Iranian one. It is interesting that the German photographer Ernest Hoeltzer (1855-1930) was concerned on offering an image of Iran based on real life, on observation from daily life; many of the photographs he staged in his studio involve images in which the people sit on the floor while eating, singing or playing instruments. A good example is the portrait of a group of women eating and playing music (fig. 122). (Notice that in this case the plane of the photographer has been lowered as well.) At the other end of the spectrum, we find the commercial (but talented) photographer from Tiflis, Antoin Sevruguin (late 1830's-1933), who stressed the exotic side of this culture (to be more precisely, exotic to Western eyes), with images like fig. 123, which is hosted at the Museum of Ethnology in Leiden. Next to the photograph there

[251] Najmabadi 1999, p. 77.

is a caption: Persian toilet. And even more shocking and "exotic": the sitter is a woman. Also taken by Sevruguin is the portrait of an Iranian woman (fig. 124), depicted naked with her hand resting on a chair. These kinds of images of Middle Eastern women were quite usual in the second half of nineteenth-century and were especially constructed by Western photographers. The women who posed for such images were normally prostitutes, as the Algerian writer Malek Alloula states in *The Colonial Harem*. As he states, 'the photographer used paid models that he recruited almost exclusively on the margins of the society in which loss of social position, in the make of the conquest and the subsequent overturning of traditional structures, affects men as well as women (invariably propelling the latter toward prostitution)'.[252] As stated by Graham-Brown, 'many of these images of women, which hardened into clichés, were drawn from a pre-existing repertoire of themes already established by a genre of Orientalist painting which had developed, particularly in France and Germany, from the first half of the nineteenth century'.[253]

Barthes rejects the idea that "it was the painters who invented photography (by bequeathing in their framing, the Albertian perspective, and the optic of the camera obscura)". He argues that 'it was the chemists who were responsible for its creation'.[254] Graham-Brown states further that, in subject matter and construction, albeit not in aesthetic intention, it might be argued that Orientalist painting had a considerable influence on nineteenth-century studio photography of the Middle East.[255] I will return to this and investigate this topic more deeply in chapter 5 concerned with Western influences on nineteenth century Iranian photography. A few examples from Iranian and Western photographers have shown us that it often happens that the analysis of images from the nineteenth century reveals more about the state of mind of the photographers in particular and society in general (biased perception of reality and the consequent biased representation of that reality, both by Western and Iranian photographers) than the objective reality of the social mesh or the photographs and the people represented on them.

To summarize, in this chapter I have investigated photographs and paintings through one of their cultural components: the pose of the sitter and, as a part of the pose, the objects held by him/her. The analysis of the pose of the sitter revealed once again a cultural conditioning in the process of taking and producing photographs. Both the photographer and the sitter constructed photographs conditioned by the image that they wanted to give of themselves and they achieve that through the use of particular objects.

There is a clear influence of the pose used in Persian painting tradition on the pose of nineteenth-century Iranian studio photography: the kneeling pose, the cushion on the sitter's back, the pose of the hands, the objects that the sitter is holding, etc. We can find the same evolutionary phenomenon of the pose in the photographer's studio as we found in the painters' studio: rising from the floor to the chair level. Of course, in the case of photography, the process happens in a shorter period of time than in the case of painting. The fact that the sitter leaves the floor to climb on a chair is clearly an influence of the Western photo-studio's mode. There are *hybrid* poses to be found due to the double exposure of the sitter and photographer to the traditional Persian

[252] Alloula 1986, p. 17.
[253] Graham-Brown 1988, p. 40.
[254] Barthes 2000, p. 80.
[255] Graham-Brown 1988, p. 40.

culture and the (new) Western influence. Such *hybrid* poses are found widely among Iranian photographers, but also in some Western photographers who had been in Iran long enough to get exposed to the influence of the Iranian culture, like Ernst Hoeltzer who lived in Isfahan for over 30 years and married an Armenian woman. The photographs of women were mostly taken by Naser-od Din Shah and present them in a respectful mode, all sitting on highly decorated and elaborated chairs. Therefore, the influence of the Western sitting pose is especially interesting in the case of photographs of women and contrasts with the lack of chairs in Qajar painting portraiture of women. Indeed, the pose not only was use to stress social status, but also to express fantasy and ideals as well. The portrait of the women in painting as idealized form is a clear indication of this claim. Portraits of men are in a more stern and serious pose than those of the women, who are posed in more inclined, and fanciful, or even in dancing or acrobatic poses. This hints at a bitter truth that men were real while women mostly were anonymous or even none-existing.

As far as the objects are concerned, the traditionally depicted objects on Persian miniature painting and Qajar portraiture (*tasb*i, flowers, water-pipe, swords, cushion, etc) are also to be found in nineteenth-century Iranian photography. The women would normally hold musical instruments and the men religiuos objects, swords, flowers or water-pipes.