

A Borrowed Gaze: Antoin Sevruguin's Photographs in Ivar Lassy's *Behind Lattice and Veil* (1917)

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Abstract

The paper analyzes the use of late 19th – early 20th century photographs by Antoin Sevruguin in the paperback edition by Helsinki-based author Ivar Lassy *Behind Lattice and Veil* (Helsinki, Otago, 1917). Photographer Antoin Sevruguin, originally Russian, lived and worked in Tehran from late 1860s up until his death in 1933. A generalized picture of a Persian woman is among the most common motifs of photographs that had been bought from Sevruguin studio by travelers and researchers alike, and eventually landed in the West. This paper looks closer at the re-contextualization of Sevruguin's images in Lassy's book as an example of adaptation of photographs as means of cultural representation by both popular and scientific discourse of the Orient.

Keywords: 19th Century; Photography; Gender; Anthropology; Orientalism.

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Introduction

The unique position of photography as a phenomenon that unites advanced technology and tradition of visual representation is to a large extent connected with the mobility and reproducibility of the image. Migrating from one geographic, cultural, ideological context to another, photographs are engaged in constructions of new meanings. Such is the story of many photographs that were made in Persia in late 19th, early 20th century by Antoin (Anton Vassilyevich) Sevruguin and purchased by travelers and researchers alike for private use for the sake of research and education, and further accumulated in private and public archives. This article studies the example of migration of a selection of Sevruguin's photographs that were used as illustrations in the book *Behind Lattice and Veil* [Hunnun ja ristikon takana] by Ivar Lassy, printed by Otava publishing house in Helsinki in 1917 (a copy of the book can be found in the library of the Finnish Museum of Photography). Addressed to a wide audience and focused on the author's encounters with the local women in Persia, the book interleaves the stories of personal experience with knowledge of Persian culture and tradition, observations and evaluation of cultural phenomena. There is no evidence of Ivar Lassy being acquainted with Antoin Sevruguin, although the latter was alive when the book was published. The photographs were obtained for publication from the archive of Russian diplomat Aleksanteri Ijas (now in the collection of the Finnish Museum of Photography¹).

This case of migration of photographs from one author to another, one cultural and professional context to another, provokes a number of questions: how do photographs change their meanings as they are re-contextualized in the course of their migration? By what qualities of photographs, does this change happen? Finally, integrated in a hybrid product (an illustrated book), how does this hybrid entity add/subtract meanings to the photographs, and what meanings exactly? This article is dedicated to searching answers to these questions, with Sevruguin images in Lassy's book as an exemplary case of photographic migration. I will start with outlining the cultural contexts of these photographs' initial production and further use, by addressing the topoi suggested by the biographies of Antoin Sevruguin and Ivar Lassy, after which I will describe how the photographs are used in Lassy's book and, finally, will suggest a way to analyze this case of the migration of photographs.²

1 The two authors

Antoin Sevruguin (late 1830's - 1933) was born into a family of Russian diplomat in Tehran and spent his early years in the Caucasus (Tbilisi, Akulis, and Baku). An important encounter for Sevruguin's choice of profession was with the Russian photographer Dmitry Ivanovich Ermakov (1845-1916) who accumulated over 25 thousand photographic negatives and over 127 photographic albums during his travels in the Crimea, Central Asia, Northern Caucasus and Iran. The cooperation with Ermakov possibly gave Sevruguin an understanding of photography being the means by which he can provide for himself and his mother and sisters (his father died in a horse accident when Sevruguin was a boy, and since then his mother had to find the means to sustain the family). Having settled in Persia in early 1870s, Sevruguin, together with his two brothers, established a photography studio (first in Tabriz and later in Tehran) that produced, over almost three decades, several thousands of glass negatives (made in the technique of wet collodion) with a vast range of motifs: studio portraits, architecture, archaeological monuments, street scenes and landscapes, life of the court, ethnographic "types", pieces of folk art (sculpture, ceramics, miniature paintings, carpets).³

The glass negatives were stored in the studio, and the albumen photographs printed off them were sold to tourists, anthropologists, ethnographers, researchers of Iranian culture (Sevruguin was one of the resident photographers recommended in the travel guides at the turn of the last century for tourists visiting Persia). It is known that he had made a number of photographs on commission by German historian Friedrich Sarre

1. Collection of Sevruguin's photographs in the archive of Aleksanteri Ijas, Finnish Museum of Photography. D1993:11/296-341. All images are vintage prints approximately 13 by 18 cm, with penciled inscriptions on the reverse
2. I wish to thank the specialists at the Finnish Museum of Photography in Helsinki for their attention, help and support in my research of their collection.
3. For a detailed account of Sevruguin's biography, his service in Persia and memories of his contemporaries, see: Sevruguin and the Persian Image: Bohrer, F., Sackler, A.M.(eds., 1999). *Sevruguin and the Persian Image: Photographs of Iran, 1870-1930*. Gallery and University of Washington Press.

(1865-1945) who was in need of images of archaeological monuments belonging to Achaemenid and Sassanid Empires in Southern Iran. The expedition undertaken by Sevruguin for Sarre was successful largely due to the photographer's good contact with the leaders of the local communities. Sevruguin was an erudite, a lover of Iran and a connoisseur of Persian culture. In his Persian passport he used the words "nurtured by Iran" as his last name. By the contemporaries' accounts, he willingly recited Persian poetry at celebratory gatherings. He also had a good connection with the current Shah, Naser-al-Din (in reign: 1846–1896) who himself practiced photography and who commissioned Sevruguin to document the life of the royal court.

Unfortunately, Sevruguin's archive suffered severely in 1908 during the street riots when most of the negatives perished in fire (only 2000 of 7000 were recovered). Remaining 2000 negatives were confiscated in the 1930's by Shah Reza Pehlevi (in reign: 1925-1941) who was aspiring for Persia's modernization and regarded Sevruguin's work as the image of "old" Iran. However, a lot of Sevruguin's work has been saved in the form of prints that had been bought by travelers and accumulated in various collections, from private family archives to public libraries and museums.⁴

In his discussion of whether the notion of "Orientalism" is applicable to Sevruguin's work, Iranian-born researcher Ali Behdad suggests to regard it from more than one perspective. Indeed, Sevruguin did feed on the tropes of the Western representations of the Near East and thus his images may be perceived as "Orientalist", in the way in which Edward Said in his seminal book *Orientalism* (1978) understood the term, i.e. when, in the paradigm of Western imperialism and colonialism, the Orient is the cultural "other" to the West, — mysterious, ancient, untamed, traditional, cruel, erotic, exotic, — and the Orientalist image is the one that justifies the Western domination over the East. However, Ali Behdad continues, in his love of the country and its culture, Sevruguin "did not reduce Iran and its people to Orientalist clichés but represented them through the eyes of a man informed about local knowledge and genuinely interested in its culture. As a result, his photographs can be interpreted in multiple ways" (Behdad 1999: 91). One of the prospective ways to look at Sevruguin's photographs may be through the prism of recent discussions on "Orientalism" as the interest in and scholarship of Eastern religion and philosophy by the Western people in their search for spiritual and artistic inspiration.⁵ I suggest that both Antoin Sevruguin and Ivar Lassy are to be regarded from the point of view based upon this recent understanding of Orientalism.

Like Antoin Sevruguin, Ivar Lassy (1889-1938) also has a special connection to the Middle East. In his study of Lassy's political and academic biography, Finnish researcher Otso Kantokorpi quotes Lassy's autobiography:

I do not know if my place in eternity is amidst the eternal fires and tortures. I only know that I am, in a way, already the child of the eternal fires. I was born amongst the eternal fires, far from civilization, in the centre of a wonderful, completely barren nature, which usually destroys the little seeds of life which stray there. (Kantokorpi 1984: 516)

Born into a family of a sea captain in Azerbaijan (to which he refers in a poetic way by using the allegorical name of Azerbaijan, "the land of eternal fires"), Ivar Lassy received his education in Finland but spent his childhood summers in Baku. Lassy received his master's degree in 1913 from the University of Helsinki. His doctorate (1916) was entitled *The Muharram Mysteries Among the Azerbaijani Turks of Caucasia*, Muharram mysteries

4. The largest of the known collections of Sevruguin's images belongs to Smithsonian Institute. Other collections where Sevruguin's work has been identified include those of Leiden University, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden, Finnish Museum of Photography, as well as three institutions in St. Petersburg, Russia: ROSPHOTO Museum and Exhibition Centre, Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography. For more information about Sevruguin's work in St. Petersburg collections, see: Gourieva, M.M., Starilova L.A. (2013). "Orientalny mir v fotografiyakh iz kolektsii ROSPHOTO [Oriental world on photographs from ROSPHOTO collection]." In *Chteniya pamyati V.F.Minorskogo(1877-1966). Istochnikovedenie i istoriografiya stran Blizhnego i Srednego Vostoka*. [Readings in the memory of V.F.Minorsky (1877-1966). Source studies and historiography of the countries of Near and Middle East]. Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of RAS. St.Petersburg: LEMA In Cyrillic: Гурьева, М.М., Старилова, Л.А. (2013). "Ориентальный мир в фотографиях из коллекции РОСФОТО." *Чтения памяти В.Ф.Минорского(1877-1966). Источниковедение и историография стран Ближнего и Среднего Востока*. Институт восточных рукописей РАН. Санкт-Петербург: ЛЕМА.

For more information on Sevruguin's work in the Dutch collections, see, for instance: *Sevruguin's Iran: Late Nineteenth Century Photographs of Iran from the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden, the Netherlands* (1999). Edited by Fereydoun Barjesteh van Waalwijk van Doorn and Gillian M. Vogelsang. Tehran: Eastwood/Rotterdam: Zaman, Barjesteh.

5. An important resource within this discussion: App, Urs (2010). *The Birth of Orientalism*. PennPress.

being the religious rites also common in Persia.⁶ In 1917, the popularized version of his thesis was published in Swedish by Holger Schildts publishing house under the title *Persian mysteries. Legend, poetry, drama and ceremony* [Persiska Mysterier. Legend, dikt, drama och ceremony]. In the same year Otava publishing house in Helsinki printed 2700 copies⁷ of Lassy's book *Behind Lattice and Veil*.⁸ As follows from the preface to the book, it was to become first of a succession of works introducing the culture and traditions of Persia to a wide audience, the general title to the series to be "The People of Lion and Sun" (the lion and sun referring to the Persian coat of arms). However, after *Behind Lattice and Veil* there was no succession to this series.

After the Finnish Civil War, in which Lassy had been on the Reds' side, and the subsequent seven-months imprisonment, his further actions in the left-wing politics and press (he was the editor of *Sosialistinen Aikakaulehti* in 1919-23) brought him to court and imprisonment again, in 1920. The possibilities of an academic career in Finland were cut off for Lassy, in 1923 he moved to the USSR where he continued to be politically active: in 1924-25 he was the minister of education in Soviet Karelia, after that he went further to Moscow, where he became the head of the Scandinavian department of the Comintern and taught Oriental languages at the University of Moscow (1932-35). Lassy perished in the Stalin's purges, after his book *The Fundamentals of Marxism* [Marxism in perusteet] was found anti-revolutionary. According to the information retrieved by International Memorial Society, Lassy was arrested on 22 February 1938. He had been a member of the Communist Party since 1919, and at the time of arrest he was the bookkeeper of Frunzensky district housing department, before then he had been in charge of the foreign department at the Main Administration of Literature and Press at the Council of People Commissars, the board at the USSR government that was responsible for censorship of printed materials and for the safeguarding of state secrets in mass media. Lassy was convicted of espionage in favor of Finland on 22 May 1938 and executed on 4 June 1938 in Butovo (in the vicinity of Moscow).⁹

2 Photographs, re-contextualized

The critical overviews given in 1917 were in general positive to *Behind Lattice and Veil*. Otso Kantokorpi quotes from the review of the book in *Dagens Press*: "we too have men who penetrate deep into the life and conceptual world of strange peoples" (Kantokorpi 1984: 524). Professor Knut Leonard Tallqvist, who had been the opponent of Lassy's dissertation, criticizes the book in *Finsk tidskrift* for giving account of intimate relationships with women and for exposing details about "erotic sensations and desires" (Tallqvist 1918). In his 1984 article on Lassy, summarizing the contents of the book, Otso Kantokorpi, ranks *Behind Lattice and Veil* as a travelogue and characterizes it as "one of the best of its kind in the Finnish repertoire" (Kantokorpi 1984: 524).

One half of the short, three-page preface to the book is the characterization of "a Persian woman". Lassy writes that "history and culture of Persia are created by men. Persian woman is always an observer. Perhaps more of her natural inclination than compulsory inaction outside the domestic activities, or because her thinking has not been schooled, she lacks space in her vision, greatness in her emotion and courage in her will" (Lassy 1917:8). Lassy's Persian woman is something of a Rousseau's 'noble savage' with a gender: she is described as uneducated and intellectually unskillful (and therefore unaware that she should demand to be respected, "like the educated women do"), deeply sensitive to others' pain, generally uninterested in love but devoted to motherhood, keen of decorating herself but unsophisticated in use of her charms, and, in general, leading a "comfortable and inactive life" (Lassy 1917: 8-9). After this generalization is made, Lassy's narrative

6. For a more detailed account of Lassy's studies of the Orient, see: Kantokorpi, Otso (1984). "Ivar Lassy and his Adventures in the Land of Eternal Fires." *Studia Orientalia* 55(25): 513-534. Retrieved from <https://journal.fi/store/article/view/49790>.

7. Information received from the employees of Otava in personal email on 25 Feb 2020.

8. The Swedish version of the book is mentioned in the bibliography to the article by Otso Kantokorpi (under the title *Bakom gallret och slojan*, 1917), but it has not been possible to find the full bibliographical data of the book.

9. See entries on Lassy in the lists of the victims of political repressions: *Butovsky polygon, 1937 — 1938 gg.: Kniga pamyati zhertv politicheskikh repressiy* [Butovo Polygon, 1937-1938: The Memory Book of the Victims of Political Repressions] (1997). Edited by Yu.P.Blinov et al. Moscow: Institut eksperimentalnoy sotsiologii [Institute of experimental sociology]:253. In Cyrillic: *Бумовский полигон, 1937 — 1938 гг.: Книга памяти жертв политических репрессий* (1997). Редколлегия: Блинов Ю.П. и др. Москва: Институт экспериментальной социологии:253. Online database: <https://base.memo.ru/person/show/2646681>.

throughout the book is dedicated to concrete women that he meets as he moves from one place in Persia to another, the women who he befriends and who become, scientifically speaking, his informants: a young wife, a wife to be, an old woman, a widow, a barren merchant's wife. The chapters are structured along the change of places and informants, each of the five chapters being dedicated to a new place and woman/women that Lassy meets, observes and communicates with. He reproduces their accounts and considerations of topics important for a woman's life, including love, marriage, adultery, chastity, free love, and incest. His researcher role is often mixed with personal relationships, and his observations are interleaved with self-ethnography. For instance, the first chapter and the longest of the five, describes his life in the house of a Haji Masum. Lassy's observations of the local culture combines with the account of his gradually developing acquaintance with the women of the house, when they first hide and spy on him and eventually start talking to him and even at one occasion invite him to watch them dance on the women's side of the house. He writes down the dialogues with the women and collects information on the context of their lives, including the absence of education, the commonly used cosmetics, the ways to dance, the age of marriage and its arrangements, the horror of being barren, the magic used for healing and protection against evil. An important line in this chapter is Lassy's romance with the host's daughter Bagdagyl, which ends, after a period of silent glances and one embrace, with her husband taking her away. The chapter ends with the scene of her leaving on a horse, her face invisible under the veil, and Lassy lamenting his "beautiful experience sinking into the grave of memory" (Lassy 1917: 50). Analyzing Lassy's text against the background of Finnish anthropology in the early 20th century, Otso Kantokorpi suggests: "Lassy unites the anthropologists empathy, the Orientalist's literary breeding and a youthful imagination in such a way that a readable and multilevelled text is produced. The delicate nature of the book's subject has not succumbed to cheap sensationalism, although it is no doubt thanks partly to this work that Lassy gained his reputation as a womanizer..." (Kantokorpi 1984: 524).

Throughout the book, Lassy places 25 photographs by Sevruguin's¹⁰ and accompanies them with titles and captions that at times reach a paragraph in length. All of the photographs, as mentioned in the preface to the book, come from the collection of the deceased Aleksanteri Ijas through his sister, Adele Tschalenko. Aleksanteri Ivanovich Ijas (1869-1914), Russian military orientalist, born in The Grand Duchy of Finland, held various diplomatic positions in Persia since 1901. He took part in delineation of the border between Persia and Turkey since 1912 and was the Emperor's Consul in Soudzh Bulak in Persia since 1913. Ijas was killed by rebelling local tribes in Soudzh Bulak in 1914.¹¹ His archive was found in 1915 and sent to his relatives in Finland. Now in the collection of the Finnish Museum of Photography,¹² Ijas's archive contains many of his own images as he was an amateur photographer, alongside a collection of photographic postcards and 47 prints of Sevruguin's work.¹³ Sevruguin's name is never mentioned in Lassy's text, which allows to conclude that he was not aware of the authorship of the anonymous photographs in Ijas's collection (Lassy 1917: 6).

The first of Sevruguin's photographs used in the book appears right on the cover. It depicts a young woman sitting on a pedestal covered with a carpet, in a richly embroidered dress that covers her up to her neck and palms and leaves her childishly thin and barefoot legs open from mid-thigh down (Figure 1). Reproduced once again in the book, it is accompanied by the following caption:

Young girl. [Nuori tyttö]. Her hair is fringed which means that she is married. Her exalted eyes with painted eyebrows and stern yet somewhat melancholic expression of her mouth slightly oppose the childlike legs, long and not very clean. The spontaneity of her pose creates an impression of being almost monumental. (Lassy 1917: 67)

This is exemplary of how the images are commented in the book. First, there always is a title that pinpoints the central meaning of the image. It is in most cases followed by a further, longer caption that blends the knowledge of local culture and tradition with the personal observations and impressions of the author. Except two, all of

10. 24 of the images correspond with the prints found in Ijas's collection at FMP, one (that is reproduced on the book cover) is not represented in the collection.

11. A detailed account of Ijas's service that widely employs his own images and other photographs from his collection, is written by his descendant, British historian John Tschalenko. See: Tschalenko, John (2006) *Images from the Endgame: Persia Through a Russian Lens 1901-1914*. Saqi Books.

12. Finnish Museum of Photography: Aleksanteri Ijas collection, D1993.

13. Finnish Museum of Photography: D1993:11/296-341.

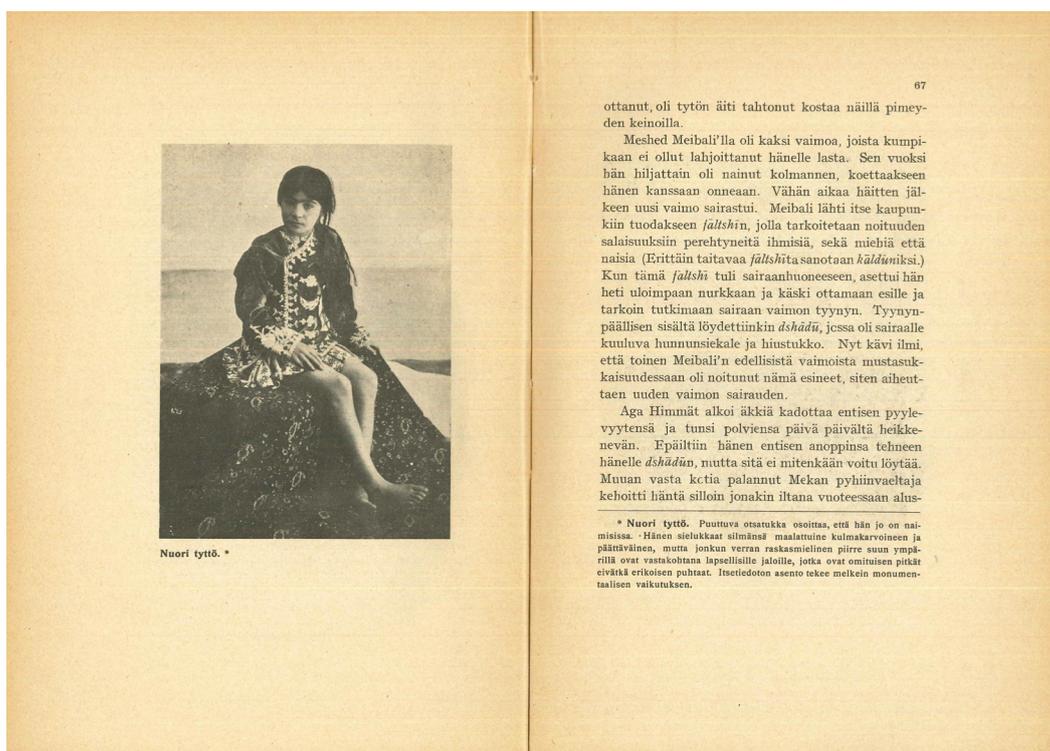


Figure 1

the images selected by Lassy from Ijas's collection for this book depict women, all of them posing in a studio or in what seems to be a familiar environment. Large part of the images are single portraits, with a portion of double and group portraits. Just two of the images in the beginning of the book are wide shot street scene reportage.

Part of the images used in the book shows women at characteristic domestic activities, such as the baking of bread, the whipping of butter, the carpet weaving, the milking of sheep, cradling a baby, even searching each other's head for lice. The texts accompanying the images either name the activity («milking a sheep») or resemble an ethnographic description of the specifics of the action or its circumstances. For instance, the image of two women seated with a cradle between them, is accompanied by the text describing the construction of the cradle, the image entitled “the baking of bread” is accompanied by a brief description of the technological procedure of bread baking. Large part of the “image+title+caption” entities (at least 11 illustrations out of the 25 used in the book) is dedicated to the appearance of Persian women, including descriptions of clothes, accounts of Persian standards of female beauty, and author's personal judgments; this also is the largest part of text in the captions. For example, the text accompanying the picture that Lassy entitled “reclining woman” (Figure 2) suggests: “Magnificently splendid hair and body grace compensate to a large extent the missing facial charm. On the right is an old-fashioned window of the kind that were used before the introduction of glass” (Lassy 1917: 55).

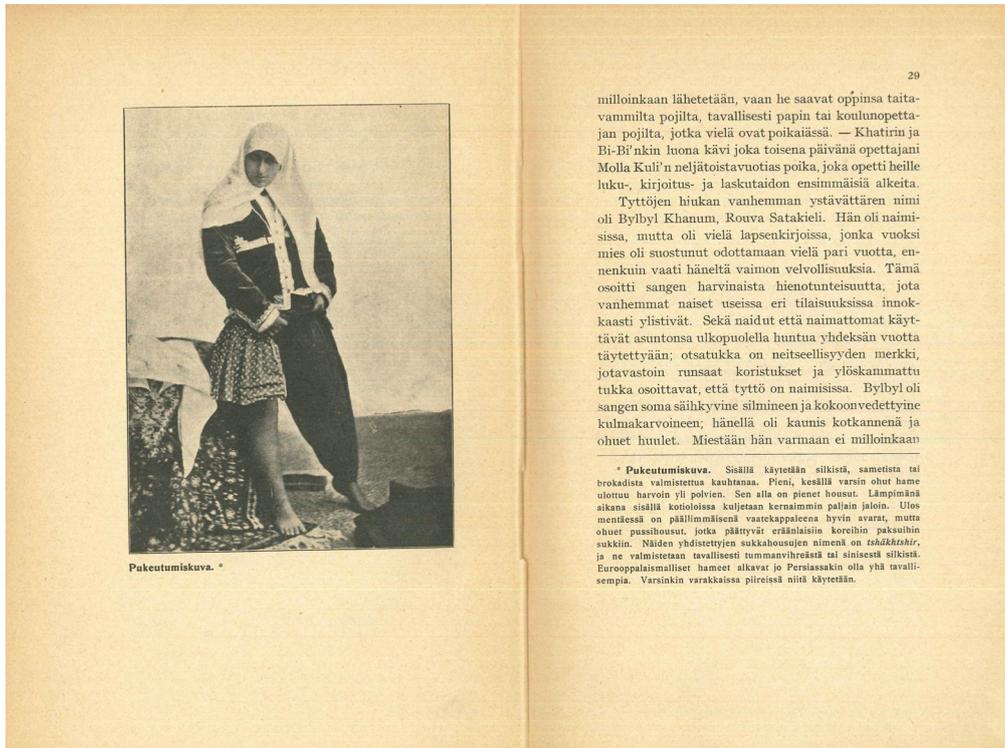


Figure 2

The title and caption to the picture of a standing woman getting dressed (Figure 3) read:

Dressing up. Kaftan of silk, velvet or brocade is used as underwear. Short and thin (especially in summer) skirt rarely reaches the knees. Under it there are short trousers. In the warm time of day, inside the house they willingly go barefoot. To go outside, they use spacious breeches that end with various thick socks. Such trousers connected with socks are named *tshakhtshir*, they are usually made of dark green or blue silk. European skirts are becoming common in Persia, too. They are especially used by the well-off. (Lassy 1917: 29)

The captions, thus, provide general information, “decoding” the picture and enriching the cultural representation in the image by the textual commentary. Lassy also allows himself personal judgments of the sitters’ personal appearance. For instance, the photograph that resembles a Western-style studio portrait, complete with European dress, a painted backdrop and a piece of furniture used as a rest for models (Figure 4), bears the caption that reads: “Des Pudels Kern”. Jacket, gloves and silk skirt represent Europe in this robust-built woman whose coarse face and hands, as well as terrifying hip line, happily end up in a nice looking foot (Lassy 1917: 21).



Pukeutumiskuva. *

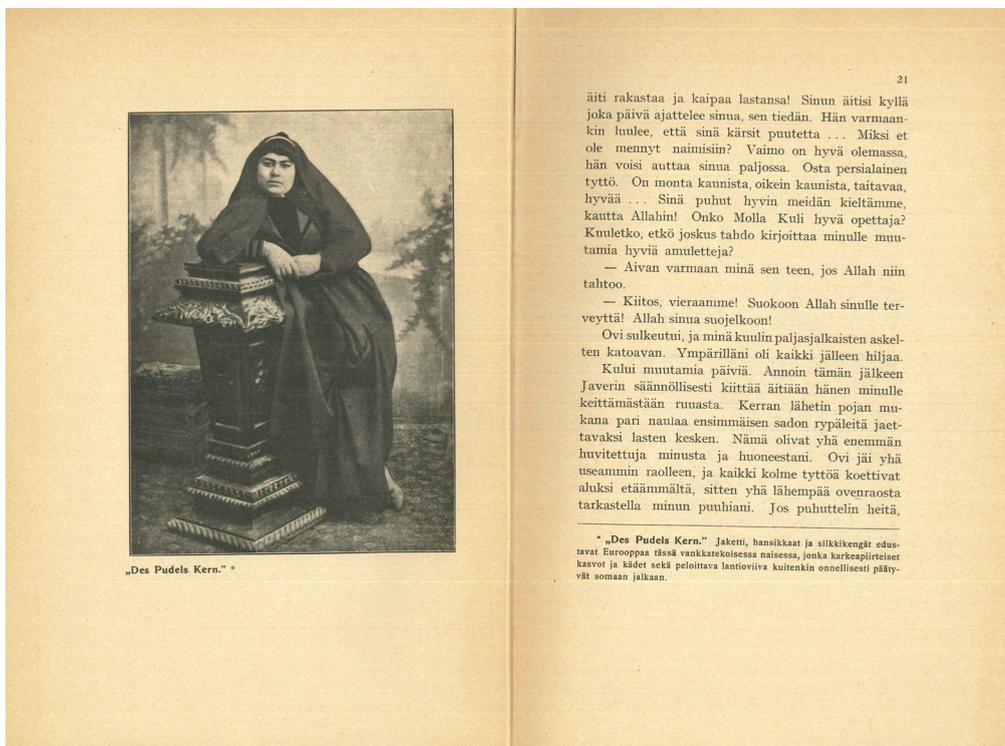
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milloinkaan lähetetään, vaan he saavat oppinsa taitavammilta pojilta, tavallisesti papin tai koulunopettajan pojilta, jotka vielä ovat poikakäissä. — Khatirin ja Bi-Di'nkin luona kävi joka toisena päivänä opettajani Molla Kuli'n neljätoistavuotias poika, joka opetti heille luku-, kirjoitus- ja laskutaidon ensimmäisiä alkeita.

Tyttöjen hiukan vanhemman ystävättären nimi oli Bylbyl Khanum, Rouva Satakielel. Hän oli naimisissa, mutta oli vielä lapsenkirjoissa, jonka vuoksi mies oli suostunut odottamaan vielä pari vuotta, ennenkuin vaati häneltä vaimon velvollisuuksia. Tämä osoitti sängen harvinaista hienoutta, jota vanhemmat naiset useissa eri tilaisuuksissa innokkaasti ylistivät. Sekä naidut että naimattomat käyttävät asuntonsa ulkopuolella huntua yhdeksän vuotta täytettyään; otsatukka on neitseellisuuden merkki, jota vastoin runsaat koristukset ja ylöskammattutukka osoittavat, että tyttö on naimisissa. Bylbyl oli sängen soma sähköyvine silmineen ja kokoonvedettyine kulmakarvoineen, hänellä oli kaunis kotkannenä ja ohuet huulet. Miestään hän varmaan ei milloinkaan

* Pukeutumiskuva. Sisällä käytetään silkkiä, sametia tai brokadista valmistettua kaunistana. Pieni, kesällä varsin ohut hame ulottuu harvoin yli polvien. Sen alla on pienet housut. Lämpimänä aikana sisällä kotiloissa kuljetaan keraamisiin pallasin jaloin. Ulkos mennessä on päällimmäisenä varokkapeitea hyvin avarat, mutta ohuet pussihousut, jotka päätyvät eräänlaisiin koreihin paksuihin sukkiin. Näiden yhdistettyjen sukkaosujen nimenä on *tsäkkishir*, ja ne valmistetaan tavallisesti tummanvihreitä tai siniseitä silkkiä. Eurooppalaisimmalliset hameet alkavat jo Persiassakin olla yhä tavallisia. Varsinkin varakkaita piireissä niitä käytetään.

Figure 3



„Des Pudels Kern.“ *

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äiti rakastaa ja kaipaa lastansa! Sinun äitisi kyllä joka päivä ajattelee sinua, sen tiedän. Hän varmaankin luulee, että sinä kärsit puutetta ... Miksi et ole mennyt naimisiin? Vaimo on hyvä olemassa, hän voisi auttaa sinua paljon. Osta persialainen tyttö. On monta kaunista, oikein kaunista, taitavaa, hyvää ... Sinä puhut hyvin meidän kielämme, kanta Allahin! Onko Molla Kuli hyvä opettaja? Kuuletko, etkö joskus tahdo kirjoittaa minulle muutamia hyviä amuletteja?

— Aivan varmaan minä sen teen, jos Allah niin tahtoo.

— Kiitos, vieraamme! Suokoon Allah sinulle terveyttä! Allah sinua suojele!

Ovi sulkeutui, ja minä kuulin paljasjalcaisten askelten katoavan. Ympäriilleni oli kaikki jälleen hiljaa.

Kului muutamia päiviä. Annoin tämän jälkeen Javerin säännöllisesti kiittää äitiään hänen minulle keittämästään ruuasta. Kerran lähetin pojan mukana pari nauvaa ensimmäisen sadon rypäleitä jaettavaksi lasten kesken. Nämä olivat yhä enemmän huvitettuja minusta ja huoneistani. Ovi jäi yhä useammin raolleen, ja kaikki kolme tyttöä koettivat ahuksi etäämmältä, sitten yhä lähempää ovenraosta tarkastella minun puuhiani. Jos puhuttelin heitä,

* „Des Pudels Kern.“ Inkeri, hansikkaat ja silkkihengät edustavat Eurooppaa Etsä vaukarefleksissa naisessa, jonka harteet ja kädet kasvat ja kädet sekä pelottava lantioviiva kuitenkin onnellisesti pitävät soaman jalan.

Figure 4

Some of the captions demonstrate Lassy's profound knowledge of and even possibly infatuation with the Persian culture and its texts. For example, his caption to the chest-high studio portrait of a woman (Figure 5) reads:

Beauty with bushy eyebrows. Seeing a fuller face starts a flame in a Persian man. He loves obese women passionately. This woman's eyebrows are artificially magnified and connected with each other by drawing. A Persian man would consider them especially beautiful and would praise them together with [the poet] Hafiz: My eyes will grow languid with blood, hopelessly wounded by the sword of your eyebrows. But who would not wither of love in front of such eyebrows that subdue all world. These are the lines of a marvelous poem that Hafiz dedicated to beautiful eyebrows; in his opinion, they are most beautiful when they join in one. The poet describes women's eyebrows as beautiful curved swords that wound the one looking at them, or as thick trees with curved tops, giving shadow to the eyes that radiate love, or as crescent moon over the eye of Venus. He is astounded with how the young crescent presumes to shine and compete in form with such eyebrows when they are like a bent bow that sends arrows of looks defeating the innocent victims. Other poets compare them with a rainbow shining with black, or with an exquisite arcade. (Lassy 1917: 33)

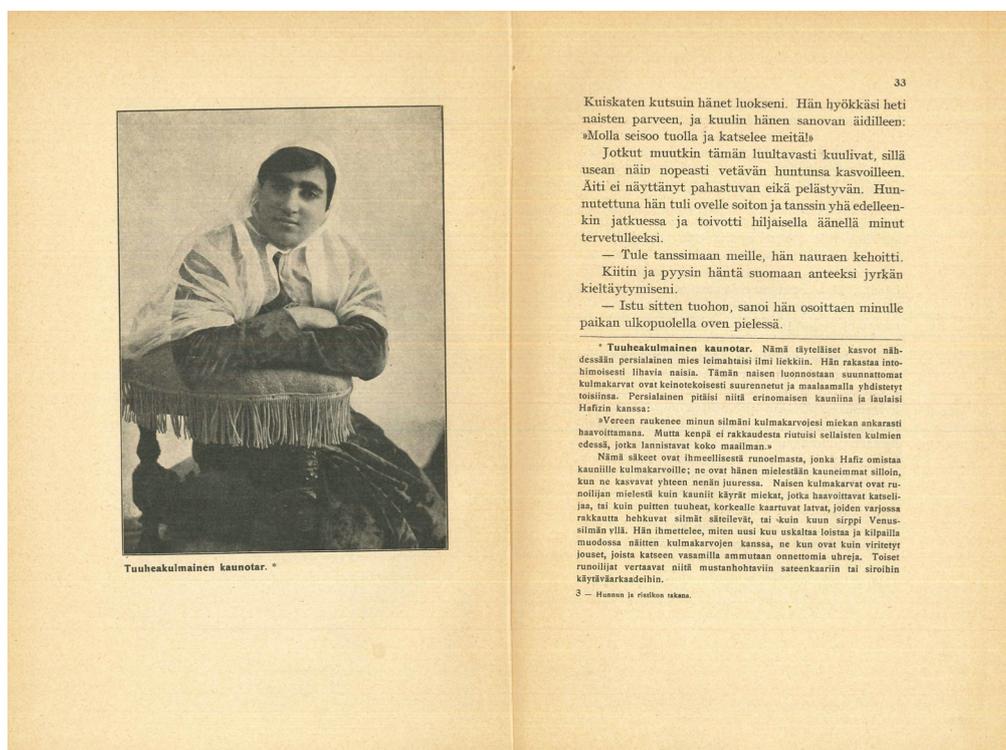


Figure 5

Some of the captions fluctuate from the descriptive and informative style towards a more lyrical tune, that corresponds with the lyricism and emotional charge of Lassy's narration in the chapters. For instance, one more caption that draws on examples from Persian literature, accompanying the picture of a bare-legged woman sitting with her legs crossed (Figure 6), reads:

Woman with bare legs. Her face shows a mixture of race, most likely of the Armenian and Caucasian blood. Nothing expresses her consciousness of the beauty and attractiveness of her legs. Her rich hair that is braided in at least a dozen braids, flows like a wave that reaches the hem of her skirt. One of the chapters in the Persian book "Lover's Guide" lists the parts of female body and the objects that they can be compared with, with a never ending range of ways to refer to the

hair. It is said that there are sixty words for hair but in practice there are many more variants to use them, so now women's tresses are called – The Object of a Hundred Charms. In most cases, the color of hair is compared to the darkness of midnight or to a black cloud from which the sun or full moon would appear. (Lassy 1917: 49)

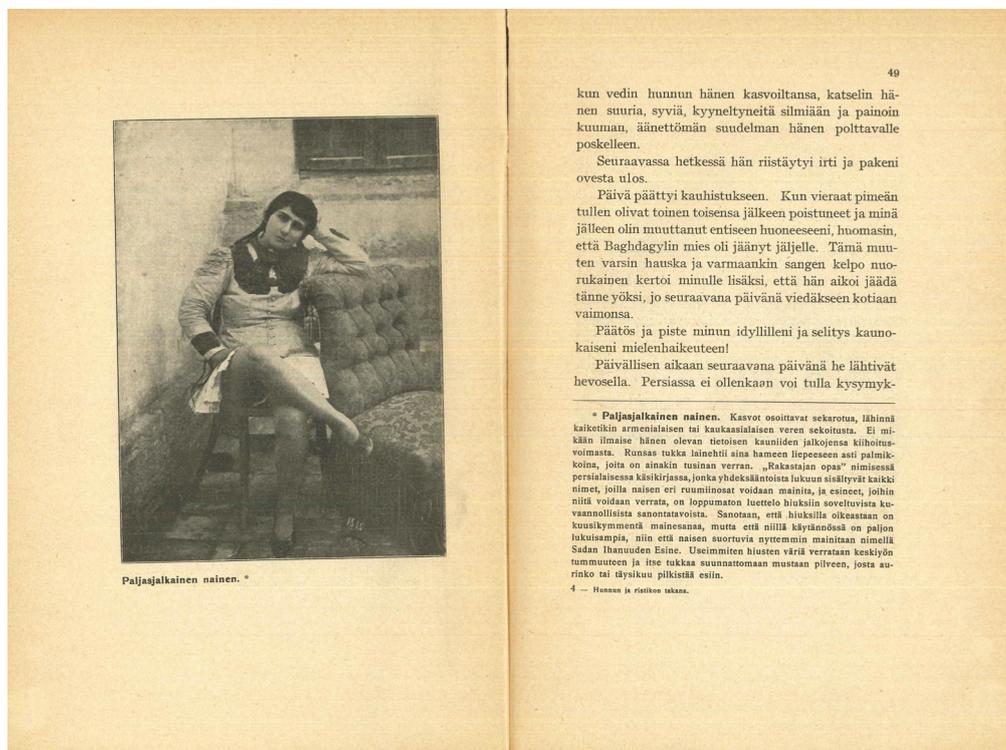


Figure 6

Elizabeth Edwards in her essay on photography and anthropology, points out that important in the study of coexistence of anthropology and photography are questions of evidence, or how photography has been used to provide and give proof of scientific fact, as well as questions of power, i.e. the possibilities used to employ photography as a means of cultural representation (Edwards 2011: 159). Lassy does indicate where he acquired the photographs used in his book; he does not, however, explain why he needs them. The function of these images is, one may presume, to render credibility to the text by providing visual evidence, as well as to outline the cultural context (through illustration and commentary to it) of the circumstances and events described in the book. In thus using the photographs, Lassy followed the conventions of his academic field. Same he did in choosing the photographs: most of Sevruguin's images in Lassy's book are the "types", the term used for images in which, by means of documentation of a real, living person the image of an abstract representation of a category of people, a cultural representation is constructed.

What does this use of Sevruguin's photographs in Lassy's book do to the photographs themselves? How does their employment in the context different from the one of their production change their meanings?

In his essay on photography and cultural memory Alan Trachtenberg points at the inability of photographs, despite their visible precision of representation, to convey the very essence of the experience they refer to, as "for all their apparent transparency and ease of identification, photographs often seem hieroglyphic, obscure, ambiguous, elusive, the more so the more transparently window-like they seem" (Trachtenberg 2008: 122). Photographs, one may continue, due to this very ambiguity and elusiveness, may suggest – and endure – a multitude of interpretations, rendering each of these interpretations trustworthy by supporting it by the visual evidence of fact.

The production and circulation of Sevruguin's photographs is exemplary of how this sort of photographic

produce existed in the second half of 19th – early 20th century. “... in the [nineteenth century] ‘little anthropological photography’ was made with specific scientific intent but, rather, became ‘anthropological’ through categories of consumption as images were often negotiated between the competing scopical regimes of popular voyeurism and science” (Edwards 2011: 168). Photographs like those sold by Sevruguin’s studio were this type of visual phenomena that combined the power of evidence with the possibility of being filled, like a shell, with a variety of meanings. That his photographs have been found in the collections of historical and anthropological museums, researchers of the Middle East and collectors of Oriental items, travelers, diplomats, speaks for them as representations fitting to the needs and visualities of a number of areas of study and interest, but also as an example of a common pattern of production and consumption of photographs of territories, peoples and cultures in the 19th century. Their ability to reciprocate “ethnographic interest in categorization and classification with an aesthetic and touristic desire for the exotic and the picturesque” (Behdad 1999: 86) made them fit for a variety of uses – from private collections of curiosities and tourist albums to publications on ethnography and anthropology. Indeed, this being a “shell” does not only characterize the 19th century photographic produce fitting for a wide range of purposes including voyeurism, memory, scientific documentation and observation, but is, in general, a metaphor of photographs’ ability to appropriate various meanings when migrating from one context to another.

Thus, Sevruguin’s photographs are transparent and precise but at the same time mute, they are “shells” to be filled with meanings. Lassy adds to them in order to make them “speak” in two ways. The more direct way is Lassy’s interpretations in the titles and captions he provides the images with. The less direct is, that the images together with the captions are placed alongside the text of the book. The captions and commentaries are mostly enriching the cultural representation through explanation of dress, practices and customs, with some addition of Lassy’s personal judgments of taste. Lassy’s main narrative expands the personal alongside the general. The reader of the text learns about the author’s circumstances “in the field”, his concerns and his feelings towards “the natives”. The women that he meets are portrayed through their everyday activities, the interests and opinions that they express, together with the very peculiarities of their expression. By conveying his compassion and interest to the women he is writing about and by giving them a voice, Lassy disrupts both their cultural otherness and gender otherness. When all of this becomes the context of the photographs, something interesting occurs. It seems that, in a way, Lassy in his use of Sevruguin’s photographs does the opposite to what Sevruguin had done when he conceived them: where, by the conventions of the photographic genre he contributed to, Sevruguin turned an individual into a “type” and a cultural representation, Lassy returns to the typified a dimension of individuality.

The case of Sevruguin’s anonymous images in Lassy’s book is an example of a history of photographs migrating between cultural contexts, channels of communication, audiences, hybrid products they become parts of. These migrations, facilitated by the reproducibility of photography as well as its instrumentality largely based on supposed credibility, prove photographs as complex phenomena: one in which precision and evidential force of a document can well combine with muteness that invites a variety of interpretations upon which meaning can be built. A history of these meanings is something that a history of photography must take into consideration.

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