

NOVEMBER 2, 2018 – JANUARY 13, 2019

LOOKING AT PERSEPOLIS

THE CAMERA IN IRAN, 1850 – 1930

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A brief chronology of photographing Persepolis

1839 The details of the daguerreotype photographic process are published in Paris.

1842 Iran's first daguerreotype camera is a gift from the Czar of Russia, brought by a young diplomat named Nikolai Pavlov. Arriving in mid-December, Pavlov takes the first recorded photograph in Iranian history, in the presence of Mohammad Shah.

1844 French photographer Jules Richard, a master of the daguerreotype process, is installed at the Qajar court as a teacher of photography. Among his first assignments is taking Crown Prince Naser al-Din Mirza's portrait on a silver plate.

1848 Colonel Luigi Pesce (1828-1864), an Italian infantry officer from Naples, enters the service of the Qajars to train Iranian infantry units; Naser al-Din Shah (1831-1896, r. 1848-1896), who will become a prominent patron of photographers in Iran, ascends the throne.

1850 Richard is sent on the order of Naser al-Din Shah to take photographs of the ruins of Persepolis. However, unable to raise funds for travel due to the government's financial problems, the mission only goes as far as Isfahan.

1851 The collodion photographic process is invented.

Naser al-Din Shah's prime minister, Amir Kabir, opens the Dār al-Fonun, Iran's first university based on Western models, which includes a department of photography.

1858 Naser al-Din Shah establishes the Royal Photographic Atelier on the grounds of the Golestan Palace.

Colonel Pesce completes a self-funded expedition to photograph the ruins of Persepolis. He presents the album to Naser al-Din Shah on April 29, 1858 (15th of Ramezan 1274 A.H.).

1872 Soltan Oveys Mirza, son of Persepolis excavator Prince Farhad Mirza Mo'tamed al-Dowleh, produces the first systematic series of archaeological photographs of the ruins, for scientific purposes.

1874 After travelling through Iran to view historic monuments and mosques, German explorer Franz Stolze (1836-1910) joins philologist Friedrich Carl Andreas and photographer Gustav Fritsch in Isfahan to observe a transit of the planet Venus. While in Iran, Stolze and Andreas conduct a number of visits to archaeological sites. Stolze remains in Iran until 1881.

1877 Between June 16 and July 3, Stolze and Andreas take around three hundred images of the ruins of Persepolis, later published with their other images of Iranian archaeological sites in two large volumes. Stolze prefers the high angle of the summer sun for photographing the inscriptions. Farhad Mirza grants Stolze and Andreas permission to undertake an excavation – a privilege usually restricted from non-French foreigners – but they refuse on account of having to forfeit any discovered artefacts.

1897 The newly created Délégation Scientifique Française en Perse entrusts geologist, mining engineer, and archaeologist Jacques de Morgan to excavate the Palace of Darius the Great at Susa, leading to many significant Achaemenid-era discoveries.

1910 German archaeologists Friedrich Sarre and Ernst Emile Herzfeld publish their landmark book on rock-reliefs in ancient Iran, *Iranische Felsreliefs*, featuring specially commissioned photographs of Persepolis by Antoin Sevruguin (c. 1851-1933). Herzfeld goes on to be the only foreign member in Reza Shah's Society for National Heritage in 1923.

1931 After years of negotiation with the Iranian government, and sponsored by the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, Herzfeld begins a major scientific study and excavation of Persepolis, breaking the French monopoly on excavation. Starting in 1933 Hans-Wichart von Busse (1903-1962) joins Herzfeld's staff as expedition photographer.

1934 Herzfeld is terminated from the excavation after allegedly giving two sculptural fragments to the visiting Crown Prince of Sweden, thus breaking the Antiquities Law. Von Busse also leaves the expedition.



Above:
Antoin Sevruguin, *Fragments of a Torus with Inscriptions to a Palace Rebuilt by Artaxerxes II (r. 404-359 BCE)*, Hamadan, c. 1885, albumen print, collection of Azita Bina and Elmar W. Seibel

From the curator

Throughout the latter nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the ruling dynasties of Iran drew on photographs of ancient Persia to construct an image of political stability. Associating themselves with the ancient cities of Persepolis and Pasargadae, the Palace of Darius the Great, and other remnants of the first Persian Empire, these rulers sought to define a sense of national identity during a period of social transformation. *Looking at Persepolis: The Camera in Iran, 1850-1930* identifies the unique, even paradoxical role that early photography played in Iran: using cutting-edge technology to invoke the past.

Persepolis stands some forty miles northeast of modern-day Shiraz, built against Kūh-e Rāmat (Mount of Mercy). Darius the Great (c. 550-486 BCE) initiated the construction of Persepolis; the city's Persian name, Takht-e Jamshīd ("Throne of Jamshīd"), refers to a mythological Zoroastrian prophet-king. Persepolis was envisioned as a new capital for the Achaemenid Empire, to be built near Pasargadae where Cyrus the Great – the empire's founder – was buried. However, Persepolis's mountainous location made it difficult to reach, and Darius the Great's administration was based mostly in the cities of Susa, Babylon, and Ecbatana. Persepolis was eventually burned and looted in 330 BCE, after which it declined as a national capital, and over time was abandoned.

Nevertheless, over the course of Iran's politically turbid history, the majesty of Persepolis's remains – including its grand staircases, Darius's palace (Tachara), and the pillared hall (Apadāna) – has often been looked back on as symbolic of a powerful, indigenous Persian heritage. Comprehensive excavations of the Persepolitan ruins began in the mid-1800s, during the Qajar dynasty (1794-1925), an era that saw major wars, a nearly bankrupt government, technological

revolutions, and sweeping constitutional reform. The camera entered Iran around this same time: 1842, only three years after the daguerreotype process was published in Paris. This new mode of image-making quickly gained traction at the Qajar court, competing with the large-scale, mytho-heroic portraits typically commissioned by the Shahs, and in time, photography began to influence the techniques of court painters as realism came into fashion. Photography truly flourished under the reign of Naser al-Din Shah (r. 1848-1896), himself a hobbyist photographer. Naser al-Din Shah embraced the camera as a sign of his nation's modernity – and yet, he insistently turned the lens on relics of the past, as opposed to the growing unrest that accompanied modernisation. Tellingly, the young king was only two years into his reign when he commissioned the court photographer, Jules Richard (1816-1891), to comprehensively photograph Persepolis. The mission was fraught with logistical and financial issues, however, and still remained incomplete when Italian colonel Luigi Pesce (1828-1864) presented his own album to the Shah in 1858.

In Iran, the camera was both an archaeological and ideological tool. Meticulous in their use of the arts to promote the court's grandeur, the Qajar royalty began commissioning photographers to document key ceremonies, military campaigns, and other prolific occasions, as well as ancient monuments. Photography's archival, reproducible qualities were key to their strategy of disseminating a national identity affiliated with the glory or the distant past. Through images of historic sites such as Persepolis, Pasargadae, and Susa, the Qajar dynasty – and the Pahlavi dynasty that followed – attempted to evoke a sense of cultural solidity in a rapidly changing country.

Pantea Haghighi

Right:
Hans Wickart von Busse,
Tribute bearer with doe,
ascending staircase of the
"Tripylon", c. 1933, gelatin silver
print, collection Azita Bina and
Elmar W. Seibel



Right:
Hans-Wickart von Busse,
*The Tachara, Palace of Darius
the Great, looking to the
southwest*, c. 1933, gelatin silver
print, collection of Azita Bina
and Elmar W. Seibel

About the artists

Marcel Dieulafoy (1844-1920) was a French archaeologist. After working as an engineering officer in the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871), Dieulafoy served in municipal services in his hometown of Toulouse, until being granted a government assignment in Iran in 1880. He photographed Persepolis from 1881-1882, but is best known for his images of the excavations at Susa. Photographs of both sites, among others, were published in Dieulafoy's famous five-volume folio *L'Art antique de la Perse*, published between 1884 and 1889.

Georg Jüterbock (1896-1940) was a German commercial pilot based in Iran, with the German Junkers Aviation Company. He took aerial photographs of Persepolis from his Junkers W.33 plane, for commercial purposes. Jüterbock compiled an album titled *Die Reise durch Persien 2-15. April 1930* while in Athens, featuring shots of the cities and landmarks along his flight route, which included Persepolis. Interestingly, the album contains at least one photograph by Antoin Sevruguin, presumably purchased in Tehran.

Luigi Pesce (1828-1864) was an Italian colonel originally from Naples, employed by Naser al-Din Shah to train and modernise Iran's army. An avid amateur photographer, Pesce is regarded as the first photographer to document the ruins of Persepolis, Pasargadae, and Naqsh-e Rostam. His first album, presented to the Shah in 1858, is housed in the collection of the Golestan Palace, Tehran.

Maurice Pillet (1881-1964) was a French architect. In 1912, he joined the mission to excavate the Palace of Darius, in the ancient city of Susa (near modern-day Shush), which had been led by archaeologist Jacques de Morgan from 1897-1912. Pillet not only documented

the ruins of the Palace of Darius extensively in photographs, but he also succeeded in reconstructing the plans of the palace through architectural drawings.

Antoin Sevruguin (c. 1851-1933) was born at the Russian Embassy in Tehran to a diplomat. He lived in Iran for over thirty years, working as one of the country's most prolific photographers. Sevruguin kept a commercial studio in Tehran, and his photographs often have features of both portrait photography and ethnographical documentation. His images appeared frequently in magazines, travelogues, and journals, often uncredited or incorrectly attributed, including a 1921 issue of *National Geographic*.

Franz Stolze (1836-1910) was a German engineer, photographer, and stenographer, as well as an avid photographer. A member of the Photographic Association of Berlin, Stolze founded a camera and photographic paper factory, as well as a photo lab in Berlin-Charlottenburg. He travelled to Iran in 1874 on a research trip on behalf of the Prussian Ministry of Culture, and left in 1881, bringing around 1,400 negatives back to Germany.

Hans-Wickart von Busse (1903-1962) was a German photographer who from 1933-1934 captured detailed images of ancient architecture during Ernst Herzfeld's excavation of Persepolis. He was a student of scientist and inventor Adolf Miethe, known for co-developing the first practical photographic flash and designing one of the earliest methods of colour photography. Von Busse retained several hundred prints and negatives from the Persepolitan mission, which, along with his weekly letters to his father in Germany, form an astonishing archive of Herzfeld's expedition.



The photographic processes

Salt print This was the main paper-based photographic process from 1839 until the end of the 1850s. English inventor Henry Fox Talbot sensitised paper to light by wetting it with a mild solution of dissolved salt, blotting it and letting it dry, and finally brushing one side with a solution of silver nitrate. This allowed the paper to darken when exposed to light. After the paper had been exposed, a wash of sodium thiosulfate could be applied to fix the image and prevent the paper from darkening further.

Albumen print The first commercial method of producing photographic prints involved applying an albumen (egg white) coating with light-sensitive salts to paper, and then exposing the paper to daylight through a glass-plate negative.

The process, which was developed in France by Louis Désiré Blanquart-Evrard in 1850, was the most common paper printing technique until the 1890s when the silver print replaced it. After exposure, albumen prints were usually toned to sepia in a gold-chloride solution that helped prevent fading.

Gelatin silver print These prints have become the most common type of black-and-white photographs since replacing albumen prints in 1895; the process is still in use today. Created by coating paper with a mixture of light-sensitive silver salts suspended in gelatin emulsion, gelatin silver prints typically display a full range of values from white to black.

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The Polygon Gallery

101 Carrie Cates Court
North Vancouver, British Columbia
V7M 3J4 Canada

thepolygon.ca

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Looking at Persepolis: The Camera in Iran, 1850 – 1930

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