Troubles with Perspective: Case Studies in Picture-Making from Qajar Iran

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I begin with two points of view recorded by European visitors to Iran—from c. 1863–67 and 1934—that reflect typical notions about the visual arts and their making during the Qajar era (1779–1925). While such commentaries, mostly negative in tone, continued to find their echoes in the reception of Qajar art until quite recently, they are useful because they also record ideas about Qajar artists' working methods and the role played by photography in painting. The first text was written by Julien Comte de Rochechouart, in Iran from 1863, as Joseph Arthur Comte de Gobineau's successor at the French legation, Tehran. In a chapter "On boarding [bookbinding] and painting," he begins:

The Persians have no idea about painting as we think of it, and what is more, they do not understand it. Persian rulers have been heard speaking many times about the value we attach to this art and have requested paintings and sent students to study in Rome. But the paintings that they bring are loathsome and the students sent to Europe learn nothing and return saying—to explain their ignorance—that we have nothing in painting that is remarkable and that the last street-sweeper of Tehran knows better how to hold a brush than Raphael or Titian. Although the "Seated Madonna" has found grace before Raphael and Titian, the Persian artist persianized it before reproducing it, at first she was not so décolletée, then changed the palette; it takes a lot of good will to identify the model.¹

The same chapter includes other commentaries about art. "And as for paintings that the Persians themselves make, they would make one grind one's teeth; not only do they ignore the principles of perspective and drawing, not only are their colors bad, and method of painting revolting, but one cannot explain how a people—whose taste is so delicate in some instances—and who have such a high level of knowledge of the science of color, could agree to look at such horrors."² Later, de Rochechouart opines: "That the Persians are ornamentalists, nothing more,
and that their painting is an utterly industrial art form entirely outside the aesthetic norms to which we are accustomed,” that their “art of illumination is in decline, the taste [for it] absent from most Persian artists and their coloring is hard and jarring;” that artists “have as their models images of Lorraine that garnish the shop-windows of our village wig-makers or lithographs that decorate the rooms in taverns: Asia, Africa, Nina, ‘Matilda’s Smile,’ ‘A Fire in the New World;’ and even worse, lewd engravings of the sort only sold in the backstreet shops of certain neighborhoods;” and, that in the Orient, “the artist is a tradesman or a worker; one does not buy his works for their intrinsic merit, but only because one needs them.” De Rochechouart applies these assessments equally to artworks made for the consumption of the royal court and buyers from the open market (fig. 1).

In the second recollection, from March 9, 1934, Robert Byron (d. 1941) records his encounter with the painter Muzaffar in Isfahan amid a narrative of travels that took Byron from Venice to Iran, Afghanistan, and India. To introduce the exchange, Byron records that Muzaffar exhibited at the London exhibition, made a painting for the Queen of England, and that he “takes one back to the days before artistic temperament, when artists did as they were told. He comes from generations of painters, and has inherited their craftsmen’s attitude; in fact, he started by decorating pen-boxes.” A request follows. Byron asks Muzaffar to make his portrait. Muzaffar asks Byron for a photograph to copy. Byron refuses, explaining that the “purpose in giving him the commission was to see if he could
draw from life.” The experiment yielded a “portrait, . . . a likeness, quite in the Persian style,” but Byron “had to design the picture, say how the head must be spaced on the paper, and decide if the background should be plain or enriched.” At the end of the story, Byron remarks that Muzaffar worked in two manners, Persian and European, and that the miniatures he had seen done after photographs “were simply the photographs themselves, only tinted.” Byron fully expects to be asked for a photograph but declines to give him one, hoping instead for an image made through Muzaffar’s traditional Persian manner. The image not only involves a portrait aesthetic of the “Persian style,” but a hierarchy of production that enlists Byron in the process and also Muzaffar’s pupils who “do the backgrounds and borders from a repertory of traditional patterns.”

These opinions, and misprisions, are not at all unusual in the long history of reception of Persianate arts in the West, but happen to coincide temporally with the growth of collecting Islamic art and the emergence of the discipline of art history, in which Persian art was predominant among the triad composed also of Arab and Turkish art. More troubling is that the prejudicial views voiced by the likes of de Rochechouart and Byron find echoes in a formative academic discourse that continues to cast a long shadow even until this day, despite the fact that art of the later period under Qajar rule in Iran has been recuperated and taken more seriously by scholars since the late 1970s. In different ways, de Rochechouart and Byron address the aesthetics, practice, and production of Persianate painting—oil on canvas, watercolor on paper, lacquer—of the Qajar period to contrast them against European norms. But they also confront evidence of intersections between the practice of painting and new technologies of mechanical image reproduction, including lithography, chromolithography, and photography. A key question posed by both writers turns on the issue of artistic authenticity (read “traditional” art), and Iranian exposure to images formed in Europe but only to detrimental results when judged against the standard of European norms. Contemporaries of de Rochechouart and Byron, and some scholars since, have identified exchanges between Europe and Iran as causing the demise of a historical Persianate painting, a steady erosion and decline that gained speed from the early 1600s onwards. From the perspective of a decline model, the advent of lithography and photography and their assimilation into Qajar artistic production only precipitated a deeper sense of loss and nostalgia for an irrecoverable art of the native Persian past.

Another approach to artistic innovation and invention under the Qajars frames the artist’s choice as a problem of modernity and, in an emerging discourse
in the disciplines of visual culture studies and history of art, tends to focus on photography. For example, although Iranians quickly embraced the daguerreotype and later photographic processes, including wet collodion (invented in 1850–51), Ali Behdad accepts Europe’s a priori ownership of the medium and positions Qajar-era photographers as co-opted agents who could only reproduce a way of seeing and showing the “East” in “Western” terms (one might question the utility of such reductive binaries). Such was the power of Orientalism that “native” Persian photography was “indebted to, and mimetic of, Orientalism’s aesthetic values and ideological assumptions.”9 Indeed, Behdad argues for the displacement of painting by photography during the reign of Nasir al-Din Shah (r. 1848–96).10

Both viewpoints turn around a perceived rupture, the break in an artistic tradition instantiated by the growing exposure to European art, culture, and technology. What I find striking is that neither one of these perspectives is grounded in a systematic study of the broad range of visual materials, from objects made through or under the auspices of elite institutions and courtly patrons to those fashioned in the bazaar for the general public. These objects indicate much more complex intersections of media and their remediation.11 How were lithographic and photographic images assimilated, remediated, and recast in, and through, painting, and what can we make of such processes?12 Qajar artists in the period from the mid-1800s to the early 1900s neither appear to have been troubled by photography nor to have regarded new technologies of image production as the burden they became in twentieth-century scholarship.

Another important question turns on the idea that photography was heralded as the epitome of modernity and presented a double challenge to the East: photography not only held a reproductive potential but it also seemed to naturalize perspective and optically-naturalist modes of representation. Attending to these questions requires that three topics be addressed: first, the advent of photography in Iran; second, the mediation of photography and lithography in Qajar painting; and third, the perspective of a longer history and how it might alter our understanding of Qajar artistic practice. The Qajar artists’ responses to mechanically produced and reproducible images can be understood as yet another instance of the assimilation of reproductive technologies. Before the photograph and lithograph, artists in Iran had remediated prints of various types in their paintings. Hence, artistic processes of the nineteenth century can equally be characterized as a continuation and not a definitive break from past working methods.13
The Advent of Photography in Iran

Knowledge of photography and its requisite technology were quickly made available to the royal court in Iran and disseminated from it. It was only a few years after the official presentation of the daguerreotype to the French Académie de Science in 1839 that the practice spread to Iran. One of the earliest known daguerreotypes to be made in Iran is a self-portrait by Qajar prince Malik Qasim Mirza. Some photographic apparatus arrived in the 1840s through gifts made to the Qajar ruler Muhammad Shah (r. 1834–48) by Queen Victoria of England and Tsar Nicholas I of Russia. Jules Richard (1816–1891) was invited to the Qajar court in 1844 to explain the operation and principles of photographic equipment and to demonstrate their use. Other Europeans followed. While Europeans resident in Iran played a critical role in spreading and propagating knowledge of photography, its support by members of the royal house led to the training of Persians in the medium. Two of the best-known Qajars to practice photography were Malik Qasim Mirza (1807–1862), son of the Qajar ruler Fath Ali Shah (r. 1798–1834), and Nasir al-Din Shah (r. 1848–96). He devoted a building in the royal palace to photography (’akkas-khana), and created the office of court photographer (’akkas-bashi). Photography won the enthusiastic attention of the courtly elite who stimulated its propagation, leading to the growth of commercial studios throughout Iran.¹⁴

One of the most important sites for photography was the Dar al-Funun (Abode of Sciences), Iran’s first polytechnic established on December 29, 1851. The institution was initially conceived as an instrument to develop knowledge of Western sciences and military training, to modernize Iran through internal reform, but by the 1860s the curriculum adjusted its emphasis toward non-military subjects to include photography, lithography, painting, and music. Photography was added to the curriculum in 1860—located in the Department of Chemistry—and painting in 1861. Though more is to be learned about the pedagogy of painting at Dar al-Funun, students were exposed to techniques associated with European painting and lithography. They studied directly from photographs, paintings, sculptures, and engravings of works by European masters, which Maryam Ekhtiar interprets as techniques, and the resulting skills, that would enable Persian painters to create works that would “measure up . . . to European standards of realism, perspective, chiaroscuro, and modeling.”¹⁵ One of the chief painters of the time, Abu al-Hasan Ghaffari (titled Sani’ al-Mulk, “Craftsman of the kingdom,” in 1861), trained in Europe in the late 1840s and some time after his return held the position of chief editor of the state newspaper: (Ruznama-yi dawlat-i ʿillieh-i Iran).
He also oversaw Tehran's *Majma' al-Dar al-Sanayi*; a handicrafts center founded in 1852 by Nasir al-Din Shah's prime minister Mirza Taqi Khan Amir Kabir. As Ekhtiar argues, the curriculum developed by Abu al-Hasan Ghaflari for the *Dar al-Funun* was adapted to Persian systems of artistic pedagogy because it excluded "life drawing, anatomy, geometry, and art theory." Ekhtiar also observes that the principle of learning through imitation and the value attached to replication were similar in the fine art oriented *Dar al-Funun* and the handicraft oriented *Majma' al-Dar al-Sanayi*. Although there was a division between institutions, principles of artistic pedagogy were shared by them.

**Remediations of Lithography and Photography in Painting**

Useful though they are, even positive assessments of the impact of lithography and photography on painting tend to neglect the specific formal features of Qajar paintings as visual manifestations and hence to reproduce in uncritical ways recurring themes of contemporary writing, namely that Qajar artists only attempted to assimilate European pictorial modes and conventions, to reproduce valued prototypes, and relied on photographs as convenient instruments of instruction. These observations give little emphasis to a crucial point: paintings made after photographs are never direct reproductions of them but in various ways carry their trace as a scent.

Before turning to examples of painting from c. 1850–1900, it is worth providing some reactions to photography recorded in Persian texts. The court historian Mirza Muhammad Hasan Khan 1'timad al-Saltana first described the medium as a "kind of painting" and spoke of it in terms defined through painting. He offered other accounts of photography, such as that given in his *Kitab al-ma'dir va al-asar* (*Book of Histories and Traditions*; 1888–89): "Since photography was discovered, it has been of great service to the art of design. The art of landscape rendering, of portraiture, of light and shade and the use of the laws of perspective as well as other aspects of this technique: all have found their originality and have been perfected." Here, and elsewhere, 1'timad al-Saltana champions the modernizing agency of photography on the visual arts. In his travel diary, Nasir al-Din Shah writes that photography is a "reflection and imprint of images of objects on external surfaces" and notes its usefulness as a "device in the demonstration of the science of perspective." Such remarks convey the belief that photography *naturalized* perspective—it seemed to confirm the optical and perceptual truth of post-
Renaissance painting—but more curiously, one also senses that the photographic medium was a more effective transmitter of lessons in post-Renaissance pictorial conventions than European paintings or direct visual study from life: photography allowed Qajar artists to see in a way that they could apparently not by direct vision or through pictorial models. Other comments made by contemporaries, particularly Hajji Mulla Hadi Sabzavari, dealt with philosophical questions that issued from the capacity of a man-made mechanical apparatus to produce images on paper. As Stephen Vernoit has observed: "Theologians and jurists argued that a photographer was not rivaling God in the creative act because a photograph was brought about by the agency of the sun and was the result of divine activity," contrasting a passive "mechanical reflection" against an active "artist's creation."23

So what of the practice of painting at this time? Current assessments of Qajar art are undecided. Attempts at synthetic histories suggest the slow eclipse of painting in the face of photography while others argue for the continuity of painting at the court and in other contexts. The position of "royal painter" (naqqash-bashi) continued under Nasir al-Din Shah even when interest in photography intensified: the royal painter's mandate included oversight of the royal workshops and the guilds in the city's bazaar, as well as instructing the ruler in painting. Painting continued to be practiced in a variety of venues, formats, and media—life-size panel painting in oil, enamels, lacquer objects, paintings in manuscripts, and lithographed books—though the rupture paradigm obscures continuities in practice.

The brief survey of pedagogy in the Dar al-Funun pointed to the close intersection of painting, photography, and lithography from c. 1850 onwards. Painters' use of photographs as prototypes is verbally attested and there are even a few examples that can be matched as a pair, such as a salt print portrait of Nasir al-Din Shah dated to c. 1852–55 and a watercolor done after it from c. 1855 (figs. 2 and 3). It is clear that we cannot take the watercolor for a photograph and cannot treat it simply as a colored/tinted photograph (as Byron was inclined to think about paintings made after photographs later in the 1930s). Visual study of the watercolor leaves one questioning how the photograph could have imparted lessons in shading and modeling, while the tight framing abrogates the question of perspective. Artistic incompetence does not explain this issue away, as several other paintings attest. The photograph supplied data about relative size, the outline of a figure, possible compositional elements—an imported spindle side chair
but not a backdrop—and a skein of lit and shaded passages. The translation toward a painting required not only an imagined palette and invention of pattern, but also a choice of which tonal passages to mimic, which ones to invent, and which to ignore.  

Another example—a portrait of Prince Ardishir Mirza—by the court painter Abu al-Hasan Ghaffari was made soon after his return from Europe (fig. 4). The painted image, like the previous watercolor of Nasir al-Din Shah, portrays an individual in a shallow, tipped-up space and remediates aesthetic aspects of the photograph. It resembles the closely framed Qajar photographic studio portraits. Prince Ardishir Mirza dominates the composition and his volume in space is conveyed through a tonal modeling integrated with networks of patterning and fields of flat color. Close attention is paid to the texture of the face and the beard.
Fig. 4. Abu al-Hasan Chaffari (Iranian, 1814–1866), Prince Ardshir Mirza, Poet and Prince-Governor, 1852–53. Opaque watercolor on paper, 17 x 12 in. (43.2 x 30.5 cm). Private collection
But for an artist trained in the West it cannot be accepted as a complete assimilation of post-Renaissance artistic conventions—consider the handling of linear perspective and the incongruities of spatial logic—as a complete imitation of either photographic or painted models. It is clearly a combinatory visual form. Despite our perception of a volume integrated in space and the sharp contrast between figure and ground, aspects of shading and shadow give the impression of an overall illumination. A second portrait of Prince Ardishir Mirza by Abu al-Hasan Ghaffari dated 1854 attests to the consistent application of photographs in the court artist’s pictorial practice (fig. 5). This example manifests an even greater attention to the subtle execution of face and hands.

Two other paintings offer a still more complex layering by showing interactions across and between the media of painting, photography, lithography, and lacquer (figs. 6 and 7). Both paintings manifest a profound attention to the individuation of the subject set in casual poses, figures caught in time and congealed for posterity. Ibrahim’s portrait of Zill-i Sultan (the eldest son of Nasir al-Din Shah) is an object designed to preserve the full affect of a photographic object and not only its mimetic properties—consider the oval frame outlined in red and yellow resembling gold, the mottled corners a trompe l’oeil stone, the inscription (a caption in white *nasta’liq*), and how the frame crops the subject (fig. 6). The format of medallion portrait resembles photographs while the frame partly mimics the presentation cases used to protect daguerreotypes and tintypes. The painting is in oil on tin by
a painter also known for his lacquer work; there are some of the honey-toned and amber hues of lacquers found in this painting. Without direct access to the portrait it is not possible to determine whether it is a tinted tintype or a painted simulation of the optical-naturalism of photography (found especially in the face, hands, and background, and the nebulous mist of purples, grays, and browns that looks like a studio backdrop). The large format of the painting suggests that is less likely to be a tinted tintype but that it is not out of the question. If it is a tinted tintype, the large format brought the photograph into scale with the conventional size of portraits done in oil on canvas.

The watercolor portrait of Haji Mirza Sulayman Khan, chief secretary to Zill al-Sultan, is a virtual monochrome in black and blue, dramatically opposing the figure against a blank ground (fig. 7). The stark opposition between the modes of execution applied to the head and hands and the drapery covered body suggests a fusion of visual effects and techniques associated with painting, photography, and lithography. The artist—Abu Turab Ghaffari (1863–1889), brother of Muhammad Ghaffari (Kamal al-Mulk), nephew of Abu al-Hasan Ghaffari—was trained as a painter and lithographer in the Dar al-Funun and produced large paintings by commission and images for the newspaper Sharaf. As a painted watercolor the painting carries the trace of reproductive processes redolent of lithography and photography.

Although these last two images come across as less connected to historical precedent than the other examples of paintings mediated through photographs, they force a discussion of history as longue durée despite their modernity. A lac-
quer pen box of the late Safavid period, dated in 1712–13, embodies what some art historians regard as the lamentable effects of exposure to post-Renaissance European art, an adoption that resulted in incongruous fusions, incompletely assimilated pictorial conventions, and the demise of “traditional” techniques characterized by fully integrated representational systems. From the early 1600s, Persian artists increasingly responded to European art imported as panel paintings, portrait miniatures, and prints, to render a style dubbed *farangi-saz* (“European style”) in Persian. The pen box displays a composition of amorous couples set before a perspective landscape, a floral border around the lid, the sides composed of portrait busts and sweeping landscapes with Italianate and Persianate architecture.

The importance of this example, and numerous others of its kind, lies in the evidence it offers of an earlier time in Persianate art when printmaking—another reproductive technology of the image—functioned as an intermediary of representation. The Persian artists engaged this visual mode in their production of lacquers and other media. On the pen box, the artist combined dual modes of polychromy (for details of clothing, flowers), and monochrome stippling (for faces, exposed body parts, details of the environment). The pen box resulted from a creative process, a working methodology, based on the use of models (drawings, paintings, prints) and the fluid movement across media. Similar traces of adaptations from prints can be seen in the painted landscape elements of an early Qajar mirror case (fig. 1).

While artists of the Qajar era of the 1850s and after continued to look back to Safavid art for subjects and styles—partial re-creations of the aesthetic aspect of historical objects—and in an imitative “intervisual” practice codified in Persianate painting since the early 1400s, they also looked to the nearer past and
contemporary times. Sources included the visual contents of lithographed books and single sheets, newspapers, photographs, photolithographs, and chromolithographs. A host of subjects, compositions, modes of expression, and the new affective nature of some images—especially photographic portraits characterized by descriptive detail and psychological intensity expressed by the direct gaze and/or physiological expression—became available to Qajar artists from imported and domestic contemporary sources. Some of these were translated—in the double sense of being moved and converted—to lacquer objects with or without the visual traces of the original medium preserved (fig. 8). The full-length portrait of a man on the lid of a pen box attributed to artist Muhammad Baqir Samirumi retains the traces of a photograph, transposed to the surface of the lacquer, where it is embedded in a system of modes of painting ranging from the mimetic to the abstract. While the painted portrait relates to photography, other painted compositions—the landscapes on the sides—stem from historical conventions of Persian lacquer painting.

It is difficult to reconstruct the visual world of Qajar artists and to convey the intricate networks of image production between media as lacquer objects simultaneously remediated a historical practice of Persianate painting (developed in books and on objects), and waves of new media in the form of prints, lithographs, and photographs. General observations of affinities of form and subject between media only go so far to explain the Qajar artist's creative intersection in a nineteenth-century world characterized by the escalating market for commodities and various regimes of mechanical reproduction. From this expanded world of images,
Qajar lacquer artists reconfigured prototypes into new arrangements and combinations, shifted their palettes, and supplied infinite permutations of details to the basic outlines presented in a design. While this form of production was not new—manuscript paintings since the early 1400s were conceived and executed in a comparable way—Qajar artists applied it to their great advantage.

It is useful now to return to de Rochechouart’s criticisms because they actually illuminate key aspects of image production in Qajar times. De Rochechouart takes Qajar artists to task for their failure to distinguish between classes of images that are mapped against classes of consumer (after all, in Iran artists treat with equal value lowbrow images used as shop displays in village wig stores or decorative accents in taverns and highbrow paintings by Raphael and Titian). They failed to make the appropriate aesthetic distinctions and also risked the association of their painting with the world of commerce. The free process of sourcing imagery from various media and combining them was also viewed with disdain by de Rochechouart as akin to the découpage of Victorian scrap-bookers—cutting out and excerpting ready-made compositions and fashioning them into new configurations—and hence also low-class. Nonetheless, the procedure was well suited to the demands of efficient production in a competitive market, for an industrial art where the artist was both “seller” and “worker,” to de Rochechouart, but in Qajar eyes a wholly legitimate and culturally approved modality of creation.

In aesthetic effect and production the lacquers are similar to Qajar paintings that mediated photographs. Qajar works on paper offer an interesting parallel to the uses of photographs in late nineteenth-century India, where cartes de visite and photographs were routinely painted in gouache and watercolor. The practice of painting Indian photographs was both widespread and extensive, far exceeding European habits of retouching negatives or tinting prints. In India paint was “much more than a supplement to the photographic image; rather, the overlay of paint completely replaces the photographic image in such a way that all or most of it is ‘obscured.’”36 In many examples, only the faces, hands, and feet of the human subjects are left unpainted. The resulting duality of modes—bright polychrome with pattern, subdued monochrome with subtle modulations of tone—in the painted photographs is shared by the fully painted Qajar portraits that used photographs as a source.

Any assessment of intersections between mechanical and handmade modes of image production cannot accept the argument that Qajar painters simply emulated photographic sources. Despite the observations of contemporaries
that photographs offered objective lessons in proportion, techniques of modeling and perspective (aerial and linear), painters did not follow this instruction. Photography was assimilated into painting in a manner consistent with practices that had a long historical precedent, a deep structure in the habits of artistic conception and production whether one looks at the output of court sponsored workshops or the bazaar. Rather than opening the way to an entirely new artistic culture, a break with the past, one of the effects of photography and lithography was to reinvigorate the historical practice and format of the painted portrait. Far from being threatened by the reproductive potential of the new technology, photography was eagerly assimilated into an arsenal of techniques of artistic production founded on the use of models. Qajar artists across the social hierarchy preferred to engage their subjects through prefabricated images. Much like the print culture embraced in the 1600s, the 1800s witnessed the impact of photography and lithography on painting. Qajar painters harnessed the new technologies as a means of forging doubly indexical and auratic objects. Their paintings combined features understood to be derived from the photographic index (the trace of a real presence) with the modalities of Persian painting in lacquer or watercolor/gouache and united them through the medium of pigment applied by the hand. The “real” was a construct that remained coded in a network of pictorial conventions and heightened sensations of materiality despite photography’s apotheosis, and promise, as the supreme evidentiary. In transforming the chemical residues of the photograph’s monochrome surface into paint, subtle adaptations of the photographic source mutated its status from reproducible into the unique object fashioned by the painter’s hand.

2. Ibid., 261.
3. Ibid., 264. These subjects reflect the types found in lithographs made by such popular print factories as Jean-Charles Pellerin at Epinal.
5. Ibid., 192.
6. Ibid.

8. Tracing the impact of European visual art on those in Iran, John Carswell laments the adoption of “western concepts of perspective and chiaroscuro,” which resulted in a “lamentable failure” and provided one example “of the corruption of eastern taste by western influence.” The result was a “deadly blow at what was admirable in eastern painting.” See John Carswell, “Eastern and Western Influence on Art of the Seventeenth Century in Iran,” in The Memorial Volume of the Fifth International Congress of Iranian Art & Archaeology, ed. A. Tajvidi and M. Y. Kiani, 2 vols. (Tehran: Ministry of Culture and Arts, 1972), 2:277–81, 277, 281. More recently, similar judgments were made about “the spectacular breakdown of the centuries-old system of artistic principles during the Qajar period.” See Iván Szántó, “The Dying Days of Persian Book Painting,” in Artisans at the Crossroads: Persian Arts of the Qajar Period (1796–1925), ed. Béla Kelényi and Iván Szántó (Budapest: Ferenc Hopp Museum of Eastern Asiatic Arts, 2010), 34–43.


10. Ibid., 141–42 and pl. 1. As evidence of this shift Behdad discusses a watercolor—Nasir al-Din Shah sitting for his portrait—and assigns it an excessive symbolism. This painting and a second example signed by Mirza Riza Tabrizi depicting a European photographer taking a daguerreotype of Mansur Khan are discussed by Yahya Zuka, Tarihk-i ‘akkas-i va ‘akkasan-i pishgam dar Iran (Tehran: Shirkat-i Intisharat-i ‘Ilmi va Farhangi, 1997), frontispiece and pl. 1.

11. I am using “remediation” to refer to the common understanding that successive media of representation always involve the mediation and “refashioning” of prior forms of media (e.g. perspective painting, photography, television). These processes and their consequences are discussed in Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, Remediation: Understanding New Media (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999).
This essay is obviously of restricted scope and does not claim comprehensive coverage of all available materials. The study of Qajar art is still in a nascent state of development and many large collections and archives are barely touched and await research and publication. This essay equally cannot engage the debate on the reception of photography in Europe where the medium was also understood to remediate painting and compared to printmaking, chiefly the mezzotint.


15. Ekhtiar, “From Workshop and Bazaar,” 60. Institutional developments and transformations in the 1850s and 1860s are studied by Diba, “Muhammad Ghaffari,” 646–50.

16. For further details on Abu al-Hasan Ghaffari’s biography, see Raby, Qajar Portraits, 56; Floor, “Art (Naqqashi) and Artists (Naqqashan),” 141–44; and Diba, “Muhammad Ghaffari,” 647–49.


18. It is important to emphasize the extent to which artists were skilled in multiple media. For examples of these crossovers, studied from the primary perspective of lithographic practice, see the


22. As Afshar notes, the *mulla’s* reaction was shaped by a psychological notion that made photography impossible, “for the ancients believed that it was only the human spirit which was capable of imprinting and recording images, and this facility was beyond the scope of any man-made machine.” Afshar, “Some Remarks on the Early History,” 264.


26. For further details about the photograph, see Diba, *Royal Persian Paintings*, 264.

27. Ardishir Mirza (1805–1866) was the uncle of Nasir al-Din Shah and governor of Tehran. The painting is discussed in Diba, *Royal Persian Paintings*, cat. 79.


29. The painting was offered for sale at Christie’s London, *Islamic Art and Indian Miniatures*, Tuesday, October 14, 1997, lot 159.

30. Little work has been done on the tintype (melainotype or ferrotype) and the practice of retouching, painting, and tinting photographs in Iran, with a few passing remarks in Floor, “Art (Naqqashi) and Artists (Naqqashan),” 133. Study of American tintypes suggest an upper plate size of 11 x 14 in. with the smaller sized “bon-ton” 2 3/8 x 3 3/1 in. or 4 x 5 3/4 in. most popular. Floyd Rinhart, Marion Rinhart, and Robert W. Wagner. *The American Tintype* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1999), 43, 74, and app. 3.

31. Diba notes the dual modes of execution in the image and suggests its execution by two artists. She also compared it to a near identical image on a ceramic tile which highlights the replication
of imagery “in different formats and disseminated throughout the country.” Diba, *Royal Persian Portraits*, cat. 81.


