

Iranian Documentary Photography in the Nineteenth Century

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Abstract-Photography in Iran started only three years after the invention of photography in the world in 1842 and it was paid a lot of attention to by Naseredinshah, the young king of Iran at that time, during the reign of Shah from 1848 to 1895. Knowing documentation value of photos, he hired photographers to the court whose mission was taking the photos appealing to the king. The result of their efforts is thousands of photographs documenting the lives of Iranians in the nineteenth century. Many of those photos are still available and are the best document of Iranian life in the past. The photos with description provide the viewer with more detailed information on the subject. Photography development in Iran compared to other parts of the world signifying the place of this art in this country. In the present research, aspects of documentary photography in the nineteenth century in Iran will be discussed.

Keywords- *Photography, Documentary Photography, Naseredin Shah, The Nineteenth Century*

I. INTRODUCTION

According to Shahriar Adl, the first photos were taken of the king and his court men in 1844, in the middle of Mohammad Shah's reign, by Jule Richard.

During the reign of NaseredinShah, photography as an emerging phenomenon of the nineteenth century developed. The Shah's interest in photography undoubtedly influenced the spread of this technology in Iran, along with the European countries. His passion for recording important events and events of the territory under his rule through photography is clear in his memories. By hiring photographers to take photos of places and events and important people, he made a large collection of photographs documenting Iran in the nineteenth century. In addition, Iran was very interesting for foreign tourists, businessmen, and scientific or political teams. These people some of whom had photography equipment with them photographed places and people. The most important collection of these photos is the album kept in Golastan Palace with over 40000 photos. This collection is of utmost importance for researchers in the fields of history, anthropology, architecture, and photography. This research describes the photos, their application, and active photographers of that time. Most studies on the history of photography in Iran just introduce the photos and photographers. Using library sources and the literature in the field, the writer of the present study has tried to categorize

the photos and introduce active social documentary photographers.

II. DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY

Documentary photography is a form, genre, style, or an activity. It is hard to provide a single definition for the word. Some 19th century photographers called their works "documents" while some others were not aware of the fact that they were documentary photographers. Although historians and critics have pointed to the difficulty of defining the same technique for documentary photography, it can be in a way connected to social issues. Martha Razler says that to understand this kind of photography, one should refer to history. Moreover, in spite of technologies, the evolving business, and practices, documentary photography has always claimed to have a special relationship with reality. In terms of the concepts of truth and authenticity, it has an unmatched position (Wels, critical revenue photography, 2011).

III. NINETEENTH-CENTURY DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY IN IRAN

When the NaseedinShah became the king of Iran, he tried very hard to expand this industry. During his reign, Academy School, which is a European-style Polytechnic, was established in Tehran in 1850. After 1860, photography became part of the curriculum in this school. The first teachers were from Austria, France, and Italy. Soon, some princes became professional in photography and royal photo studio was established in Golastan Palace and books were written about photography (Damandan, thousands of manifestations of life, 2003). Mohammad Hassan Khan Etemadolsaltaneh describes the introduction of photography as follows:

It is one of the new industries developed in the time of the king.....near the end of Mohammadshah Ghazi's period, Monsieur Richard, a teacher of Darolfonoon, took photos with a lot of hard work on the silver screen. Monsieur Phuket is the first person who used Collodion. Monsieur Carlian who had come from Paris to Tehran to develop photography in Iran photographed Collodion (Afshar, 1992: 17). The king himself took photos. In addition, he appointed photographers to photograph various commands including photography of VIPs and officials, important historical places, and important events.

That is how Royal photographer called Akasbashi found a place in royal court. He was appointed to photograph the Shah and his men in their trips and sometimes was asked to go on missions and record information and events (Kasiri).

IV. INVESTIGATING THE DEVELOPMENT AND SPREAD OF ARCHITECTURAL PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE (2016, QAJAR PERIOD)

Shah's interest in recording reality through the use of photography led to the application of photography in many areas. This could be seen in the mission in 1849 given to Jules Richard to photograph petroglyphs and monuments of Persepolis. Jules Richard did not agree to do this maybe because of his high expectations and therefore he lost the honor of recording the first visual report in his time (Tahmasebpour, Naseredinshah, the photographer, 2002).

Since the invention of photography, the most important feature of photo has been its ability to show the details and truth. Being aware of this, Shah benefitted from photography in recording events and important subjects. That is why he hired some photographers in his court and delegated them to do photography in different parts of the country. In an album number 240 kept in Golastan palace, the description of the order is written: "Ask him to take photos of Kalat and the areas around it. in addition, ask him to photograph anything interesting. Give him full support and protection".

Another long-sighted decisions of the Shah was visually documenting war scenes. Only five years after Roger Fenton's photos in the Crimean War, in 1860, Shah delegated the French photographer Henri Blokoil to the front of the battle with the Turkmen. Due to the failure of Iran in the war with Turkmen, the mission was unsuccessful and the photographer was imprisoned (Zoka, the history of photography and pioneer photographers in Iran, 1997). Although the project was unsuccessful and there are no photos today related to the war between Iranians and Turkmen, it clearly shows the position and value photography had for Shah. Social photography in that time can be categorized into 4 main groups as follows:

1. Taking photos of Shah's trips
2. Taking photos of prisoners
3. Taking photos of ordinary people and professions
4. Taking photos of important events

V. TAKING PHOTOS OF SHAH'S TRIPS

These are the first Iranian documentary photographs. Shah tried to document events and places through writing travel books and doing photography. Agha Reza Akasbashi was the first Iranian photographer accompanying Shah in his trips. His photos are usually described briefly. He is the pioneer of many subjects which are historically important in the history of photography in Iran. Gaining experience in issues such as portrait photography, nature, architecture, stereography, video reports, new ways of photo development and print are some of the fields experienced and done by him at the beginning of the

history of photography in Iran. He is also the first Iranian photographer who has photographed in European countries (Tarighi, Aghareza Akasbashi, 2006). He is in fact the first professional photographer who photographed everything that Shah ordered. In Shah's travel books, his presence has been mentioned. For example in his travel book about his trip to Karballa, Shah refers to the photos taken by Akasbashi (Naseredinshah, Naseredinshah's travel book, 1983). In the same travel book he says:

Then, I visited Taghe Kasra. In the morning, I asked Aminolsoltan to delegate someone to go over the roof and measure the height, width, and the arch. Akasbashi photographed the building (ibid, 184). Shah was also interested in seeing documentary photos of other countries. This can be seen in his memories: Akasbashi had got a big album containing the photos of Alexandria, Egypt, and Syria. I saw them (ibid, 187). One of the oldest albums in Golastan palace is related to Shah's trip to Soltanieh and Azerbaijan in 1869. We can see from the photos that photography has been done by French Karlhyan and Agha Reza. (Tahmasbpour, Naseredinshah, the photographer, 2002).

The photos taken during Shah and rulers' trips and the descriptions of them are valuable documents of life over a century ago. There is an album belonging to Zelosoltan, the ruler of Esfahan and the oldest son of Shah, which is kept in Majles library. This album dates back to 1895. The photos are taken of various buildings, people, and villages around Esfahan. The descriptions under the photos are written by Zelosoltan, which give important information about Iranian life and historical monuments (image number1).

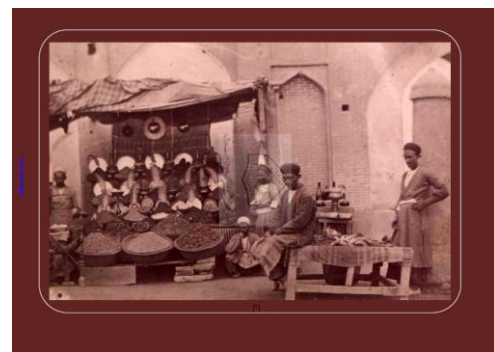


Figure 1. Ostad Karim's shop. He is very curious. There are all kinds of stuff in his shop including perfume and cigarette. He is a funny man. The photo is from Zelosoltan album-1890

VI. TAKING PHOTO OF ORDINARY PEOPLE

At the beginning, photography was just limited to court. With the passage of time, though, ordinary people were photographed too. Most photographers are not known. Abdullah Mirza was another famous photographer of that time who benefitted from the presence of people in his photos. Some of the photos taken by him are related to people in their work places doing their jobs. These photos give us visual information about the tools and machinery used at that time.

Photography of professions is mostly related to small workshops, laborers, carpenters, pharmacists, dancers and so on as well as official jobs such as the employees of telegraph company and gas lamp factory. Most of the jobs have disappeared today. That is why these photos are historically very important.



Figure 2. The women gathered in Mashgh square for some continuous days and were given tips, unknown photographer, 1892

Antonio Servuguin is a talented photographer in this field. He was famous for being a Russian. He moved to Iran in the late 19th century and started photography. Thanks to his fame, he could find a way to Mozafaredinshah's court (Zaka, the history of photography and pioneer photographers in Iran, 1997). Servuguin has taken considerable photos of men, women, and young girls. Some photos are related to professions such as grocers. These photos are in beautiful frames. Some other photos show Kurrd girls and women in workshops weaving rugs and Armenian women doing group activities. Most of his photos are about social subjects. (Figures 3, 4)

In fact, the most prominent and active professional photographer in Iran at the end of the nineteenth century was Servuguin who photographed from 1880s to about 1930. Antoine Servuguin travelled all over Iran, from Tehran to Mashhad, Ardabil to Yazd, and photographed people, landscapes, architecture, and objects (Forman Martinez, 2002). During the time of his photography activities, Servuguin managed to collect 7,000 glass negatives. The photos of this collection can be found in the collections of photographers Iran. The collection includes photographs of Qajar kings and their dependents, photos of historical monuments such as Parse (Persepolis) and Naghshe Rostam, the daily lives of people, men and women in traditional dress and Kurdish clothes in Azerbaijan, Kurdistan and Lorestan. As it was common at that time, on all these photos, a negative number has been engraved. Servuguin usually left a trace of his stamp or signature on the negatives.



Figure 3. Girls weaving rugs, Servuguin, 1892



Figure 4. Tobacco farm in Gilan, 1892 Antoine Surveguin

VII. ERNEST HOLTZER

Ernest Holtzer is another photographer who has valuable photos of architecture, portrait, and social subjects. He was a graduate of a technical school in the field of transmission of messages via telegraph. Being skillful in this field, he was employed by the government of England in 1863 June and was sent to Iran to both supervise telegraph lines and teach this skill to Iranian engineers. Gradually he became interested in Iran and decided to stay. He settled in Jolfa neighborhood in Esfahan and got married. In the early 1870s, he became familiar with photography. He took his photography equipment to Iran and photographed in his free time. During his stay in Iran, he took thousands of photos from different places. Most of these photos were taken between 1873 and 1897. These photos show Esfahan and Jolfa neighborhood, where Armenians live (Damandan, 2003). Holtze's photos and findings recorded everything which was changing and disappearing in Iran. He also gathered information about the city and social life of the people in Esfahan, as well as photographing them. His photos of collapsing historic buildings as well as his notes and description give information to viewer about the background of the sites. As a researcher, he has a precise collection of professions in Esfahan most of which have disappeared in today's world. His photos and notes are among the best resources of historic information of that time. In the 70s, photography made fast progress but due to requiring long exposure time and the weakness of the

sensitivity of glass, his work was hindered. He has expressed his sadness for not being able to photograph weavers in dark workshops (ibid, 24). No doubt, Hoeltzer's documentation provide scholars and enthusiasts with detailed information about Iran in the nineteenth Century. (Figures 5, 6)



Figure 5. Copper market, Ernest Hoeltzer, the late nineteenth century



Figure 6. Pitchers market -Ernest Hoeltzer-late nineteenth century.

VIII. PHOTOGRAPHY OF PRISONERS

In the mid-nineteenth century, photography as a new and wonderful phenomenon could establish its dominance as the most effective means of recording social events and transferring news. Photos which is an objective and realistic image matched the mental image of man from himself and his universe. Therefore, photography was recognized as an undeniable document and was accepted by everyone to prove claims difficult to believe (Tahmasebpour, from silver and light, 2010). Another category of documentary photos of that time is photography of prisoners in the 19th century. These photos are now in Golastan palace.

Photography of prisoners increased in the middle and final years of Naseredinshah's reign, when Pro-freedom protests against tyranny of Naseredinshah increased. Such photos which usually show prisoners in a very pitiful state depict another figure of that era. These photos were taken to file prisoners' criminal records or to give the potential criminals some lessons. Shah has added some insulting notes to these photos. Under the photos taken of Sayah, a reformist of that time, Shah has written these words: Ramadan, 1891- He is so mischievous. He has tried to escape but again he has been arrested. (Figure 7) Apart from political prisoners, there are some photos taken of other kinds of prisoners in Tehran and other cities. These photos have some notes too. Under a photo taken of a man with a chained neck, these words appear: Esfandiar, a man from Sanglach. His ear has been cut as punishment-1892. Such photos which are another application of photography at that time continued for years after that in various shapes.



Figure 7. Seyed, who inspired kelardasht protwest, unknown photographer, 1892

IX. PHOTOGRAPHY OF EVENTS

Another part of the nineteenth-century documentary photography relates to the holding of festivals and major events, such as meetings king and rulers' visits of military and administrative units. Photography of religious ceremonies lies in this category. Some events, such as the flying balloons in Tehran and other cities such as Tabriz, which was a new phenomenon, were recorded by the camera (Photo). One of these historic photographs shows flying balloons in Tabriz's Mashgh square. Under the photo, these words are written: Mashgh square, flying balloons and the crowd-the photographer: Ebrahim-1894. (Figure 8)



Figure 8. Flying ballon in Tabriz's Mashgh square- Mirza Ebrahim, 1893

Photography of some sport events and competitions held in town squares, such as wrestling and horse races, are another category. The album number 437 in Golastan palace which contains the photos taken in 1895 and 1896 show Naseredinshah's funeral from different angles. Such photos can clearly and perfectly show the reality of events in over a hundred years ago.

X. CONCLUSION

As the advent of photography in the nineteenth century coincided with the reign of NaseredinShah, who was greatly interested in this art, it grew and developed. Knowing documentation value of photos, he hired photographers to the court to visually record the events and information. Some of the issues these photographers were asked to photograph were Shah's trips, places and figures appealing to him, important events, and different professions. In addition, Iran was very

interesting for foreign tourists, businessmen, and scientific or political teams. These people some of whom had photography equipment with them photographed places, professions, social activities, and people. The result of these efforts is thousands of documentary photos of Iran in the 19th century, which provide the researchers with a valuable visual collection of a part of the history of Iran. There are undoubtedly photos privately kept by individuals and families all around the world which can help further investigations.

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