3 POSE, GESTURE AND OBJECTS HELD BY THE SITTER

For Pilar Lombardo

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 (Barthes 1981: 10)

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 the chair, for example). Beyond the cultural habit of the time – sitting on 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 will 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). (Poyatos 1981: 375)

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). (Poyatos 1981: 375)

The topic of gesture and posture has been thoroughly researched. 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 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. (Stemmler 1993: 151)

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) or by the French physician and neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot (1825-1893). Also, as remarked by the English historian Sir Keith Thomas, “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” (Thomas 1991: 2). Like Diamond, Duchenne 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 Thomas, “there are many languages of gesture and many dialects” (Thomas 1991: 3). 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” (Mauss 1979). Further, the anthropologist Gordon W. Hewes argues 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” (Hewes 1955: 231). The ways in which we sit, kneel or stand are determined not only by the human anatomy but foremost by culture. As pointed out by Hewes, “the peoples of the world differ in posture styles just as they do in styles of clothing, housing, cooking and music” (Hewes 1957: 123). He explains that,

postures and related motor-habits are intimately linked to many aspects of daily life: they affect the design of our clothing, footwear, 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. (Hewes 1957: 123)

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 general context.

In its general sense, posing can be considered 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” (Ertem 2006: 10). 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. (Barthes 1981: 78)

Posing is thus a moment of immobility where the sitter turns him/herself into a frozen image. It can also be considered as a moment where the sitter tends to imitate a certain image s/he has in his/her mind in order to project it onto her/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 the pose does not only arrest the body,
“hyperbolising the devitalising effects of all photographic represen-
tation” but also resembles “three-dimensional photography”.
(Silverman 1996: 202)

Much like Silverman, the American post-modernist critic Craig Owens
says:

What do I do when I pose for a photograph? I freeze... as if antici-
pating the still I am about to become; mimicking its opacity, its still-
ness; inscribing, across the surface of my body, photography’s mor-
tification of the flesh. (Owens 1992: 210)

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 behavior of certain species of
insects, which seem to adopt the shape and natural color of their en-
vironment for protective reasons, mimicry is more an attempt to be-
come part of a particular picture rather than an attempt to imitate a
pre-existing image. (Silverman 1996: 201)

“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* (Flusser 2000: 50). For
me the study of gesture and pose through photography is of more than
purely antiquarian interest, since I believe that gesture formed an indispen-
sable 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 so-
ciety, therefore, the study of the pose and gesture of the sitters in portrait
photography gives us important clues to understand the mentality of that
time. In the words of Thomas, “to interpret an account for a gesture is to
unlock the whole social and cultural system of which it is a part” (Thomas

The anthropologist Weston Labarre argues that,

many of these motor habits in one culture are open to grave misun-
derstanding in another. So much of the expression of emotion in
our culture is open to serious misinterpretation in another. There is
no “natural” language of emotional gesture. (Labarre 1947-8: 55)

Nevertheless, he also says, “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” (Labarre 1947-48: 57). 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. 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.

In this chapter, I will explore whether this cultural dependence of pose or gesture is visible in nineteenth-century Iranian portrait photography. I will analyze 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 a 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” (Hewes 1955: 234). 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 take on. As the photography historian William C. Darrah concludes when considering cartes de visite from the 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. 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 1860s and again in the 1870s. (Darrah 1981: 26)

The seated pose was favored 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 another possible 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 also
to be found at a later stage. I will try to 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 re-
fect after that about its role in the studio.

All around the world, the chair and sitting on a chair has become a sym-
bol of Westernization. Even if the chair was discovered in Asia as we shall
see further below, it was in Europe that it took the main role, as far as fur-
niture is concerned, in the life of common people. Conversely, as stated by
Cranz,

when Gandhi wanted to make a point about the importance of re-
taining 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 “barbar-
ian (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 honor retained the use of the
term “mat” rather than “chair”. (Cranz 2000: 29)

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. As remarked by Cranz,

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 differ-
ent. Physically, almost anyone can sit down, whereas only a very
privileged few can be carried. 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. (Cranz 2000: 31)

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. As stated by Hewes, “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” (Hewes 1957: 127). No less 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, or just while observing life passing by; 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, that 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. In the words of Hewes, “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” (Hewes 1957: 125). Here it is useful to show a part of the postural typology used in the compilation of data for Hewes’ article (fig. 85). As Hewes explains, these drawings are for the most part based on photographs in the ethnographic literature.

However, 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 sitters 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 the 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 a 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 (Hewes’ posture 103). Sultan-Husayn Mirzā Bayqara, a wonderful miniature from Herat, ca. 1500 (fig. 53, see full color section) introduced already in the previous chapter, presents the sitter sitting on his heels, one hand holding a handkerchief. 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. 54, see full color section). Rezā Abbāsi painting a picture of a European man by Mo’ín (pupil of Rezā Abbāsi (ca.1565-1635)), shows Riza as an old man, wearing spectacles and a turban. 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 (fig. 56, see full color section).

There are also many examples of this kind of pose to be found in Qajar portraiture painting. Fath ‘Ali Shah (d. 1834), the second of Qajar Rulers, is depicted on the next portrait seated on his heels (fig. 86, see full color section). As explained by the Islamic art historian Eleonor Sims, he is the most recognizable personage of any Iranian monarch up to the era of photography:
his fine slender figure, his pale complexion and blazing black eyes under wide black brows, and especially 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 (Sims 2002: 275).

This painting is dated 1797 and is signed by Mirzā Bābā, Fath Ali Shah’s chief painter from the very beginning of his reign. As remarked by Sims,

for the first of the large single-figure oil paintings, Mirzā Baba appears to have isolated the Shah from 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”. (Sims 2002: 275).

Mirzā Bābā repeated this kneeling image of the Shah several times, as did other painters, although later portraits made use of the standing pose or seated the Shah in a European armchair-throne, as we will see shortly. In the next portrait, also of Fath ‘Ali Shah and already introduced in the previous chapter, we again find the traditional Persian pose, kneeling on a carpet with a cushion behind him, holding a mace (fig. 64). This portrait is the latest in a series of dated paintings depicting Fath Ali Shah seated on a carpet. The painting is signed by Mehr Ali and is dated 1813-14.

The sitting and the standing poses are also to be found among Qajar portraits. Fath Ali Shah Seated on a Chair Throne (fig. 87, see full color section), is attributed to Mehr Ali5, circa 1800-1806. 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” (Diba 1999: 181). Diba goes on further to state that,

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 splendor, to which the sun-shaped roundel surmounting the throne back alludes. (Diba 1998: 183)

In addition to the throne, the crown, the sword and the royal armbands symbolize his royal nature. 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. See also figure 52 printed in the previous chapter for an example of this kind of sitting pose. Diba’s book is the best source to see fine examples of sitters depicted in the standing pose.

In the following section, I will analyze the objects held by the sitters in Persian miniature painting and Qajar portrait painting. I want to explore if there is a difference in the objects held by women and men. 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 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 portraits of men holding roses in various periods. A typical example among the many to be found is Youth with Flower (fig. 88) from the seventeenth century, a precisely drawn representation of a courtier or a dandy, which may have been a sketch for a larger painting. Iran often has been 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.

Another interesting element is water, normally presented by way of a pond. See, for example, fig. 89, 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. This kind of miniatures with a pond placed in the bottom center of the image is very common and this kind of composition later on would also be used in photography, as we shall see below. Remarkably, and especially in photography, water has a close relationship to reflection and mirrors. 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 analyzed in-depth by Johann Christoph Bürgel and Priscilla Soucek. Rumi is one of the Persian poets who has used the motif of the mirror more in his poetry. Annemarie Schimmel and Eva de Vitray-Meyerovitch have investigated the role of the mirror in the imagery of this poet.

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 now consider 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 flavor to them during Fath ‘Ali Shah’s
reign. As we can see in figures 62, 63, 64, 86, and 87 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, Aqa Mohammad Khān 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. (Eskandari-Qajar 2003: 84)

In addition to the above, a mace (gorz), a jeweled dagger, a studded belt with pendant and the Qajar hanging belt form the characteristic elements of Fath ‘Ali Shah’s regalia, as we have seen in the group of painted portraits presented. The sword and the mace remind us of the ruler’s justice and the regalia and decoration reinforce an image of wealth. Some of these objects also became part of the regalia shown in photographic portraits in a later stage, as in the case of the sword. In this sense, Qajar painting came to influence the photographic portrait as far as the use of it was concerned, next to the possible aesthetical influence that I am studying in this book. Diba states that,

there is considerable evidence that images, in myriad forms, sizes, and media, played an integral role in the nineteenth-century exercise of power, both at home and abroad. In addition, numerous intriguing references document the widespread use of figurative imagery in popular and court milieus throughout Qajar society for both religious and secular purposes. (Diba 1998: 31)

As remarked by Diba, the Islamic art historian B.W. Robinson’s statement, “Persia in the nineteenth century was a land of paintings, as never before or since” (Robinson 1964: 96) may be taken literally. She argues further that,

Images in the form of mural paintings were embedded in the fabric of structures located throughout the country. They included portraits; historical, literary and mythological themes; genre, hunting, and battle scenes; and religious subjects. In fact, the entire Persian domain functioned as a lavish stage for images designed to convey the pageantry and splendour of Qajar rule. (Diba 1998: 31-32)
In the same line of thought as Diba, Falk argues that,

the character of Qajar paintings is largely embodied in the subjects that were chosen. These must have always depended upon the choice made by the patron and, understandably, one of the first interests of a patron is himself, a fact amply illustrated by the greatest patron of Qajar painting, Fath’Ali Shah (1798-1834) (Falk 1972: 10).

One may wonder whether this construction of a royal Persian image in painting would have found its way also in other visual media such as photography. Ekhtiar reflects precisely on this interesting topic arguing that,

Members of the Qajar ruling elite soon realized that lithograph portraits and photographs of royal personages and the nobility were capable of serving the same purpose that life-size paintings had fulfilled earlier and began to regard lithographic portraits as a more efficient and economical vehicle for disseminating the royal image. (Ekhtiar 1998: 62)

Women 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. It is relevant for my study to analyze the pose of the women depicted in these paintings to see if there is any relationship between 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 behavior 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” (Falk 1972: 10). We can find images of women playing different instruments, dancing with castanets, and sometimes just resting or drinking. But without a doubt, the most impressive group of pictures is that which depicts female acrobats and tumblers who played a prominent role in the entertainment provided at court. These images provide the most striking images from the Persian painter’s repertoire of females. Girls balancing on their hands and even on knives are especially interesting since those contortions of the human body have no precursors in earlier painting. A girl playing a sitar (fig. 90) by the painter Mohammad Sādiq and dated 1769-70 depicts a woman playing a sitar. As stated by Diba,
the arched eyebrows, aquiline nose, narrow kohl-rimmed eyes, elongated body proportions, and stiff treatment of the wide trousers were typical elements used in this idealized representations of women. Those were, actually, the Zand painting canons. (Diba 1998: 157)

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 huge patterned trousers made of thick carpet-like material, and a much lighter transparent chemise that was often open at the front. 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 a highly respectable profession, although its practitioners were not necessarily considered outcasts. (Diba 1998: 207)

These women performers in painting were also a favourite topic in other Middle Eastern countries and in North Africa. Sarah Graham-Brown explains that,

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. (Graham-Brown 1988: 174)

Ehktiar informs us that “the half-filled crystal decanter and porcelain tableware filled with piping-hot delicacies typically appear in representations of women during this period” (Ehktiar 1998: 207). As she explains further, 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 favored metaphor for earthly and divine love. In A woman balancing on a knife (fig. 73, see full color section) the acrobat’s body is flattened against the picture plane, achieving impossible acrobatic poses in search of a harmonic balance. The watermelon in the right bottom corner of the painting gives 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: Khātun, 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 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. Diba argues,

although Qajar representations of women were rarely signed or dated (in clear contrast to 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. (Diba 1998: 211)

Such paintings of women were displayed in the public as well as private quarters of palaces and residences. Diba states further that,

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 and mistook them for actual portraits. (Diba 1998: 211)

These female acrobats are not found in photography but the women musicians, especially playing the sitar are more common, as we will see in the next section. The women depicted in Qajar paintings hold musical instruments or, in some cases, little knives when performing some acrobatics, or a glass of wine or bottle, as we can see in figures 73, see full color section, and 90. 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 plane of the painting rises from a low one to an upper one 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 can 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. 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 who were the court’s entertainers. Around the same time, the standing pose can also 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. (Najmabadi 1998: 76)

The analysis of 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 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, as we shall see with examples in the next section.

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

In this section I explore which poses are used and which objects are held by the sitters present in traditional Persian paintings that may have been inherited by nineteenth-century Iranian studio portrait photography. Subsequently, I will discuss 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 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 (Hewes’ posture 103), the typical Persian pose, with the hands almost in the same position, one of them holding an object: in fig. 75 the mullah (religious priest or leader) holding a tasbih (a set of coral prayer beads), as in traditional Persian painting (see figure 53, see full color section). The other hand rests on his lap. In fig. 55, the man is holding a water pipe with the right hand and his left 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 as to 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. 91 and 92). The first one depicts three men with one serpent and the calligraphic inscription at the center reveals them as a luti bāshi\textsuperscript{10} and two mārgirs (trainers of serpents). Next to this information the date appears on which the photograph was taken. The inscription on the right reveals the place where the photograph was taken (Akkāshkhāne-ye Mobārake-ye Madrase-ye Majsus Nezām) and the inscription on the left reveals the name of the photographer (Dār al-Khalēfe-ye Nāserī Khān Ezzat Mohammad Hasan-e Qajar) as Mohammad Hassan Qajar. In the second image, a group of four musicians is depicted in front of the well-known Rezā Akkāshbāshi’s backdrop with the Victorian house printed on it. Actually, all photographs by Rezā Akkāshbāshi are immediately recognizable by this backdrop and since the sitters are always Iranians, an odd and intriguing decontextualization 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 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 than when taking photographs of people standing up, such as in the next photograph (fig. 93), in which the Iranian photographer Ya’qub Akkāshbāshi from Tabriz is depicted, and we can notice that the level of his camera is much lower than the common one. Going back to the kneeling pose, sitting on the heels with the knees resting on the floor is also to be found in nineteenth-century photography in other countries in Asia, like in Japan (see figures 80 and 83 from the previous chapter) and India.

The four photographs that I have just discussed are only a few examples of the many of this kind 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 94, where Anis al-Dowle, Nāser al-Din Shah’s favorite, 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. 76, by Abd al-Qāsem ebn al-Nuri. This photograph was already analyzed in-depth 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 55 and 75. The next portrait (fig. 95), taken by Rezā Akkāsbāshī, 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, as was the case in the late Qajar portrait paintings of his ancestors. Actually the jeweled 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 figure 87). Notice the self-conscious look on the face of the young man, the raised eyebrow resulting in a quite proud pose. The calligraphic inscription below the portrait reveals the identity of the sitter as Jamin al-Dawle. 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 Nāser al-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 flavor 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. Another good example is a hand-colored photograph of Nāser al-Din Shah (fig. 96, see full color section) taken and painted by the Italian photographer Luigi Montabone (d. 1877). He is wearing an astrakhan hat with a slanted top typical of the mid-Qajar period, decorated with the royal aigrette (jeqqe) and the clothes and especially the jewelry have been made obvious with the help of the colors. This image is a good example to illustrate the fact that the propagation of the Persian Royal Image was canalized not only by Iranian photographers working at court, but also by non-Iranian photographers related to the court.
So these portraits display both elements from the Western portraiture tradition in photography (i.e. the Victorian model) and elements inherited from Qajar painting, resulting in what we can name a *hybrid pose*. 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. (Efron 1972: 160)

So, a person that has been living for a long time in a foreign country 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. 97, 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. 98 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 the 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. 99).

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 s/he 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 of 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 Nāser al-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. 100 and 101), the second are mullahs or religious men (see fig. 102). In this kind of photographs the mullahs are normally 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! These men were jesters. Nāser al-Din Shah was fond of the company of jesters and there are many photographs of them in the Golestān Palace Library Photo-Archive. Many of these images depict jesters with funny, often ridiculous, ornamental elements that reveal their role as entertainers in Nāser al-Din Shah’s court. Abd al-Qāsem Ghaffāri was a well-known jester at that time, whose head and shoulders are wrapped in flowers (see fig. 103). It seems that to decorate jesters with flowers was a favorite game among the Shah and his courtiers. Another image on this theme is the one that depicts Āghā Mohammad Khāje, eunuch of Nāser al-Din Shah’s court and better known as Faqir al-Ghameh (see fig. 104). 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 contented pose and who wears quite a weird outfit. This seems to be a topic that was of interest only to Nāser al-Din Shah but that has no further connection to painting.

Many photographs of groups are organized around a small pond (e.g., figures 105 and 106). 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, 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. (Schimmel 1975: 288)

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 in many images, such as the one presented here (fig. 107). 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 Mirzâ Habibollah Chehrehnegâr (1896-1942), who was fond of using flowers and pots of flowers in his compositions, took this photograph. He was a son of Mirzâ Fatollah Chehrehnegâr (1877-1932).12 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. 98). We will see further examples of this in chapter 5.

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 to give 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 without needing objects, like fig. 108, 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 Nāṣer al-Din Shāh’s albums hosted in Golestān Palace Library, fig. 109. On this page we can see five photographs, all of them taken by Nāṣer al-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
information about the structure and hierarchy of the imperial andarun or harem, in this case, Nāser al-Din Shah’s harem and extensive family. In the center 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 bench, Bimesāl Khānum and Bigam Khānum as the text under them reveals. Under the frame of the page, we can also read that Nāser al-Din Shah has written, “my face at 51”; 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 Khājeh is depicted. It has been pasted into 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 on the page. Note that the poses of all the women are rather unnatural, sitting on chairs with legs crossed at the ankles, 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, according to the American scholar Carol M. Sparhawk in her article Contrastive-Identification Feature of Persian Gesture, “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 on the chest under the jacket or shirt. On this single page, we can find an indigenous pose as well as a Western one. Note the dress of the women. 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 bouffées by a number of under-skirts 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 colors (Wills 1891: 50).

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. There are not many photographs of women to be found, when compared to the legacy of male portraiture photography that has reached our hands. Nāser al-Din Shah took photographs of most of his wives, most of them in formal poses, but also we can find others in 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 Nāser al-Din Shah in particular. But what is especially revealing 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 himself the master of the harem. 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 appealing as far as the pose is concerned: that of Anis al-Dowle, one of his favorites, in the reclining odalisque-like pose (fig. 94). This reclining pose, very much favored by Orientalist painters, is used here by Nāser al-Din Shah in the form of some kind of astonishing mirror representation in which this native photographer seems to represent his own people in the way that the Westerners perceive them. This phenomenon has been named “self-orientalizing” by the Iranian scholar ‘Ali Behdad, who says “it is the practice of seeing and representing oneself as Europe’s Other” (Behdad 2001: 148). Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that the photographs of women analyzed here were taken exclusively by Nāser al-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 traditions. (Behdad 2001: 145)

This may be so when analyzing the work of Nāser al-Din Shah (and only in a couple of ambiguous photographs), but it is not so clear when taking into consideration the work of other court photographers or bazaar photographers who were more exposed to their Iranian visual traditions. I have never seen printed images of fully naked Iranian women taken by Iranian photographers in books, but I have found in different books several printed photographs of women with transparent blouses that clearly reveal their breasts and bellies. Most of these images of women present a hybrid approach, usually 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. 110, which is actually an album page where two photographs of women have been placed together. The two women are wives of Nāser al-Din Shah whom he photographed himself. I have seen many of these images of his wives that are placed in
different albums kept at the Golestān Palace Library. All the women sit in the same richly carved rococo wooden chair and are photographed in exactly the same way, frontally and hieratically. 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. 90). 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. 110). This kind of chemise is the same style as the ones used in some Qajar painting portraits (see fig. 90), but the long thick trousers have been changed by the tutu that became fashionable in Nāser al-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. Although 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. (Najmabadi 1998: 77)

One interesting detail is that in all the photographs of women that I have found, they always 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: Fateme Sultān Tārchi (Fatimeh The Tar Player) on the left and Zahrā Sultān on the right. When the woman depicted passed away, there was always a calligraphic inscription on the left side of her image that recorded this fact: 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 (which does not mean that they do not exist! I have just not found them to date). I have not found photographs of women holding flowers either!

The Western photographer’s representation of Iranian women was quite different from the Iranian one. It is interesting that the German photographer Ernst Hoeltzer (1855-1939) was concerned about 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 (fig. 111). (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 (and very talented) photographer from Tiflis, Antoin Sevruguin (late 1830s-1933), who stressed the exotic side of this culture (but who also produced a remarkable corpus of photographs with an ethnographical approach), with images like fig. 112, which is kept at the Museum of Ethnology in Leiden. Next to the photograph there is a caption: Persian toilet. Also taken by Sevruguin is the portrait of an Iranian woman (fig. 113), 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 the 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. Referring to photography in North Africa he explains that

the photographer used paid models that he recruited almost exclusively on the margins of the society in which loss of social position, in the wake of the conquest and the subsequent overturning of traditional structures, affects men as well as women (invariably propelling the latter toward prostitution). (Alloula 1986: 17)

Graham-Brown maintains that,

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. (Graham-Brown 1988: 40)

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. (Graham-Brown 1988: 40)

I will return to this and investigate this topic more in-depth 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 s/he holds. 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 the Persian painting tradition on the pose of nineteenth-century Iranian studio photography: the kneeling pose, the cushion behind 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 seems to be 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 culture and the (new) Western influence. Such hybrid poses are found widely among Iranian photographers. The photographs of women were mostly taken by Nāser al-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 used to stress social status, but also to express fantasy and ideals as well. The portrait of the women in painting in an 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 (tasbih, 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 religious objects, swords, flowers or water pipes.

Notes

1 Duchenne was a physician at the Paris hospital La Salpetrière and treated people suffering 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 currents.
2. 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.


4. See: Kendon 2004. Adam Kendon is a leading authority on the subject and is the editor of the journal Gesture, an important referent to everybody interested in human communication.

5. As remarked by Diba, this attribution was first proposed by Robinson 1967: 336.

6. This page is an illustration of a chapter of Ferdowsi's *Shāh-nāme*. For an interesting analysis, see Sims 2002: 319.


10. Luti Bashi is a group of men that belong to a Zurkhāne, literally, the house of force. Members of the Zurkhāne 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.

11. For an interesting research about the role of jesters in Nāser al-Din Shah’s society, see: Martin 2006.

12. An Iranian photographer born in Shiraz and member of a family of several generations of photographers. The first photographer of this family was Mirzā Hassan Akkābashi (1854-1916). For a very good selection of his photographs and other family members and also biographical information, see: Sane 1990.


14. 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.