



## DAGUERREOTYPE

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**DAGUERREOTYPE**, the first practical photographic process, introduced into Persia in the early 1840s, shortly after its official presentation to the French Académie de Science in Paris in 1839. It was developed by the French painter Jacques Daguerre (1787-1851) and involved exposing, through the lens of a camera, a silver-coated copper plate sensitized by iodine, then developing the image with vapor of mercury (for details of the process and its sources, see Daguerre). In Persia the introduction of the daguerreotype paved the way for a flourish of photography in the second half of the 19th century. In contrast to the Ottoman empire, where, especially in the Arabic-speaking lands, photography met with religious hostility until the early 20th century and thus was practiced mainly by local or foreign Christians (Çizgen, p. 15; Vaczek and Buckland, p. 35), in Persia it was never regarded as a demonic or anti-Muslim activity. The remarkable Persian imperial photographic archive (*ālbom-kāna*, lit., “house of albums”) in the Golestān palace in Tehran, though almost unknown to Western scholars before 1983, when the first scholarly study was published (Adle, 1983), contains thousands of photographs taken by Persians (Ātābāy).

Acceptance of the medium of photography in Persia reflected the cultural value attached to painting in general and portraiture in particular. From the early 16th century, in Persia, where only remnants of the traditional Islamic interdiction against images of living creatures survived, theoreticians dismissed it altogether and introduced the concept of the “two pens,” thus identifying the work of the painter and that of the calligrapher, whose art was considered the noblest (Adle, 1982, pp. 216-17; idem, 1975, pp. 98-99; idem,



1993, pp. 222, 240-41, 281-82; cf. Qur'ān 68, 96:1, 96:4). From that time onward Persian monarchs, princes, aristocrats, and other wealthy patrons had their portraits drawn or painted. Foreign diplomats were aware of the Persian passion for painting, especially portraiture, and novelties, and in the early 1840s two daguerreotype cameras were presented to Moḥammad Shah (r. 1250-64/1834-48), one on behalf of Queen Victoria, the other on behalf of Tsar Nicolas I, reflecting the Anglo-Russian rivalry in Persia. In Azarbaijan Faṭḥ-'Alī Shah's son Malek-Qāsem Mīrzā (1222-79/1807-62) also developed an interest in daguerreotype (Adle, 1983, pp. 262-75). Moḥammad Shah's successor, Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah (r. 1265-1313/1848-96), became a dedicated photographer, perhaps because his drawings were wanting in technique.

The French adventurer Jules Richard (1231-1308/1816-91), who eventually became a Muslim and a Persian civil servant, claimed that he had taken the first daguerreotypes with Moḥammad Shah's two cameras because no one at court knew how to use them (Richard, p. 113). The story seems unlikely, however, as the cameras were sold with illustrated instruction booklets and very probably the diplomats who presented them were able to provide demonstrations. At any rate, on 24 Du'l-Qa'da 1260/4 December 1844 "Madame 'Abbās," a young French milliner who had been metamorphosed into an influential Persian lady, introduced Richard to the court in Tehran, where he took pictures of the crown prince, Nāṣer-al-Dīn Mīrzā, and his sister 'Ezzat-al-Dawla (Richard, p. 113). Richard continued to take daguerreotypes at least until 1270/1853. None of his work seems to have survived, but some examples are known through royal portraits painted after his prints by [Moḥammad Khan Kamāl-al-Molk Ġaffārī](#) (Adle, 1983, pp. 252-62).

Malek-Qāsem Mīrzā took a daguerreotype of himself, which survived at the ancestral estate of the Malek-qāsemī family in 'Ajabšīr, Azarbaijan, until 24 Bahman 1357 Š./13 February 1979, when, during the riots following the Revolution of 1357 Š./1978, it was destroyed, along with unused silver-plated sheets of copper, other daguerreotypes, and the camera itself. A reproduction of this self-portrait, which shows the prince seated with a watch in his hand to measure the exposure time, is the only surviving photographic witness to the existence of Persian daguerreotype ([Plate LVI](#)). There is also a portrait of the prince painted in 1275/1858 after a "picture" (*'aks*), which could have been a daguerreotype. Malek-Qāsem Mīrzā offered the first recorded Persian photographic album to his young nephew, Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah, in 1266/1850. It can thus be assumed that already by the late 1850s he was no longer using the



daguerreotype process.

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**Plate LVI.** Malek-Qāsem Mīrzā. This self-portrait seems to be the only existing photographic witness to the one Persian daguerreotype that survived up to 1357 Š./1979. Copyright C. Adle.