

## The Manifestation and Analysis of Sociocultural Functions of Iranian Craft Arts from the Frame of the Qajari Camera

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### Introduction

Like other aspects of modernity, photography in Iran began during the Qajar era and flourished during the reign of Naser al-Din Shah. The images captured during this period, including historical sites, landscapes, professions, customs, and particularly authentic Iranian craft arts, hold significant value and importance. Throughout history, these images have preserved Iranian identity and enabled future generations to examine historical and social developments and to understand various aspects of Iranian culture. Therefore, one of the best contexts for studying the status and functions of craft arts during the Qajar period, creating an essential component of Iran's cultural identity, is the photographs left from this era. Analyzing and examining the role of craft arts in these images offer a fresh perspective on their functions in the Qajar era and enhance the understanding of photography as a cultural and artistic element as photography in Iran has evolved primarily based on a unique visual culture, societal living styles, and an underlying culture.

### Research Method

This research aims to analyze the visual aspects of craft arts in photographs from the Qajar era and to investigate the cultural and social functions of these elements in the photography of the time. It seeks to answer the following questions: What are the impacts of incorporating Iranian craft arts on the visual aspects of Qajar photographs? What are the cultural and social functions of these craft arts in Qajar photography? This study is fundamental and qualitative. The research method is descriptive-analytical with data collection conducted through library and documentary methods. Images were selected from 115 Qajar photographs taken by Iranian and non-Iranian photographers from various accessible sources. The aim was to cover different social classes of the Qajar era and the diversity of craft arts. To achieve the research objectives, this study conducted a brief review of the inception of photography during the Qajar period along with an analysis of Iranian craft arts present in photographs, the composition, and the visual arrangement of elements.

### Research Findings

The various forms of Iranian craft arts in the Qajar era, including carpets and kilims, different types of textiles, leather, felt-making, calico printing, pen box making, glass and pottery workshops, brasswork, jewelry making, and woodworking for furniture, are traceable in the surviving images from this period. To cover different social classes and various types of craft arts in the photographs, the images were studied in three groups: the nobility and courtiers, ordinary people and professionals, and women. The craft arts depicted in the images of the nobility and courtiers

include luxury items such as textiles with bottejeqqe patterns, paisley, books and pen box, vases with specific Iranian motifs, carved tables and chairs, carpets, and rugs. The application of these elements in the images serves more than just the purpose of capturing the individual's face and expressions; it is a means of recording and conveying the individual's identity and social status. Factors such as the high cost of photography, technical limitations, poverty, illiteracy, and cultural resistance restricted photography within affluent classes. Most craft arts in the images of ordinary people were functional with many of these individuals depicted as the main creators of Iranian craft arts. In examining the images of women, the use of craft arts is reflected in valuable jewelry and textiles featuring elaborate embroidery such as zari and golabetoon embroidery as well as termeh. Additionally, in some images, women are shown engaged in handicraft professions, including needlework and carpet weaving. The analysis of the composition and of the visual arrangement of individuals and elements in these photographs reveals the use of vertical and horizontal axes, adherence to the principle of symmetry, and the application of indigenous visual traditions in Iranian pictorial arts. This allows Qajar photographers to convey specific meanings and concepts in their works. The application of Iranian craft arts in Qajar-era photographs, through the creation of an Iranian ambiance in these images, helped establish a distinct identity rooted in Iranian culture. This situation makes photography a culture-building medium. The cultural beliefs and values of the Iranian people have always manifested in craft arts, forming a unique visual taste that significantly influences the acceptance or the rejection of new artistic phenomena such as photography. Thus, undoubtedly, the display of craft arts in Qajar photographs reflects the nobility's pride in the art of their ancestors and the ancient history of Iran and enhances public awareness of the value of handicraft works. Moreover, the craft arts depicted in these images have improved the global understanding of Iranian culture and art and influenced artistic movements worldwide.

### **Conclusion**

The incorporation of craft arts in images from this period was one of the key factors that enabled photography in the Qajar era to fulfill its mission as a novel and distinctive phenomenon in creating and recording images and transmitting them to future generations. The results of this study indicate that the craft arts in the composition of Qajar photography scenes, in addition to their visual functions based on the distinctive Iranian pictorial tradition and decorative aspects, also possess significant cultural and social functions: providing Iranian identity to the photographs, using photography as a culture-building medium, fostering alignment with public taste, and enhancing the public's relationship with the emerging phenomenon of photography, improving global recognition of Iranian culture and art through the transfer of photographs to Europe, increasing the attention of rulers and ordinary people toward valuable craft arts, influencing global artistic movements, and ultimately playing a role in transmitting concepts and representing the identity and status of different social classes during the Qajar era.

**Keywords:** craft arts, photography, Qajar, visual arrangement, cultural-social analysis.