

Verisimilitude: From Photography to Painting & Lithography during Qajar Era

Abstract:

Qajar era is the time of conflict between tradition and modernity. Iran's relations with other countries and the arrival of inventions such as photography contributed much to the progress in the field of arts and culture of this country. Through portraying the real, existing facts, photography is the most important representative of the country's modernity during this epoch of time. Photography in Iran was much welcomed and supported by the court artists and particularly the King himself to the extent that it made possible the review of many photographs taken by Naser ad-Din Shah Qajar and his fellow photographers.

Many photographers worked in different fields with one of their favorite subjects being making photographs of prominent political figures. Taking note of human beings and illustrating figures became popular during the Qajar period and at this point, many painters and designers utilized the benefits that photography provided. Photo turned into an efficient means of portraying the realities of the face and body and created a new style of art. The stable nature of photos provided the time required for the exact simulation of the subject individual and gave the artist free hand to more precisely illustrate and attend to details. Losing its ages-old identity, the traditional Persian art emerged in a more modern way in some works of painting and lithography in this specific era. It was in the artworks of this period that shading and perspective as well as depiction of human subjects and real scenes in paintings and prints drew near to those of the Western styles. The invention of photography significantly influenced the art of

painting and printing of books and newspapers and, of course, established a new style of art such as decoration in photography. Perhaps such result would have not been achieved without the intervention of photography and the accurate and detailed replication of the appearance of the subjects would have been impossible.

The fact that the reproduction of human dispositions and simulation of characters in paintings and works of lithography became so accurate indicates the ability of the illustrators to use photographs as a tool in creating their works. Studying the surviving documents and images of the Qajar era draws the attention towards the popularity of photography because so many works along with their photos have remained to date.

Even in some cases, a single picture was used to create several works of art (painting or lithography). In some other cases, the teachers painted the faces and the students were given the task to do the rest of the job. In paintings and lithographs (of faces and figures), the court men and the king were depicted more than ordinary people which well points out that art was at the disposal of the royalty.

The artist of the time was not that free to choose his subjects, but was allowed to follow his own imagination to design parts of the pictures such as the details of the outfits, background and even coloring. Qajar Art is the art of the royalty

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wherein to satisfy the taste of the court men, the lithographers and painters created artworks to portray the royal splendor.

With the greatest meticulousness and delicacy, the artists attended to all the details of the picture and recreated them in the best and most natural way in their artworks. Such precision could be observed in figure paintings or in 'Sharaf' and 'Sherafat' newspapers.

Therefore, having made its way through to Iranian art, photography left a profound impact on illustrating the pictures of the nobility and later on the ordinary men. The results of the studies conducted indicated that photo, in addition to affecting the simulation of portraits, was the founder of verisimilitude in the works of later artists.

Keywords: Painting, Lithography, Photography, Qajar Art, Verisimilitude

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Image sources:

- Images from the private collection of Mr. Kazerouni (Picture 3 and 4 from Sherafat newspaper), photo by the author.