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## **European Artists in Iran During the Qājār Period**

During the Qājār epoch Iranian artists exhibited a great interest in European paintings of the Renaissance and Baroque periods and the Realism of the nineteenth century. One of the vital reasons for such curiosity was the presence of European artists in Iran, most of whom were sent by their governments to explore social, cultural, and political situation of Iran, gather visual information, and provide maps for military purposes. These European paintings and drawings were intended as visual reports and were intentionally accurate, detailed and realistic. Qājār monarchs and princes, who were directly in touch with European artists-travelers, commissioned Iranian royal artists to follow the western style of the descriptive rendering of objects and people. Moreover, royal artists lived at court and they probably met European artists and became familiar with European techniques of sketching, drawing and painting. As a result Iranian painting became more realistic during the Qājār era.

The familiarity of Iranians with European schools of art begins with the political relationship with Europe in the seventeenth century, and increases in the nineteenth century. In Europe, industrial, social, and cultural changes reformed many political systems in the nineteenth century and ended many monarchial, feudal, and hierarchical systems that had existed for centuries. In the transition from monarchy to democracy, according to Stephen Eisenman, in his book *Nineteenth Century Art: A Critical History*, the bourgeois controlled some parts of Europe for about a century. On the one hand, the working class, farmers, and women followed revolutionary ideas of enlightened individuals in gaining their freedom and equality.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, industrialized nations invaded weak countries in Africa, South America, and the Middle East, maintaining economical and military supremacy during the colonial period of the nineteenth century. Britain, for instance, asserted control over oil and other resources in Iran to assure its routes to India. Countries such as Iran suffered constant interference by Europeans trying to enforce their ascendancy in the name of modernization, two-way friendship, and trade. Having political and economic clout, England, Germany, France, and the United States chased valuable resources and lands. As a part of the plan, European ambassadors, government missions, military men, traders, archeologists, and artists, all of whom traveled to different regions, took back to Europe information on future investments, as well as a large number of ancient and contemporary art pieces and treasures, which made many museums and private collections enormously wealthy.

European artists-travelers of the nineteenth century who traveled to the Middle East were either Orientalists or on diplomatic missions. Orientalists were in search of new ideas and exotic subject matter for their Western audiences whereas artists on diplomatic and military missions were sent to explore Middle Eastern countries such as Iran, gather visual information, and provide maps for military purposes. They did not go merely for art experiences, as did many Orientalists. Therefore, traveling to Iran to fulfill political objectives offered a superb chance for artists to collect visual information about the cultural, social, and political systems of Iran, its military, its people, and its different districts.



Fig. 1

For instance, Eugene Flandin, an Italian-born artist who lived in Paris, and Pascal Coste, a French artist, were sent to Iran on a mission in 1840 to collect information about Iran's political environment under the rule of Mohammad Shâh (ruled 1834-1848). The leader of this mission, Edouard De Sersi, was unable to manage his political duties in Iran, and the government recalled him to France. Yet, Flandin and Coste stayed in Iran and traveled to Hamedan, KermanShâh, Isfahan, Shiraz, and Persepolis. After two and a half years, they returned to France and published a six-volume album on Iran in 1851.<sup>2</sup>

Also, Jules Laurens traveled to Iran and Turkey on a government mission in July 1847 during Mohammad Shâh's reign. While on his mission of travel to Iran, Laurens provided many sketches and drawings of people and landscapes. He went back to Paris in 1850. The advantage Laurens had over other artists was that he was allowed to paint a portrait of a royal princess, the Shâh's aunt, Farah Khanoum (Lady Farah) in the Shâh's private harem; this was an opportunity for him to get some information about harem life.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, no information about this canvas has been found.

Since European artists-travelers were expected to produce visual information about Iran, their paintings and drawings were intentionally graphic and explicit in detail. European paintings and drawings were intended as visual reports, revealing to foreign governments vital information on the land and people of Iran. One of these artists was Louis Emile Duhousset, a French artist and army officer.

L. E. Duhousset was born in April 18, 1823. He attended military school and joined the army. As an officer, he was sent to Iran in 1858, when Naser-al-Din Shâh requested the French government to send a group to instruct the Persian army based on French standards. Since Duhousset was very interested in anthropology and human ethnicity, he prepared more than 600 drawings of people from different provinces on their way to Tehran. A year later he traveled to Isfahan, Shiraz, Kerman, Baluchistan, and Khurasan and studied ethnic groups such as the Lour, Bakhtiyari, Balouch, Armenians, and Turkamens. He provided hundreds of fast sketches in pen and ink, and watercolor drawings of soldiers and their weapons, men and women from different ethnicities, the monarch Naser-al-Din Shâh and his courtiers, attendants, servants, holy shrines, bridges, mountains, lakes, cities,

and gates of the cities. He left Iran after three years. His drawings impressed Napoleon III and Eugenie, the empress, deeply. In 1863, his works were exhibited at the Science Academy. The French Ministry of Education printed his drawings in a book.<sup>4</sup> His human figures contain accurate details of the costumes and characteristics of the sitters identifying them as to their rank, position, gender, and ethnicity. Duhousset visited the court of Naser-al-Din Shâh and provided at least two sketches of the Shâh, in one of which the monarch himself is drawing Duhousset.<sup>5</sup> These drawings suggest that the Shâh, some of the princes, and probably the royal artists of the time were introduced to Duhousset's technique. Moreover, the artist was one of the educators in the military department of the Dar-al-Fonoun School, and there is a good chance that he shared some of his works and techniques with the art teachers and even the students (see fig1).

Other artists-travelers invited to the royal court while accompanying diplomats also had the opportunity to show their work to the monarchs or paint their portraits. The rulers were fascinated with their realistic style and their techniques. For example, in his journal, Jules Laurens states that Mohammad Shâh was delighted with the portrait he made of the Shâh and commissioned him to do more oil paintings.<sup>6</sup> As a landscape painter, Laurens painted outdoor canvases in a realistic manner to be completed later in his studio.<sup>7</sup> Some of his landscape paintings, drawings, and sketches of the sites in Iran indicate the hardship of traveling, especially in winter.

Another artist Alberto Pasini was born in Basseto in 1826 and died in Cavoretto in 1899. In 1851, he moved to Paris, met Prosper Bourre, and traveled to Iran with him "on an official mission to counteract the Russian influence on Naser-al-Din Shâh." Pasini's drawings fascinated the monarch and he asked the artist to accompany him on hunting trips and his travels. Pasini was also commissioned to paint works of art for the royal family. The artist returned to Italy in 1856 and sent his paintings of Persia, Arabia, Azerbaijan, and Syria to the Salons in Paris.<sup>8</sup>

Other artists contributing important information included Eugene Flandin, who



Fig. 2

created hundreds of canvases and drawings of cityscapes, monuments, picturesque views, and people,<sup>9</sup> and Pascal Coste, who accompanied Flandin and was in charge of making the engravings of architectural depictions of the monuments and drawing war scene (see fig 2).<sup>10</sup> Colonel F. Colombari's drawings and paintings of battle scenes were studied by the military commanders in Iran,<sup>11</sup> and Jane Dieulafoy, the wife of a French officer whose drawings of different parts of Iran are still studied today by historians,<sup>12</sup> introduced different aspects and styles of nineteenth-century European painting to Iranian patrons and artists (see fig 3).

Three other artists traveled to Iran as well. The first was Emile Prise d'Avennes, who Born in Avennes in 1807 and died in Paris in 1879. He was an archaeologist, artist, and illustrator. The artist traveled to Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Iran, and India.<sup>13</sup> The second artist, Edwin Lord Weeks, was born in Boston in 1849 and died in Paris in 1903. He traveled to India in 1882 through Turkey and Persia. He published the book *From the Black Sea through Persia and India* and exhibited his oil paintings in Paris, Berlin, Munich, London, Boston, and Philadelphia.<sup>14</sup> Also, Henry Blocqueville de





Fig. 3

Couliboef was a French physician, painter, and photographer who traveled to Iran about 1858. He also joined the army as Sergeant of the Royal Guard and was in charge of recording military equipment and war scenes in paintings.<sup>15</sup>

The presence of Western artists in Iran increased the awareness of and popularity of new styles and techniques in painting. As the primary patrons of art, Qājār monarchs, who were directly in touch with artists-travelers, urged Iranian royal artists to emulate the style of these European artists. Since royal artists lived at court, there is a high probability that they met European artists and even were trained by them and were introduced to European techniques of sketching and drawing. Unintentionally, perhaps, European artists left behind visual elements of Western art, specifically the descriptive rendering of objects and people. Some aspects of European realistic painting found favor with Iranian artists and patrons, particularly subject matter displaying adversity, individuality, and social differences owing to rank, ethnicity, gender, and careers. As a result European artists traveling to Iran should be considered as one of the main

reasons for the raise of Realism in Iranian painting of the nineteenth century.

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## Endnotes:

1 “The age of modern colonialism began about 1500, following the European discoveries of a sea route around Africa’s southern coast (1488) and of America (1492). With these events sea power shifted from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic and to the emerging... Capitalism: also called free market economy, or free enterprise economic system, dominant in the Western world since the breakup of feudalism, in which most of the means of production are privately owned and production is guided and income distributed largely through the operation of markets.” — Eisenman, *Nineteenth Century Art*, p. 7.

2 Lynne Thornton, *The Orientalists Painter-Travelers 1828–1908*, p. 80. As Thornton states, Eugene Flandin was born in Naples, in 1803, and died in Paris in 1876. Pascal Coste was born in Marseilles, in 1787, and died in 1879.

3 Thornton, op. cit., p. 80. According to Thornton, Jules Laurens was born in Carpentras in 1825 and died in Saint-Didier in 1901.

4 See Manuchehr Farman-Farmayan, *Safari Beh Iran, Duhousset*, p. q.

5 See Farman-Farmayan, op. cit., pp. 7 and 9.

6 Lynne Thornton, *Women as Portrayed in Orientalist Painting*, 204.

7 Eisenman, op. cit., p. 246.

8 Thornton, op. cit., pp. 124–125.

9 Jean Calmard, “Flandin and Coste”.

10 Jean Calmard, “Flandin and Coste”.

11 Manoutchehr M. Eskandari-Qâjâr. “Mohammad Shâh Colonel Colombari traveled to Iran in 1833, during Mohammad Shâh’s reign, and served in the Iranian military as an advisor until the death of the monarch in 1848. Like other travelers-artists he provided many sketches and paintings. Iranian commanders used Colombari’s sketches of battle scenes for studying war techniques.

12 See Jean Dieulafoy, *La Perse, la Chaldee et la Susiane*.

13 See Thornton, op. cit., p. 264.

14 See Thornton, op. cit., p. 267.

15 See Yahya Zoka, *Tarikh-e Akasi va Akasaan-e Pishgam dar Iran*, p. 41.