

Original Research Article

Ameneh Mafitabar<sup>1</sup>

Received: 13 October 2021

Revised: 9 February 2022

Accepted: 5 March 2021

DOI: 10.22055/PYK.2022.17342

URL: [paykareh.scu.ac.ir/article\\_17342.html](http://paykareh.scu.ac.ir/article_17342.html)

How to cite this article: Mafitabar, A. (2021). The Visual Signs of Affluence in the Single Figurative Paintings of the Court Women in the Zand and Qajar eras and their Comparison with the Paintings of the Isfahan School. *Paykareh*, 10 (25), pp.29-43

..The Persian translation of this article is published in the same issue with the following title

«شانه‌های تصویری تنعم در تک پیکر نگاری‌های درباری زنانه عصر زند و قاجار در قیاس با نگارگری مکتب اصفهان»

## **The Visual Signs of Affluence in the Single Figurative Paintings of the Court Women in the Zand and Qajar eras and their Comparison with the Paintings of the Isfahan School**

### **Abstract**

**Problem Definition:** Royal figurative painting, a style of Persian painting formed during the Zand era, continued until the end of the reign of the third Qajar Shah in Iran. This type of iconography received much recognition during the 37-year reign of Fath-Ali Shah and such artworks followed fixed rules. Given that visual symbols are further manifested comparatively, the main question of the study is as follows: How are the visual signs of affluence in the single royal figurative paintings of court women of the Zand and Qajar eras in comparison with the Isfahān school of painting?

**Objective:** This study aimed to investigate the visual signs of affluence in the single royal figurative paintings of the Zand and Qajar eras restricted to the feminine custom.

**Research Method:** In this analytical-comparative study, stratified random sampling was used to select artworks from twelve royal figurative paintings to be studied in comparison with four miniatures from Isfahān school.

**Results:** Unlike the iconographies of women in Isfahān school, generally depicted in a reclined position in external spaces with simple and minimum backgrounds; during the Zand era and the first half of the Qajar era, women were painted in sitting, standing, dancing, and occasionally reclined positions in internal spaces with various kinds of foods, drinks and animals as signs of possessing wealth. In contrast with the preceding era, this pattern is not only defined in the style of painting but also in the view of opulence on the one hand and the female gender on the other.

### **Keywords**

Qajar Painting, Zand painting, Royal Figurative Painting, Isfahān School, Visual Sign, Affluence, Wealth

1. Corresponding author, Department of Textile and Clothing Design, Faculty of Applied Arts, University of Art, Tehran, Iran. Email: [a.mafitabar@art.ac.ir](mailto:a.mafitabar@art.ac.ir)

### Introduction

Royal figurative painting known as the first Qajar school is a style of Persian painting formed in the second half of 12th century AH (18th century AD) during the rule of Zand dynasty in Iran. Later, it reached its pinnacle during the reign of Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar, and more importantly during the rule of Fath-Ali Shah. Royal figurative painting waned during the reign of Mohammad Shah Qajar and was replaced with western nature painting. In this style, human figures bestow distinct importance and the visual elements are portrayed to express human wealth and affluence. This study examines visual signs of affluence, comfort, and riches in individual iconographies of women during the Zand and Qajar eras in Iran. Accordingly, the paintings are studied in comparison with miniatures of Işfahān (Isfahan) school in the preceding period, i.e., the Safavid era. Thus, the main question of the study is put forward as: How are the visual signs of affluence in the single royal figurative paintings of women in Zand and Qajar eras compared with Işfahān school of miniature? Given that these schools belong to consecutive historical periods, it seems that they may have followed a similar path in their world view and stylistics by means of almost similar visual frameworks. Since most studies have prioritized analyzing the form of Shahs [kings], particularly Fath-Ali Shah, and princes, there is limited research on royal figurative paintings of the Zand and Qajar eras with focus on women and femininity, that highlights the significance of this study. Moreover, deeper analysis can be anticipated as this study places emphasis on the works of Zand and Qajar eras and uses Işfahān school miniature as a touchstone. In this regard, after a brief review of the features of Işfahān school miniatures and paintings of the first Qajar school, a number of individual royal figurative paintings of women are studied in comparison with Işfahān miniatures of the Safavid era.

### Research Method

This analytical-comparative study is a basic research as it is theoretical and aims to expand the knowledge-base in painting. In this qualitative study, the data were collected from documents, using text and picture reading tools. The studied works included royal figurative paintings of the Zand and Qajar eras, which followed their particular principles and were centered on women. Accordingly, stratified random sampling was a fit method for this study. In this regard, the works were divided into different categories based on intra-group features and later, the samples were selected from each category proportionately. In individual Qajar iconographies, with the categorization of depiction of women in different positions including sitting, standing, reclined, or while performing acrobatic moves and dancing, twelve Qajar paintings were examined in comparison with four Işfahān school miniatures. Thus, the independent variable was depiction of the figure of women and the dependent variable was visual signs of affluence and wealth in their posture and expression, apparel, jewelry, and other visual elements based on the positive space including thrones, foods, drinks, and pets in their possession, which are analyzed in terms of their representation.

### Research Background

One of the main sources on royal figurative painting is "The Association between Qajar Literature and Painting" by "Alimohamadi Ardakani". The book provides an effective analytical account on attributing and preserving the term "royal figurative painting" as the common style of painting in the Zand and first half of the Qajar eras until the reign of Naser al-Din Shah (2013). The book is a countless source of understanding and analyzing the style

of painting common in the first half of the Qajar era, foregrounding it in the heavy shadow of natural painting which prevailed in the second half of Qajar rule. In this regard, in an article titled "Analysis of the Aesthetic Connections between Literary Return (Bazgasht-e Adabi) and Royal Figural Painting during Fath Ali Shah of Qajar (1785- 1925 A.D.)", Fahimifar, Khodayar, and Narimi (2015) scrutinized the connection of this specific style of painting with literature. Similar to previous work, they emphasized the influence of Persian literature on royal figurative painting of the Qajar era, rejecting interpretations that regard Qajar art merely earthly, full of glamor, and devoid of local views. Moreover, Jahangard, Shirazi and Porrezaian examined the features of this style of painting in their "Explanation of Ideal Realism in Qajar Royal Painting and its Proportion with Persian Traditional Painting" published in 2015. Later, Mafitabar and Kateb published "Restoration of the Design and Motif of the Textiles in the Reign of Fathali Shah Qajar in View of Royal Figurative Paintings" in 2018. These articles can be considered great steps towards official recognition of this school of painting. Such studies, somewhat influenced by "The Association between Qajar Literature and Painting" have attempted to show the features of painting during the reign of Agha Mohammad Khan, Fath-ali Shah, and Mohammad Shah, the influence of literature on the works, and their distinctions from western natural painting which was common during the second half of the rule of Qajar dynasty (i.e., the reign of Naser al-Din Shah, Mozaffar ad-Din Shah, Mohammad Ali Shah, and Ahmad Shah). Perhaps one of the most related studies to this topic is Khorsandi Akbarnezhad and Kharaziyan's "Social Position and Classes of Women in Qajar Royal Figurative Paintings" (2020), which focuses on a sociological view. They categorized the women of the Harem (Haramsara in Persian) as nobles, princesses, and wives of the courtiers on the first level and the dancers, minstrels, entertainers, and servants on the lower level. Put differently, they used visual analysis to determine the social base and occupation of women of Harem; however, they left out examination of signs of affluence and enjoyment in both categories. In this regard, the current study examines such visual signs from a new perspective by scrutinizing individual royal figurative paintings of women in the Zand and Qajar eras in comparison with the works of the preceding school, i.e., Isfahān school. Given that affluence and wealth are features of the particular paintings of this era, the study focuses on this theme and analyzes these signs in comparison with the Safavid (Isfahān) school in order to shed light on this visual change and attempts to explain the possible reasons for it. In addition, the paintings examined here were selected from less-studied ones with a forgotten identity compared with other instances of painting in this era.

### **Features of Isfahān School Miniature during the time of Reza Abbasi**

When Shah Abbas I (995–1037 AH / 1587–1628 AD) moved his capital to Isfahan (Isfahān), he achieved a great status in all arts with his orders and sky-high expenditure, which led painting to a new phase. (Pope, 1990, p. 53) Isfahan was considered a reputable cultural center even before Abbas I moved his capital to this area. He was a patron of the works of architects and artists during his reign and the city became not only the center of government but also trade and indeed, a symbol of the new social order in Iran. (Canby, 2003, p. 98) When the reign of Abbas I began, the art workshop of the royal library boomed after a period of recess. During the rule of Abbas I, there was a split in the traditional form and a new form emerged which broke away from the traditional idealism. Indeed, Abbas I sowed the seed of this school and had a great role in the flourishing of its talented artists. (Azhand, 2006, p. 36) In terms of stylistics, the influence of western art can be seen in the

paintings of Isfahān school as the link between painting and literature thinned in this era. Going beyond the limit of book illustration allowed painters to record daily and interesting events in the surrounding world in the form of individual figurative paintings and design. (Pakbaz, 2006, p. 124) The main feature of Isfahān school was the artists' interest in depicting the movement of figures where, in terms of aesthetics, they regarded the shape of wavy and curved arabesque patterns in connection with the whole elements of the topics. (Scarcia, 1997, p. 27) The most prominent painter of the time was Reza Abbasi who led the Isfahān school in late tenth century AH / sixteenth century AD and early eleventh century AH / seventeenth century AD. There are numerous paintings by Reza Abbasi with "raqam" (in Persian, writing artist's name on a work of painting). However, a number of his contemporary artists' name was Reza and were as famous as him, there are similar instances from the time (Pope, 2005, p. 122), which is a topic beyond the scope of this paper. Reza Abbasi created a new style in his time and shattered the traditions of Tabriz and Herat schools. Although he established the Isfahān school of miniature with his inclination towards western art and eastern traditions, he never attempted to apply shadowing and perspective. (Kargar & Sarikhani, pp. 2011, 122) In his assembly (or gathering) paintings, there are a few people, larger than the standard proportion and usually unrelated with the environment. The coloring and space are simplified and lines have overcome colors; moreover, his curved designs correspond with Nastaliq handwriting. In these paintings, there is a particular choice of color, manifested specially by various brown and purple shades. (Pakbaz, 2006, p. 123) In many of Abbasi's well-known paintings, the work is covered with a thin layer of color which is at times is supplemented with the golden patterns on the brocade apparel. (Gary, 2006, p. 148) Following him, the Isfahān school painters focused on the flow of pen, emphasis on the smoothness of lines, wrinkles, long shawls, and dervish cloaks. There are no traces of various trees, colorful bushes, huge mountains, luxurious buildings, streams, and plentiful decorations in the works of the artists in this era. Instead, the background is usually minimal with a half-trunk of a tree and scattered branches. The intensity and burnish of the colors are reduced and the paintings are limited to one or a few colors of a same family. Chiaroscuro is employed for the "Qalamgiri" [outlining] and the visages of figures are performed using "Qardaz" or the stripple technique. (Tavousi, 2016, p. 33) The works of this school indicate the peak of a change that began from mid tenth century AH / sixteenth century AD. along with Reza Abbasi, Mohammad Ghasem, Afzal al-Hosseini, and Mohammad Yusef were among other painters following this style. In their works, tall people dressed in noble apparel were depicted with official movements. (Pakbaz, 2006, p. 123) In this way, with Reza Abbasi's style known as Isfahān school, the royal painting boomed during the later years of Shah Abbas's reign and continued to the eleventh century AH / seventeenth century AD in the circle of his followers. (Robinson, 2005, p. 77) Afterwards, in later Safavid era, adding volume (influenced by western painting) increased in the works of Isfahān school. 2D painting gradually waned and the contrast between traditionalism and modernism paved the way for the emergence of royal figurative painting.

### **Features of Royal Figurative Paintings in the Zand and Qajar Eras**

Paintings in the Zand era (1164–1209 AH / 1751–1794 AD) continued the Safavid artistic tradition in the Isfahān school; however, fundamental changes laid the groundwork for the emergence of Qajar painting. Using symmetrical structure based on horizontal and vertical lines and limited warm colors, highlighting representation of human figure which filled the

whole space of the work, visualizing the ideal glory of figures based on Persian aesthetics, particular of literature, focusing on decoration in painting, and not specifying a light source and unshaded subjects in the background are among some of the achievements of Zand painting which lived on into the Qajar era. (Alimohamadi Ardakani, 2013, p. 39) This paved the way for royal figurative painting. After the one-year rule of Agha Mohammad Khan, during the reign of Fath-Ali Shah (1212–1250 AH / 1797–1834 AD), the Persian artistic movement continued as peace was established in Iran. Fath-Ali Shah was very interested in art fields particularly calligraphy, poetry and painting, which led to the revival of art in the early years of Qajar reign after the fall of the Safavid dynasty with the presence of artists and respected figures in arts. (Haghighat, 2005, pp. 579–580) Fath-Ali Shah was the patron of several prominent painters such as Mirza Baba, Mehr Ali, and Abdollah Khan, who contributed greatly to satiate the ample passion of the king to have large full-length paintings. (Robinson, 1995, p. 225) According to traditional Persian principles, he asked for artists to paint an imaginative portrait of to express his visage with grandeur and originality; a broad chest and a lean waist indicated power and beauty. (Soudavar, 2001, p. 388) This style continued roughly until the end of the reign of Mohammad Shah (1250–1264 AH / 1834–1848 AD), moreover, although its outcome remained in the paintings of the later periods in other forms such as lithography, coffeehouse painting, tile and glass painting, and others, it did not continue in a unified form and faded away during the intruding advent of Western art during the reign of Naser al-Din Shah and the other subsequent rulers. (Alimohammadi Ardakani, 2013, p. 55) In fact, structurally, the works of painters of the Fath-Ali Shah's reign were mostly oil painting techniques of the Zand era which was first experienced by Western artists in Isfahan. The style (using oil paint) became popular during Qajar era, particularly during the reign of Fath-Ali Shah. (Kargar & Sarikhani, 2011, p. 128) Accordingly, the individual figurative paintings in this school were usually pictures of kings, princes, and women. Moreover, the assembly (or gathering) paintings had romantic themes or depicted scenes from court or hunting. (Jahangard, Shirazi, & Porrezaiyan, 2015, p. 118) In these paintings, princes and minstrels are painted by a sash window or a window with folded curtains. The women are depicted with oval-shaped faces, connect brows, sormeh (kohl)-wearing eyes, hennaed fingers, and in languishing state. All ladies are visualized in brocade and pearl dresses and overflowing in jewelry and ornaments. All items in the illustration including thrones, crowns, carpets and cushions are all patterned and sumptuous. The people are introduced through the objects and no attempt has been made to represent their mental characteristics. Objects such as decanters, cups, fruits, and vases, fill the 2D space of the painting. (Pakbaz, 2006, p. 151) Women in these works are usually dancing or a similar act such as playing a musical instrument while holding a decanter, cup, and related items. A more important feature is that in this style, almost for the first time, a type of figurative painting with focus on female features emerges officially in many instances. (Jahangard, Shirazi, & Porrezaiyan, 2015, p. 119) Centering on the human figure, the paintings use other visual elements to represent royal life.

### **Visual Signs of Affluence and Wealth in Royal Figurative Paintings**

Depicting wealth is one of the major features of royal art since possessions and wealth create self-confidence as it is an attractive topic gathering people from different sides, and opulence is even regarded as God's grace. (Dehghan, 2010, p. 172) In literal meaning, wealth is a material affair from which one can profit and possess. Thus, everything that meets such factors is considered wealth. Fulfilling at least one individual and social need is

one of the basic benefits of wealth, some items such as jewelry and expensive furniture are secondary and the fanciful items are used merely for affluence and self-indulgence. (Foroughi, 1998, p. 26) Accordingly, in the visualization of royal kings from all tribes and periods of time, including the Zand and Qajar eras in Iran, it is not the first factors but the secondary aspects which verify wealth and welfare. In royal figurative painting, Persian literature influenced the desire to show wealth as in this period of time, Fath-Ali Shah established Khaghan Literary Society, which was a center for revival of poetry. In this way, painting was influenced by the institutionalized signs in Persian literature and the painter and the patron both understood a basic point, i.e., following the aesthetic culture which was accepted as the standard in Persian culture throughout centuries and bestowed an identity and function among everyone in the society. (Alimohamadi Ardakani, 2013, pp. 143–580) An interesting point is that similar to painting, emphasis on appearance is seen in Persian literature as in possessions, material things, vanities of the world, desire, wealth, appurtenance, universe, opulence, riches, and related economic elements such as goods, food, clothing, nourishment, earning a living, livelihood, silver and gold, property, luxury, and other similar words are used profusely in Persian poetry. (Dehghan, 2010, p. 168) In this way, the human figure plays a central role in this world view and imagery gives place to conventions of metaphoric beauty, glory, and grace in appearance. (Pakbaz, 2006, p. 151) Therefore, excessive decorations are foregrounded and substantially highlighted in relation with the cultural context of the time, the magnificence of royal life and the appearance of princes and courtiers drowned in jewelry. (Navaei Lawasani, 2013, p. 27) This is why the kingly elements visualized in the paintings of this era show achieving and possessing wealth as a point of inspiration and secondly, a feature reflecting pride and glory in addition to depicting the wealth expected of courtly life and kingly affluence - as the basic and main factor in such a life. Placing this emphasis is not a sign of God's grace but also authority of the ruler and his unconditional sovereignty over Iran with the power to constantly validate cultural values. As a result, the visual representation of power, with a long history in Iran, developed into a unified program to announce the dominance of the Qajar dynasty in the political field. Fath-Ali Shah's passion to use painting was not rooted in his haughtiness and fancy but constituted the artistic dimension of a unified cultural program and propaganda, which aimed to equate the reign of Qajar dynasty with the magnificent history of ancient Persia (Diba, 1999, pp. 427–433). With these discussions, the visual signs based on wealth and affluence are examined in the royal figurative paintings (of women) in sitting, standing, dancing, and reclined positions in the following.

### **Depiction of Women in the Sitting Position**

In individual royal figurative paintings of the Zand and Qajar eras, women are depicted in sitting positions including sitting on the knees, cross-legged in a more relaxed state and sitting on a throne or similar kind of seat. Figure 1, which belongs to the Zand era, shows a lady dressed in items of clothing specific to the time including a Dastār (or turban), a silk shirt, Moharramat (striped) pantaloons, a patterned Arkhalig, and a cummerbund, leaning to a Poshti (Persian backrest pillow or cushion) with a cup in hand. The thin shirt women wore in the Zand era had a slit from under the neck to the bosom and their pantaloons were made from Moharramat fabric with an oblique pattern. Arkhalig was a jacket inlaid with jewels, which women wore over their shirts. (Gheibi, 2006, pp. 526–530) The woman in the painting, similar to the women of the court including women of the harem, cup bearers and dancers is sitting and leaning to a Poshti with a relaxed and content look, although

artificial, wearing a Dastār inlaid with paisley pattern, expensive apparel, and pieces of jewelry such as earrings and necklace on a fine silken woven Kheshti carpet. Behind her, the interior space of a kingly castle is depicted with the fine art of Khatam-Kari as an architectural decoration; furthermore, similar to many of the figurative paintings of the era, a hung curtain is portrayed, recalling expensive velvet fabrics. Velvet was a single-colored fabric woven with cotton warp, weft and silken lint. (Talebpour, 2011, p. 22) Beside the woman, there is a bowl and plate, which seems to be filled with seeded pomegranate alongside a cat, which is visualized in many Qajar individual figurative paintings of women as a pet. Although sometimes other animals such as rabbits or birds like partridges are also depicted, in terms of quantity, cats are more frequently manifested in the paintings of the early Qajar era, aimed to highlight feminine coyness. Figure 2 is a painting of a lady from the Fath-Ali Shah era, wearing a headband studded with gems, a silk shirt, an inlaid armband, and an expensive gold embroidered skirt. She is sitting on the knees and holding a mirror in her hand to look and admire her whole beauty. In the miniatures renaming from the non-minstrel women of the court, apparels with gathered fabric can be frequently seen. An instance is the painting of a lady holding a mirror while wearing an embroidered skirt. Silken textiles with golden thread decorations such as “Golabatun”, which were the main part of making these clothes strengthens the assumption that her skirt is made with needlework. (Mafitabar & Kateb, 2018, p. 96) The background of this painting indicates only the interior space and no elements are used to complete its royal status. However, since the woman fills the most of the frame and her decorative features are emphasized, the simple background foregrounds the decorative glory and details used in depicting her figure. The focus on the figure as the subject of the work and reduced attention to the surrounding are features of most of patronized works of Zand and Qajar schools. Less attention is paid to the surrounding space since the subject of the work, based on the desire of the patron, is ideal representation of the figure’s appearance and personality features, making the figure the main element of the painting. Accordingly, with reduced focus on the surrounding space, consideration to the performance of clothing extensions and the is increased to an exaggerated degree (Jahangard, Shirazi, & Porrezaiyan, 2015, p. 117). Moreover, as the lady in the painting dressed in a gold embroidered silken dress has her focus on her own beauty in the mirror in her hand instead of having other delicacies such as food and drinks, she is one of the prominent women of the court and not a member of the service-providing group. In Figure 3, a woman from the time of Mohammad Shah is painted with an inlaid hat, silk shirt, velvet Arkhalig and skirt (inlaid with jewels) leaning on a cushion studded with pearls with a cat in her arms. Also, in the background, there is an exquisite green curtain and a beautiful vase as a sign of the visualization of nature. Before this, many of the elements in this painting such as peonies in naturalist form or holding a cat in arms in this specific position used to be in contrast with the principles of Persian art. However, these elements emerged in the royal figurative paintings in this era, influenced by the cultural symbols of the time such as western postcards, and their representation became an indication of affluence and royal wealth. In comparison with the women painted in See Figures 1 - 3, the woman in the painting from the Isfahān school (See Figure 4) is painted on a simple uni-colored background based on exterior setting with minimum visual elements. She is depicted with a long head-covering, a Qaba with delicate flora and fauna patterns, which could only be produced by fabrics like silk, and a red waist scarf. In this era, women wore a long Qabas which reached their ankles. Similar to men, they wore waist scarves and covered their head completely with a scarf that came to down to their shoulders.

(Gheibi, 2006, p. 458–465) This lady, in a metaphoric setting, is depicted on a uni-colored background with an unrealistic color and without a specific horizon line in the frame of the natural world. The curves in lines in the Qalamgiri and the dominance of line over color strengthen the extraterrestrial aspect of this work. Unlike the detailed surrounding in Figures 1 - 3, only a few golden abstract branches visualize the exterior setting of the work and the representation of what can be called objects of comfort is limited to a decanter. Although in Figure 4, the dominant visual element is the human figure just like in the instances from the Zand and Qajar eras, more space is reserved to the background with reduced human body size and the figure is formed in interaction with nature similar to other elements of the painting. In fact, the color and pattern of her apparel in harmony with the background color and use of flora and fauna imagery increase her interaction with other natural symbols. A deeper comparison reveals that in addition to evident structural differences such as artificial composition or physical and intense colors, the signs of Zand and Qajar affluence and wealth are apparent and discernible. In Figure 5, which belongs to the Zand era, the instance of feminine affluence and wealth is intensified with more reclined position, instead of sitting on the knees, and holding a musical instrument in hands. As a depiction of court minstrels, this woman is painted wearing a studded hat, a silk shirt inlaid with jewels, a delicate patterned skirt, and with hennaed hands and fingers leaning against a cushion by the window. Similar to Figure 3, a vase of peonies is used as decoration. There is a rug on the floor and two rabbits and a few apples complete the positive space. In the same way, in Figure 6, which belongs to Fath-Ali Shah's era, the woman is painted in a relaxed way by leaning to something like a seat. She is depicted wearing similar clothes as in the last painting and she holds a cup in hand. In front of her, fruits such as a Persian melon, apples, pears, and peaches and a partridge is looking at her. The bird is not only in her possession but can also guarantee the quality of her food in her future meals. On a similar note, in Figure 7, which belongs to later years of Qajar reign, probably late Fath-Ali Shah era or early Mohammad Shah era, a woman is painted with studded crown and expensive clothes leaning against a cushion. Her legs are stretched and she holds a cup in her hand. The background velvet curtain completes the painting. In comparison with this painting, Reza Abbasi's "Lady with a Mirror" from the Isfahān school is shown in, Figure 8 Although the figure's feminine presence is defined in exterior setting similar to, Figure 4 the work's earthly and tangible aspect is highlighted with the depiction of visual elements with realistic colors. It is as if the lady is daydreaming by looking at her face in the mirror, leaning on a cushion with a figurative design, which shows the skills of the weavers of the time and highlights the unique, delicate Safavid textiles. This type of figurative design on textile was popular in the Safavid era but waned in the Zand and Qajar eras. The design can be a metaphor of the lady's lover whom she seems to remember. The woman is painted leaning and dressed in the customary clothes of the Safavid era such as a hat, a Dastār, a shirt, a Qaba, shoes - for outside - and delicate jewelry (necklace, bracelet, and even anklet) in the shadow of abstract trees. There are a few walnuts and a small cup in front of her. In comparison with signs of wealth in Figures 5 - 7 such as various kinds of fruits and drinks, these elements seem minimum and insignificant. Not only they are not signs of flaunting but also they appear modest. Thus, it can be argued that visual signs of affluence were exaggerated in the Qajar era, centering on human comfort in interior setting with various visual delicacies (feminine beauty and its intensification with type of clothes, henna, flower arrangement, etc.), possession (jewelry), dominance (over birds and other pets such as cats and rabbits), and eating (various foods and drinks).



# PAYKAREH

Journal of Art Faculty, Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz

The Visual Signs of Affluence in the Single Figurative Paintings of the Court Women in the Zand and Qajar eras and their Comparison with the Paintings of the Isfahan School  
Volume 1o Issue 25. Page 29-43

37

Individual royal figurative paintings of women in the Zand and Qajar eras

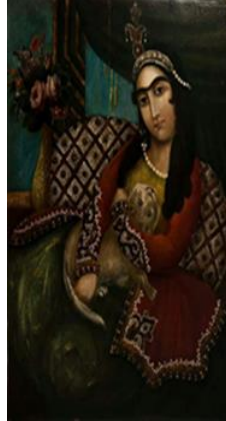
Individual figurative painting of women in the Safavid era



**Figure 1.** Woman and Cat. Oil on canvas. Late twelfth century AH / eighteenth century AD. The Shangri La Museum of Islamic Art, Culture & Design. Source: <https://fa.m.wikipedia.org>



**Figure 2.** Girl with Mirror. By Mohammad Hasan. Oil on canvas. Early thirteenth century AH / nineteenth century AD. Museum of Fine Arts (USA). Source: <http://museum.g>



**Figure 3.** Qajar Princess Oil on canvas. Early thirteenth century AH / nineteenth century AD. Massoud Nader private collection. Source: <http://www.massoudnader.com>



**Figure 4.** Woman Counting on Her Fingers. By Reza Abbasi. Watercolor on paper. Eleventh century AH / seventeenth century AD. The Bibliothèque nationale de France, Source: [Canby, 2014, p. 146.](#)



**Figure 5.** A Lady Playing a Mandolin. Oil on canvas. Late twelfth century AH / eighteenth century AD. Sotheby's private collection. Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org>



**Figure 6.** Lady with cup. Oil on canvas. Early thirteenth century AH / nineteenth century AD. Massoud Nader private collection. Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org>



**Figure 7.** Lady Resting against a Cushion. Oil on canvas. Early thirteenth century AH / nineteenth century AD. Victoria and Albert Museum (England). Source: <https://collections.vam.ac.uk>



**Figure 8.** Woman Counting on Her Fingers. By Reza Abbasi. Watercolor on paper. Eleventh century AH / seventeenth century AD. The Bibliothèque nationale de France. Source: [Canby, 2014, p. 146.](#)

**Depiction of Women in Standing Position**

In **Figure 9**, a court woman is painted from the Zand era, standing and dancing. She is depicted with a happy countenance and hennaed hands, wearing various jewelries such as a pearl necklace, armband, and studded crown hat, a shirt and skirt made of velvet and silk, an item of clothing which looks like tight trousers, and slippers. There is a parrot sitting on her hand and a cat is at her feet. Not only her looks bring to mind mirth and delight but also her jewelry, the fabric of her clothes, her makeup, ornamentation, and even the accompanying pets indicate her wealth and affluence. Moreover, besides the red velvet curtain, the background is defined at simplest to foreground the figure similar to. **Figures 2 & 6** It seems that she is one of the minstrels of the court. In a similar way, in **Figure 10**, a woman court servant from the Qajar era is painted holding a bottle and cup in her hands, indicating further mirth and ebullient with her twisted body. This Qajar woman with a similar makeup, ornamentation, and even clothing to the previous lady is in a part of the Andaruni (Harem) where the positive space is completed with various foods such as kebab, sweets, and drinks on a platform. There is also a white cat on the left corner of the frame. This is an element that can be found in many of the individual figurative paintings of women - and men - in this era. Continuing this trend, in **Figure 11**, standing position gives place to dancing. Here, the lady is painted with a studded dress and bare feet. She holds a plate of sweets and a red apple can be seen by her on the wooden lattice decoration. It can be imagined that the animal element of the cat is replaced with the apple and in depiction of foods and drinks sweetness is seen adequate. In fact, the women in these paintings, while recalling different social roles such as dancer, cup-bearer, or servant, are depicted in royal form and full of royal wealth, which they have taken to be seen with proper looks in the presence of the king, princes, and other courtiers. (See **Figure 12**)



**Figure 9.** Girl with a Pet Parrot. Probably by Mehr Ali. Oil on canvas. Late twelfth century AH / eighteenth century AD. Saad Abad Palace Museum (Iran). source: [Falk, 2014, P.18.](http://www.bonhams.com)



**Figure 10.** A Young Lady in a Coquettish Pose in and Interior, holding a Wine Bottle and Glass, a Cat Seated with Her Oil on canvas. Early thirteenth century AH / nineteenth century AD. Bonham's. Source: [https://www.bonhams.com](http://www.bonhams.com)



**Figure 11.** Woman Carrying a Plate of Sweets. Oil on canvas. Early thirteenth century AH / nineteenth century AD. Victoria and Albert Museum (England). Source: <http://collections.vam.ac.uk>

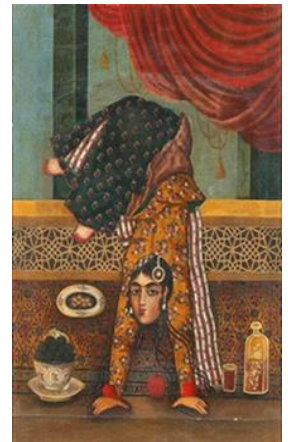


**Figure 12.** Woman with a Spray of Flowers. Watercolor on paper. Eleventh century AH / seventeenth century AD. The Freer Gallery of Art (USA). Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org>

is an individual figurative painting from the Safavid era in contrast with these instances. In this figure, the presence of the woman in nature is adequate in quality, requiring depiction of nothing but a tree as the sign of nature to show her fancy and mirth. The woman is painted with a patterned headband, shirt, Qaba, pantaloons, waist scarf, and shoes. She wears a delicate necklace as a sign of femininity. She stands by a sapling, smelling its blossoms in reflection as if she is in another world oblivious to her surroundings. In particular, the dominant blue color in the background and her clothes adds to this view. This type of representation is placed in contrast with the representation of women in the Zand and Qajar eras (See Figure 9 - 11), where they are depicted with maximum emphasis on material features with warm colors. It is a type of bodily representation at least a part of the philosophy of its formation seems influenced by the male hedonism because of the shape and form of the body. This kind of material rendering not only flaunts possessions such as beauty, jewelry, and access various foods as a sign of affluence but also verifies that the whole feminine presence and the enjoyment of women were in service of the higher class of the society, i.e., kings, princes, and courtiers whose absence as the observers of these paintings are evident, This is in contrast with the individual figurative paintings of women from the Isfahān school, Where all they have of material possession is a spray of flower or a decanter and even if they have an instrument or a cup in hand, they are painted in a sitting or standing position that is in interaction with the natural space and an indication of heavenly or divine atmosphere. They do not seem to be depicted in the role of a minstrel, servant or occupied with somebody or necessarily at the service of an another person.

### Depiction of Women in Reclined Position

In the Qajar paintings, women can be found frequently performing acrobatic moves (See Figures 13 & 14) and less in reclined position. (See Figure 15) There is no clear instance of acrobat women in the Safavid era paintings; however, in large scale, women in reclined position can be seen in the paintings of the Isfahān school and even sitting ladies are depicted tending to a reclined position. In Figure 13, which belongs to the early Qajar era, the acrobat woman is painted performing a handstand on a fine silk carpet with *Kheshti* design and floral patterns. Wooden lattice architectural decorations and red velvet curtain can be seen in the background. There is a red apple between her hands and there is a plate of sweets and a bowl filled with pomegranate seeds on the one side and a bottle of drink on the other. The woman is portrayed wearing makeup, dress, and studded hat, and her feet are hennaed. Similarly, in Figure 14, an acrobat woman wearing velvet shirt and floral skirt is depicted in the mature Qajar style performing tumble on an embroidered mat. Her pearl studded and inlaid dress stands out and not only the type of fabrics such as velvet, silk, and a cashmere shawl but also the excessive use of them in her clothes point to a wealth that allows purchasing such items as fine and expensive goods. Unlike other the belief in other governments, in the Qajar era when imitating western styles of clothing was not popular among the people, Persians wore items of clothing over the other to show their gentility and that they had more than one set of clothing. (Shahri, 1990, p. 496) In contrast with the common form in the paintings of the time, Figure 15 is one of the rare instances that portrays a Qajar woman in reclined position. With maximum ornamentation of the time such as hennaed hands and feet, studded hat, and various pieces of jewelry such as pearl necklace, silk shirt, and a fine laced skirt, she is painted reclined on a cushion with a hand fan. There is a plate of oranges and a few apples beside her. The few instances of women in reclined positions in the Qajar era is probably because the beauty and enjoyment of women were



**Figure 13.** Portrait of Female Acrobat Performing a Handstand. Oil on canvas. Early thirteenth century AH / nineteenth century AD. Sotheby's (England). Source: <https://www.sothebys.com>



**Figure 14.** Lady Acrobat Performing a Tumble. Oil on canvas. Early thirteenth century AH / nineteenth century AD. Victoria and Albert Museum (England). Source: <https://collections.vam.ac.uk>

# PAYKAREH

Journal of Art Faculty, Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz

The Visual Signs of Affluence in the Single Figurative Paintings of the Court Women in the Zand and Qajar eras and their Comparison with the Paintings of the Isfahan School

Volume 1o Issue 25. Page 29-43

40

depicted in the role of minstrel, dancer, entertainer, cup-holder, and servant at the service of the owners of the harem, i.e., kings and courtiers, and less in individual form specific to them. In comparison with Figures 13 -15 where women are painted in an exaggerated interior setting with different expensive clothes, foods, and drinks, Figure 16 from the Safavid era portrays a lady looking at a dog in reclined position in exterior setting. Despite the colorful visage of the woman and the painter’s effort to depict her beauty, which is in line with the principles of the era, the floral imagery is painted in yellow ochre to foreground the figure of the woman and only a vase is depicted with a color similar with her apparel for the balance of the composition. Instead of the recurrent cats in the Qajar paintings, there is a dog over one of the two bowls in front of the woman. Perhaps this could indicate that in Persian culture, a dog was kept outside the living space; *Andaruni* or Harem. Therefore, as Safavid paintings represent exterior settings, the presence of a dog is observed; however, since the Qajar instances focus on the royal harem, cats can be seen, animals better fit for feminine coquetry. As in later works of Reza Abbasi, contemporary topics are further highlighted and foreigners are depicted playing with their pet dogs, (Canby, 2003, p. 102) the woman, in reclined position, looks at a dog in Figure 16 by Mir Afzal Tuni.



**Figure 15.** Reclining Lady Holding a Fan Oil on canvas. Early thirteenth century AH / nineteenth century AD. Victoria and Albert Museum (England). Source: <https://artuk.org>



**Figure 16.** A Reclining Woman and Her Lapdog. By Mir Afzal Tuni Watercolor on paper. Eleventh century AH / seventeenth century AD. The British Museum (England). Source: [Canby, 2004, P.107](#)

Overall, the comparison of the individual figurative paintings of women from the Zand and Qajar eras with the Safavid era reveals difference in view not only in the style of painting but also towards comfort and affluence on the one hand and female sex on the other. (See Table 1)

**Table 1.** Comparison of visual signs of affluence in individual royal figurative paintings of women in Zand and Qajar eras with Isfahān School of Miniature. Source: Author.

Composition	Zand and Qajar schools	Isfahān school
<b>Style of depiction of figure</b>	Reserving maximum space for the human figure / sitting (on the floor, a platform, or a chair) / standing / dancing / performing acrobatic moves / reclining	Reserving dominant visual space for the human figure, in interaction with other elements / reclining / standing / sitting (usually on the ground)
<b>Makeup and ornamentations</b>	Connected-brows / lush eyes with Sormeh (kohl) / rosy cheeks, plump body, long black hair / small mouth and nose, hennaed hands and feet	Connected-brows / lush eyes / plump body / long black hair and almost covered under a scarf and headband / small mouth and nose / jewelry items

# PAYKAREH

Journal of Art Faculty, Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz

The Visual Signs of Affluence in the Single Figurative Paintings of the Court Women in the Zand and Qajar eras and their Comparison with the Paintings of the Isfahan School

Volume 1o Issue 25. Page 29-43

41

Composition		Zand and Qajar schools	Isfahān school	
		/ jewelry items (pearl necklaces, studded armbands, inlaid hats)	(delicate necklaces, bracelets, and anklets)	
<b>Clothing</b>		Expensive silk, velvet inlaid shirts and skirts ornamented with cashmere scarves	Shirts, pantaloons, qabas, headbands, head-scarves, and waist scarves made from various fabrics with human, floral, and fauna patterns / with shoes	
<b>Surrounding space</b>	Manner	Andaruni space with depiction of windows and columns, velvet curtains, cushions and pillows studded with pearls, exquisite rugs / window, platform, and architectural decorations with wood lattice design and khatam-kari	Exterior space with depiction of rocks and natural imagery such as plants	
	Visual elements	Plant	Vases with passion flowers (a type of flower known as peony)	Vases, flowers, bushes, and trees
		Animal	Cats / rabbits / parrots and partridges	Dogs
		Inanimate objects	Instruments / various fruits (Persian melon, apples, oranges, pomegranates, peaches, etc.) Bottles and plates of food (kebab and sweets) / hand fan and mirror	Cushion / glass and metal (golden) bottles and china bowls / mirror / walnuts
	Coloring	Warm colors such as red, green, navy blue, gold, yellow, and brown	Minimum colors with the dominance of neutral colors such as ochre and khaki in the background and other colors in the depiction of the subject	

## Conclusion

Women are the center of a large number of works in the single figurative paintings of the Zand and Qajar eras. They are depicted with maximum ornamentation in sitting, standing, dancing, performing acrobatic moves, and rarely in reclining position at the center of the frame. They generally are painted looking at the audience with a cup or an instrument in hand. They are conscious of their beauty or are busy entertaining the audience in the real world. Although these paintings differ from those remaining of the previous era, i.e., the Safavid era, in terms of artistic quality and structure, it can be argued that the paintings of both compared eras focus on the human figure. A deeper examination reveals that depiction of female figure in Zand and Qajar eras overshadows other elements, while the female figures in the miniatures form the Isfahān school are defined in interaction and harmony with other elements of the painting. In the individual figurative paintings of the Zand and Qajar eras, women are portrayed with maximum elegance decorated with jewelry and expensive clothes in an artificial state in interior space such as a castle in the most beautiful form of the time - influence by Persian literature. In addition, they experience instances of material wealth such as various foods and possession of pets like cats and parrots. This is

in contrast with the individual figurative paintings of the Safavid era as they depicted women in exterior space sitting, oblivious to the surrounding world, in seclusion far from flaunting even if they have a cup or instrument. They possess a branch of tree or spray of flower and are sunk in self-reflection in reclining position, perhaps thinking about their lovers. Emphasis on curved lines and the use of minimum colors against the Qajar and Zand warm and bright colors further manifest this timeless and placeless quality, highlighting the physical and material quality of Qajar painting. Perhaps the portrayal of women in the royal figurative paintings could be seen as a sign of kingly possession and dominance of the male desire since it seems that the women in all positions (sitting, standing, dancing, or performing acrobatic moves) are at their service to provide comfort through visual pleasure or foods and drinks. This is in contrast with the miniatures of the Işfahān school where women in all states, even jolliness or resting, appear self-sufficient. Regardless of these assumptions, the clear result of this study indicated that in figurative paintings of women from the Zand and Qajar eras, depiction of interior space with different equipment of comfort such as exquisite rugs and curtains, cushions and pillows, various kinds of foods and drinks, flowers and vase, and pets, particularly cats, pave the way for defining the female role in maximum affluence and wealth, while in the Safavid paintings, women are portrayed in interaction with the natural space like an element of the nature. The depiction of food is limited and if necessary, a dog is represented as a guardian pet. Therefore, with the change in visualization of space from exterior to interior, women were portrayed more coquettish, display of wealth gained more importance, manifested not only in makeup, ornamentation, clothing, and jewelry, but also flaunting other symbols of material life like foods. In addition to verifying the fundamental change in view towards art and painting, this indicates definition of symbols of wealth and praising or censuring its display, and indeed, the general view towards women and femininity at that time. Future studies are recommended to employ other methods than description to examine seemingly familiar topics which have not been analyzed sufficiently. This could lead to assessment of previously neglected topics in introducing the artistic values of Iran.

## References

- Alimohamadi Ardakani, J. (2013). *The Association between Qajar Literature and Painting*. Tehran: Yassavoli.
- Azhand, Y. (2006). *Isfahan School of Painting*. Tehran: Iranian Academy of the Arts.
- Canby, Sh. (2003). *Persian Painting*. (M. Hosseyni Trans) (2<sup>nd</sup> ed). Tehran: University of Art.
- Canby, Sh. (2014). *The Rebellious Reformer: The Drawings and Paintings of Riza-yi Abbasi of Isfahan*. (Y. Azhand Trans) (3<sup>rd</sup> ed). Tehran: Iranian Academy of the Arts.
- Dehghan, A. (2010). Economic Topics in Persian literature. *Journal of Literary Aesthetics*, 2(5). PP.167- 193.
- Diba, L. (1999). Images of Power and the Power of Images. *Iranname*, (67), PP. 423- 452.
- Fahimifar, A., Khodyar, E. & Narimi, M. (2015). Analysis of the Aesthetic Connections between Literary Return (Bazgasht-e Adabi) and Royal Figural Painting during Fath Ali Shah of Qajar (1785–1925 A.D.). *Comparative Literature Research*, 3(6). PP. 131 – 156.
- Falk, S. J. (2014). *Qajar Paintings: Persian Oil Paintings of the 18<sup>th</sup> & 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (A. Baharluo Trans). Tehran: Peykare.
- Foroughi, M. (1998). *The Wealth of Nations*. Tehran: Forouzan.
- Gary, B. (2006). *La Peinture Persane* (A. Sherve Trans). (2<sup>nd</sup> ed). Tehran: Donyayenopub.
- Gheibi, M. (2006). *An 8000- Year History of Persian Costume*. Tehran: Hirmad Book Store.
- Haghighat, A. (2005). *History of National Arts and Iranian Artist* (Vol. 1, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed). Tehran: Koumesh.

- Jahangard, A. Shirazi, A. & Porrezaiyan, M. (2015). Explanation of Ideal Realism in Qajar Royal Painting and its Proportion with Persian Traditional Painting. *Kimiya-ye-Honar*.4(16). Pp.107 - 122.
- Kargar, M. & Sarikhani, M. (2011). *The Illumination in Islamic Civilization of Iran*. Tehran: Samt.
- Khorsandi Akbarnezhad, N. & Karaziyan, L. (2020). Social Position and Classes of Women in Qajar Royal Figurative Paintings. *Sixth National Conference on New Research in the Field of Humanities and Social Studies in Iran*. Iranian Demographic Association Tehran, Iran.
- Mafitabar, A. & Kateb, F. (2018). Restoration of the Design and Motif of the Textiles in the Reign of Fathali Shah Qajar in View of Royal Figurative Paintings. *Pazhuhesh-E Honar*, 8(15). Pp. 87-106.
- Navaei Lawasani, Z. (2013). *A Survey on the Painting of the Qajar Period*. Tehran: Nikkherad.
- Pakbaz, R. (2006). *Persian Paintings: from Ancient Times to the Present* (5<sup>th</sup> ed). Tehran: Zarrionosimin.
- Pope, A. (1990). *An Introduction to Persian Art: Since the Seventh Century AD* (H. Nayer Trans). Tehran: Bahar.
- Pope, A. (2005). *Survey of Persian Art* (Y. Azhand Trans) (2<sup>nd</sup> ed). Tehran: Molapub.
- Robinson, B. W. (1995). *An Article of Art et Societe dans le Monde Tranien* (26). (Y. Azhand Trans) (2<sup>nd</sup> ed). Tehran: Molapub.
- Robinson, B. W. (1996). Painting after Safavid Era. *The Arts of Persia* (Under Review R. W. Ferrier. P. Marzban Trans). Tehran: Forouzanfar.
- Scarcia, G. (1997). *A Part of Encyclopedia of World Art* (Y. Azhand Trans). Tehran: Molapub.
- Shahri, J. (1990). *Social History of Tehran in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century* (Vol 2, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed). Tehran: Rasaa.
- Soudavar, A. (2001). *Art and History Trust Collection (Houston, Tex)* (M. Shemirani Trans). Tehran: Karang.
- Talebpour, F. (2011). *The Story of Iranian Textile* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed). Tehran: Alzahra.
- Tavousi, A. (2016). *Persian Painting* (10<sup>th</sup> ed). Tehran: Sahami Khas.

