



ELIZABETH TAYLOR IN IRAN 1976

An exhibition of photographs by Firooz Zahedi

LEILA HELLER GALLERY.

568 WEST 25TH STREET | NEW YORK NY 10001

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September 22 - October 29, 2011

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In 1976 Elizabeth Taylor visited Iran for the first and only time. Accompanying her was Firooz Zahedi, today a successful Hollywood photographer but then a recent art school graduate just learning his craft. Iran provided an exotic and engaging locale for Taylor, a tireless global wanderer still at the height of her fame. For Zahedi, who had left Iran as a child, this was a reintroduction to his own country, which he experienced not only thru the camera lens, but also through Taylor's eyes. It was a remarkable journey for both as documented by Zahedi's vivid photographs, shown together here for the first time.

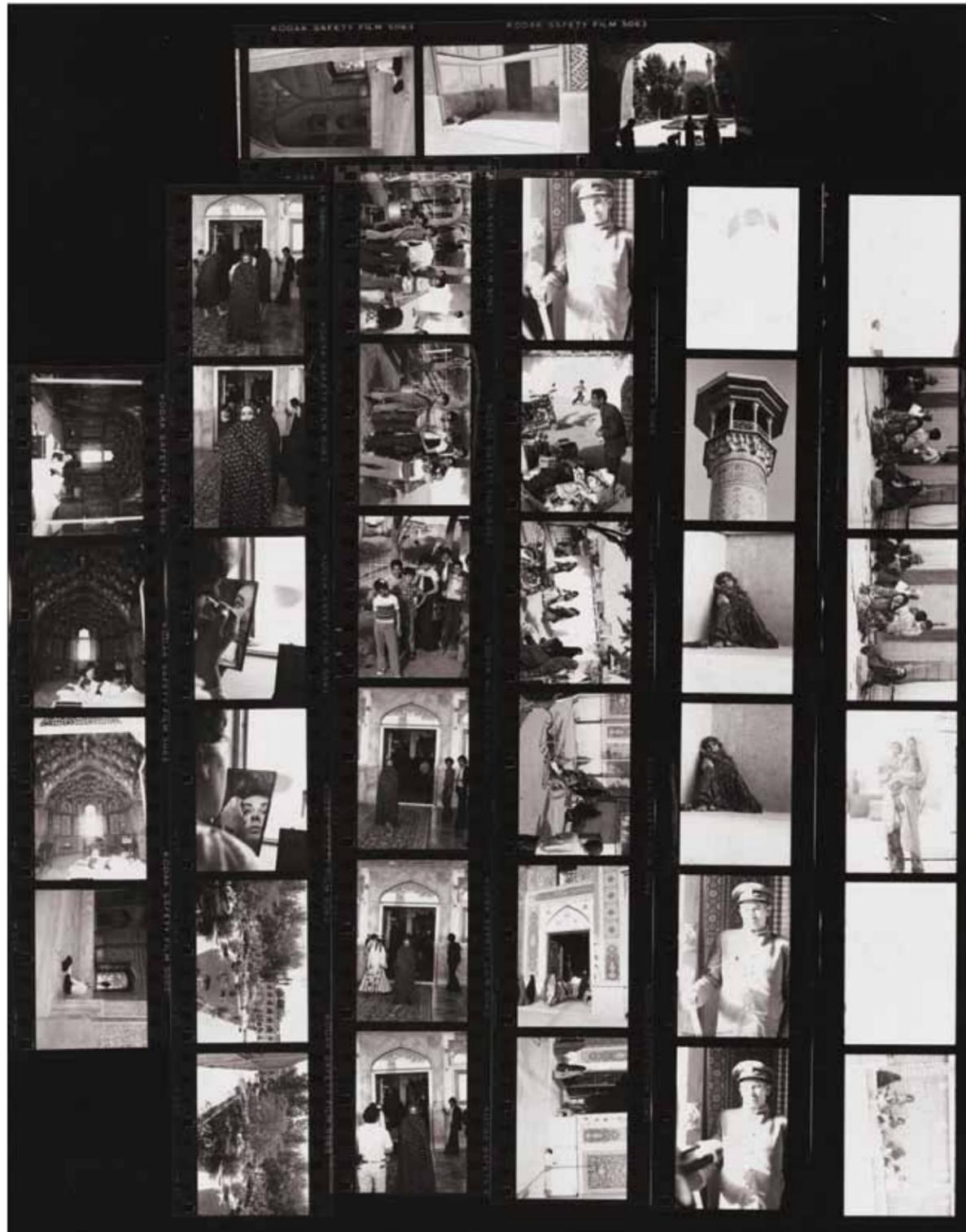
The pair traveled to the main tourist sites: ancient Persepolis, where the Tent City erected in 1971 for the 2,500 year celebration of the Persian Empire was still standing, Shiraz, home of poetry and wine, and Isfahan, renowned for its beautiful tile-clad buildings. Grouped in narrative fashion, the images depict people and places with the actress as tourist, but one so iconic that she is never anonymous even wrapped in a chador.

In the Isfahan bazaar, Taylor was attracted to and purchased a traditional tribal outfit. Dressed in this colorful costume and in full makeup, the film star posed as an Oriental odalisque, an especially suitable persona for one who was herself a male fantasy. Though Zahedi took many photographs of Taylor in the years following their Iran trip, none are as personal, candid or creative as these unique images.

Text by Linda Komaroff

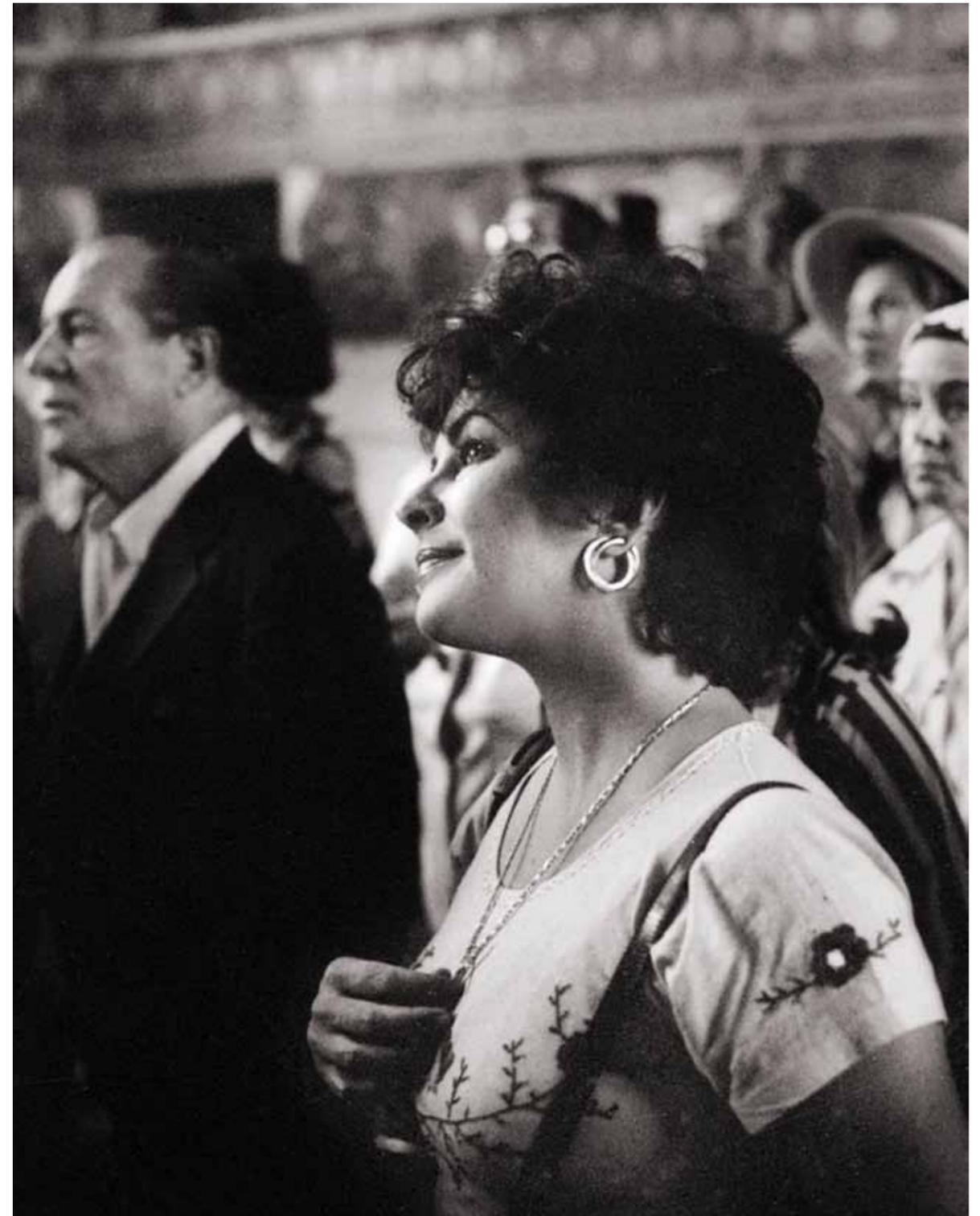
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Courtesy of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

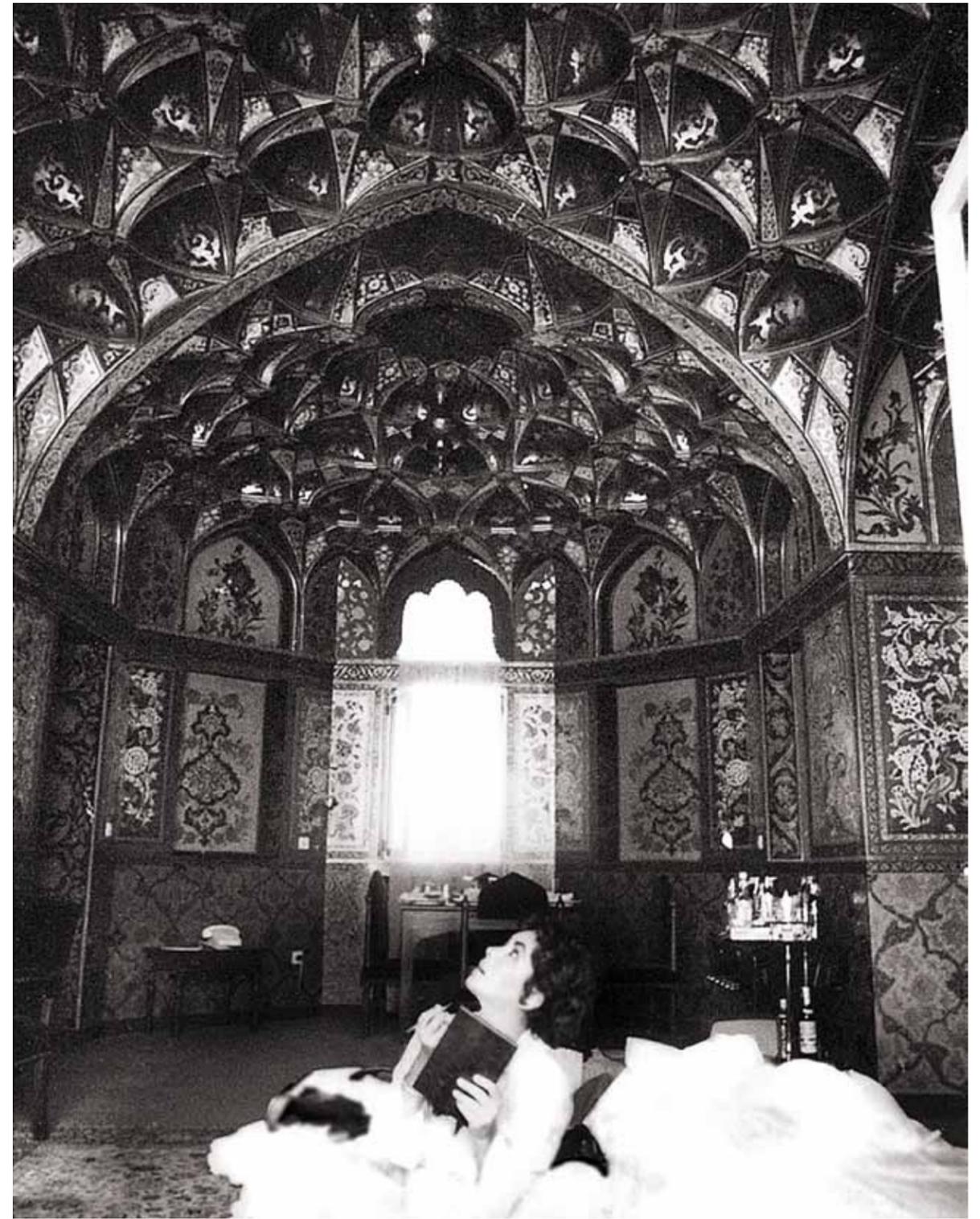


Many years ago the negatives to the images in this exhibition were destroyed in transit. All that was left were a few color transparencies and a handful of 35 mm proof sheets. Most of the photographs on display here are enlargements from those proof sheets. Though they may be a little fuzzy my memory of that trip is still very sharp and always will be.

Firooz Zahedi, February 2, 2011

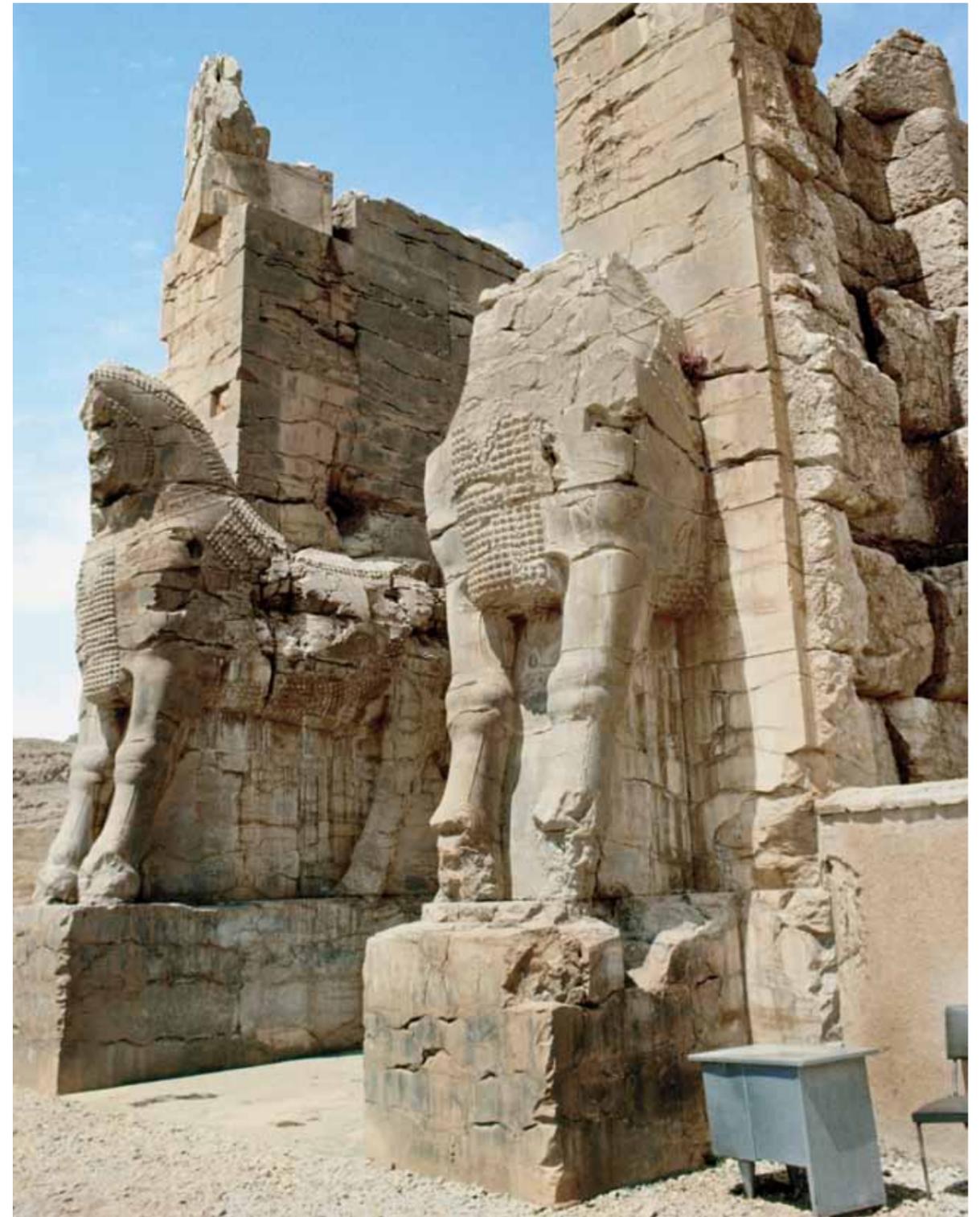


Sightseeing in Tehran.

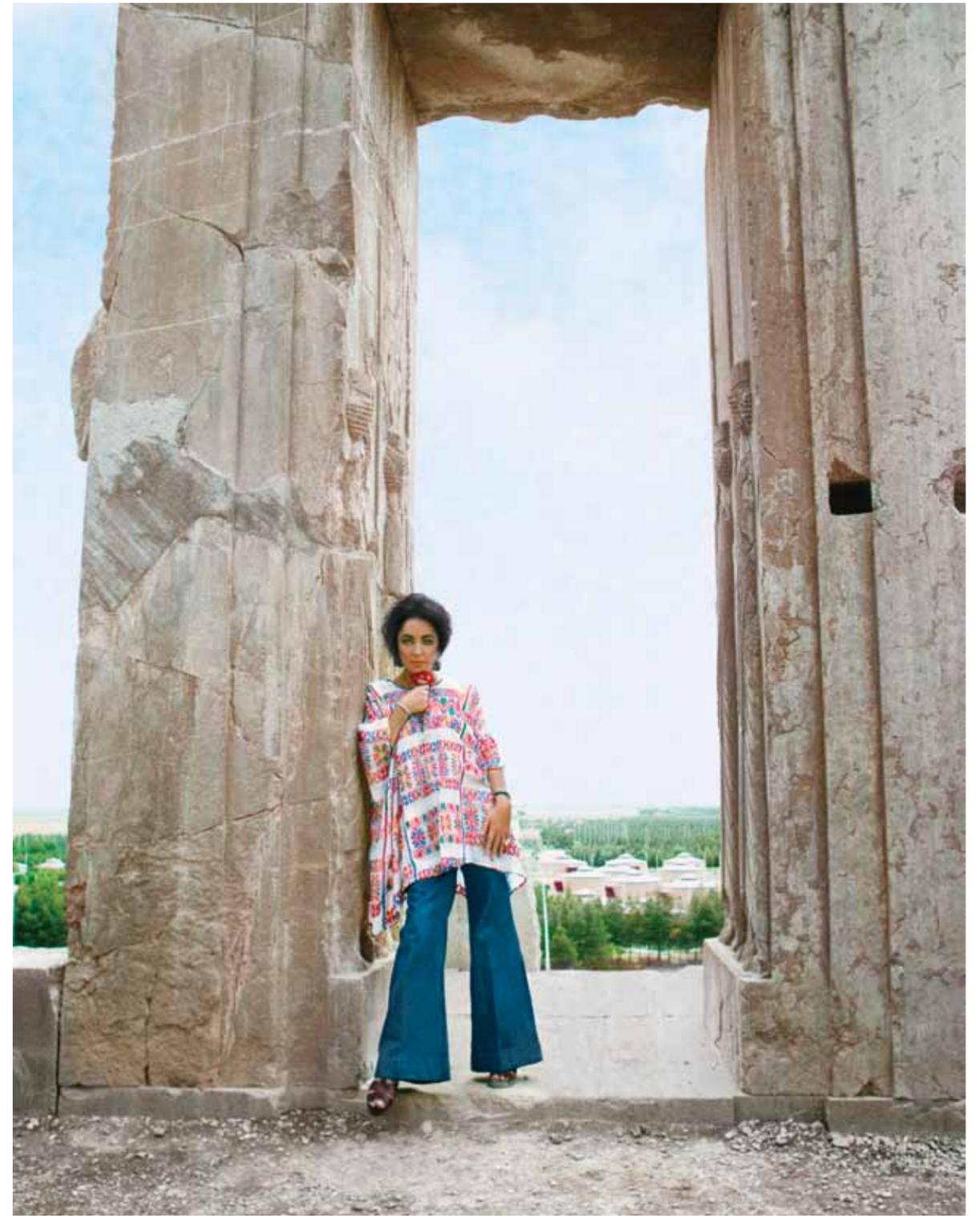


Shah Abbas Hotel, Isfahan.





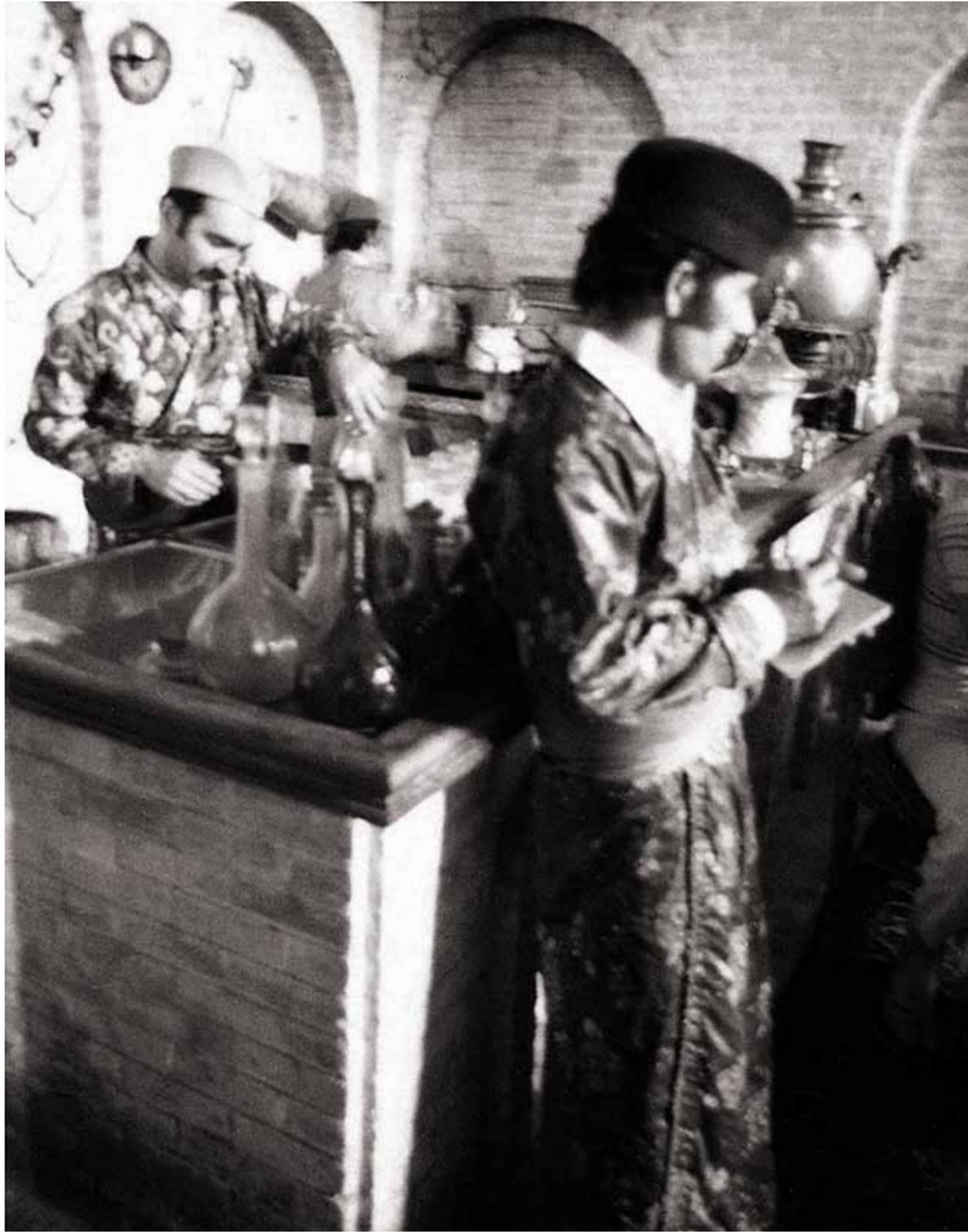
Persepolis.



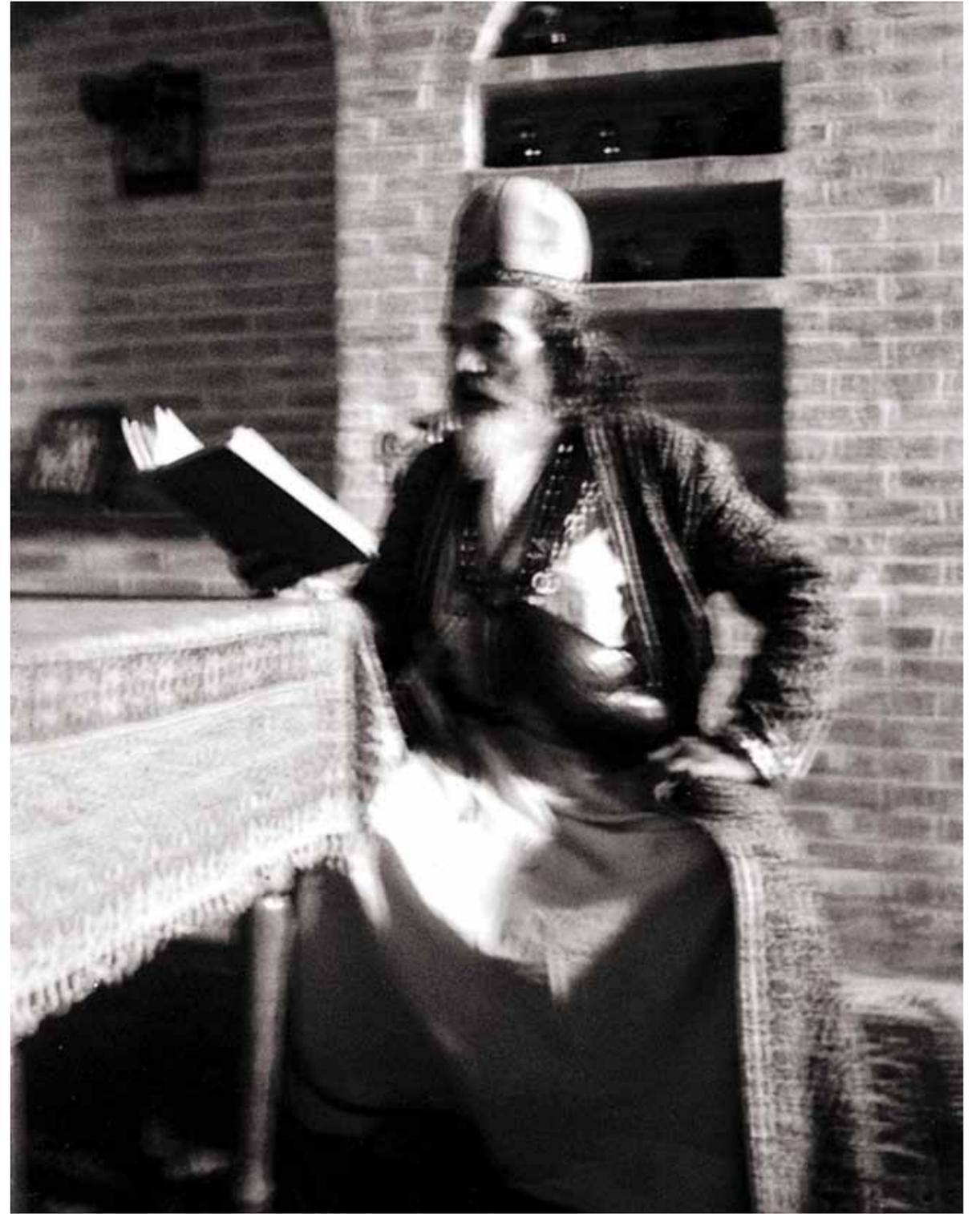
Persepolis with view of the Tent City in the background.



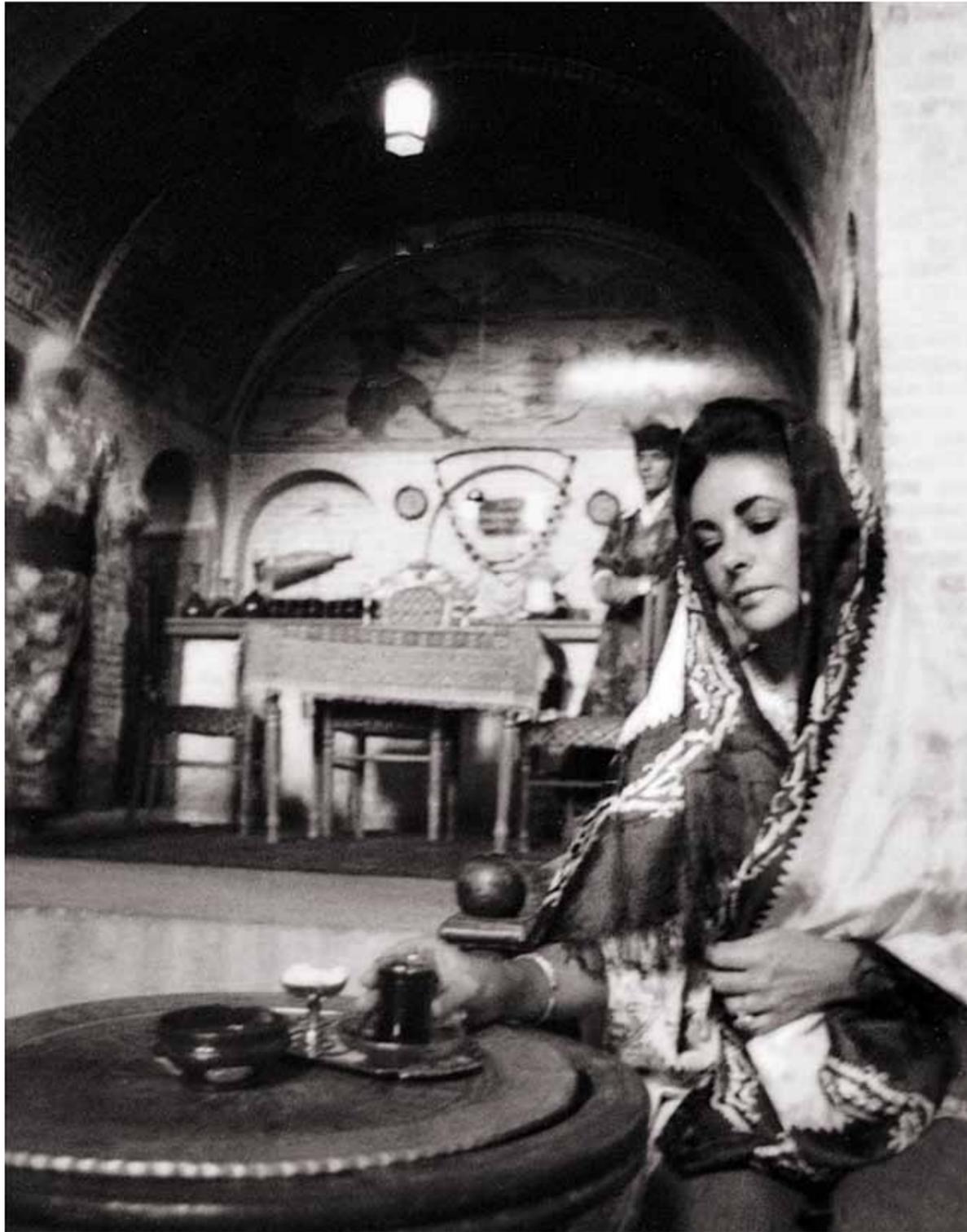
Shah Chirag Shrine, Shiraz.



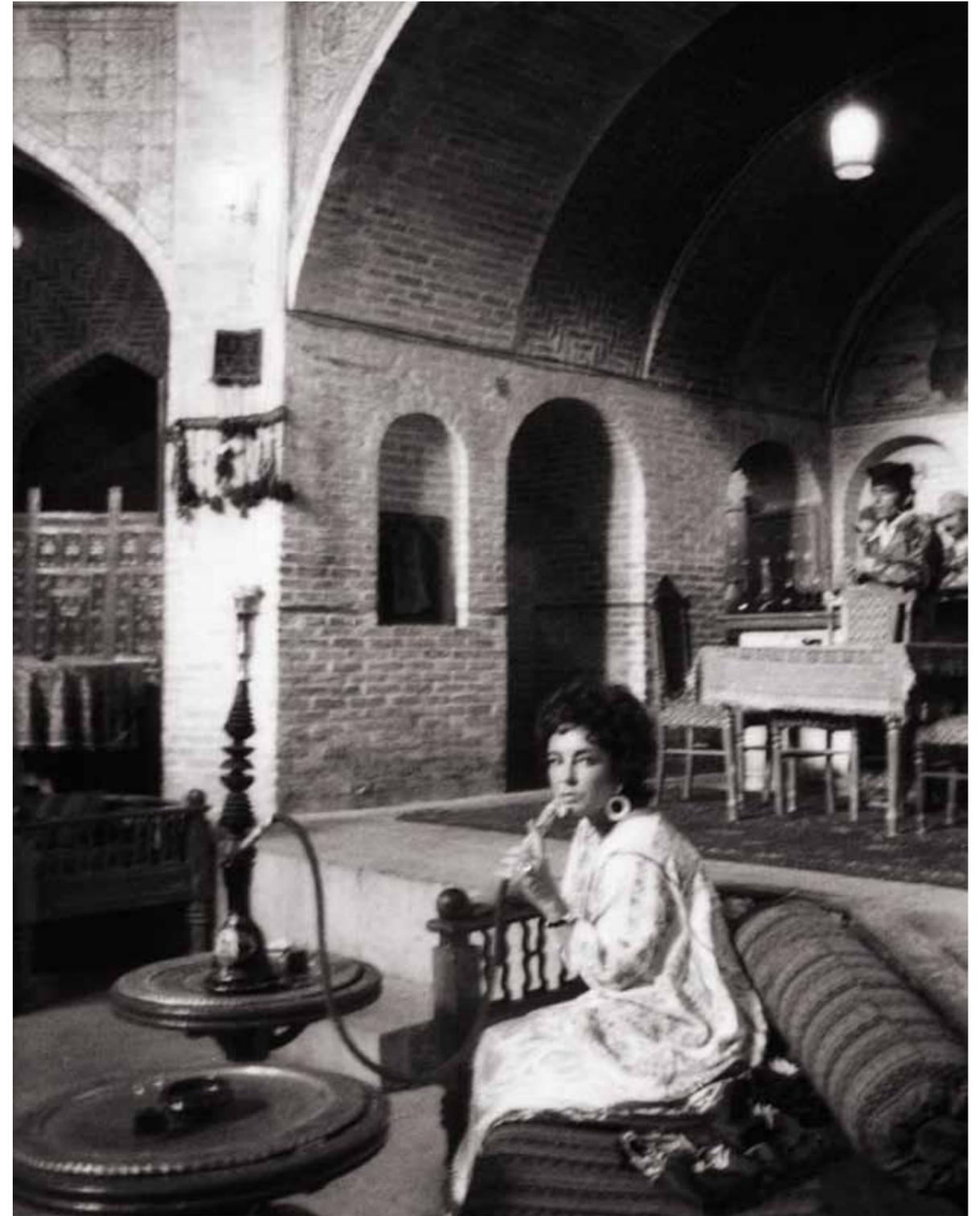
Waiters at the Tea House, Shiraz.



Dervish at the Tea House, Shiraz.



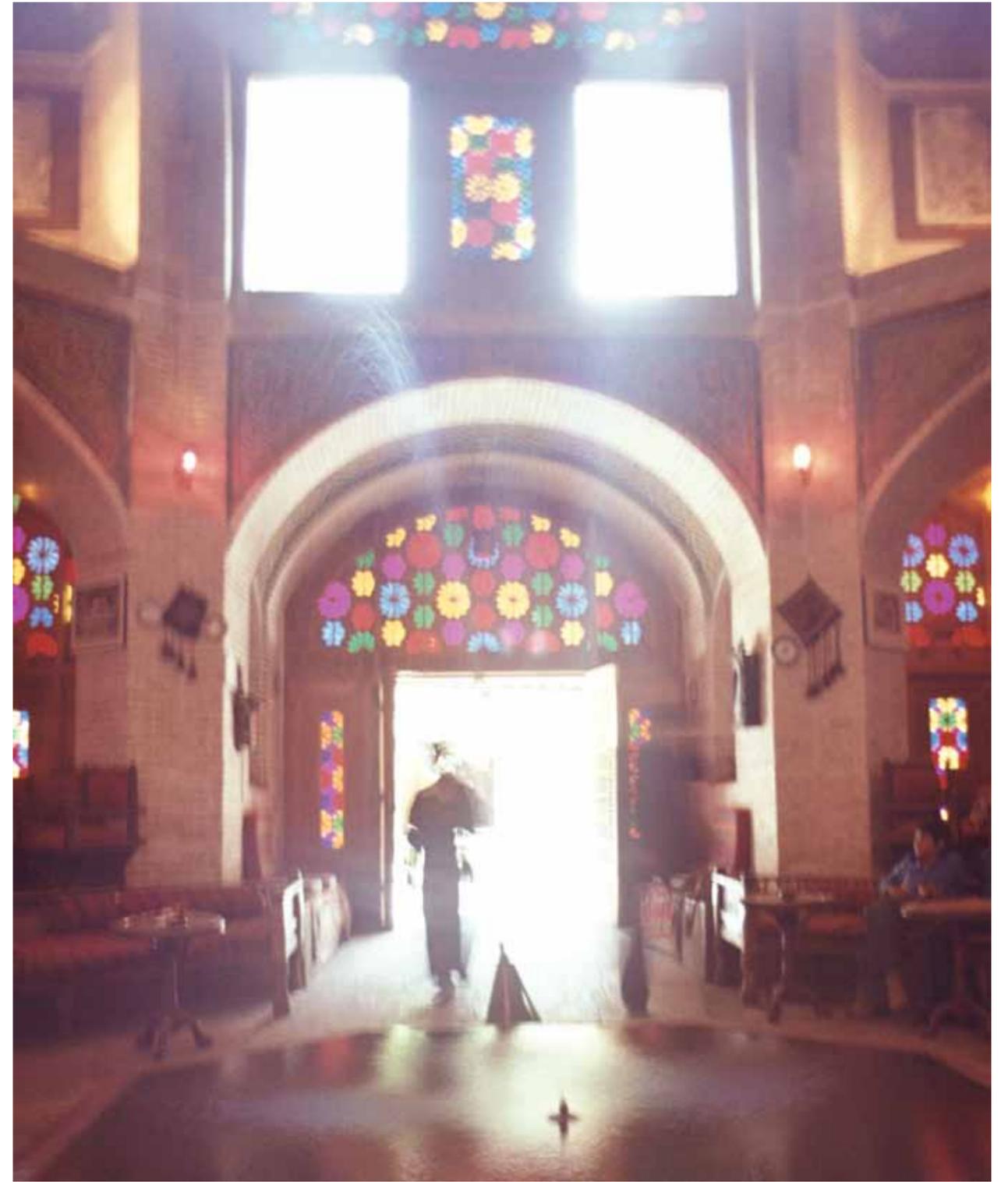
Traditional tea service.



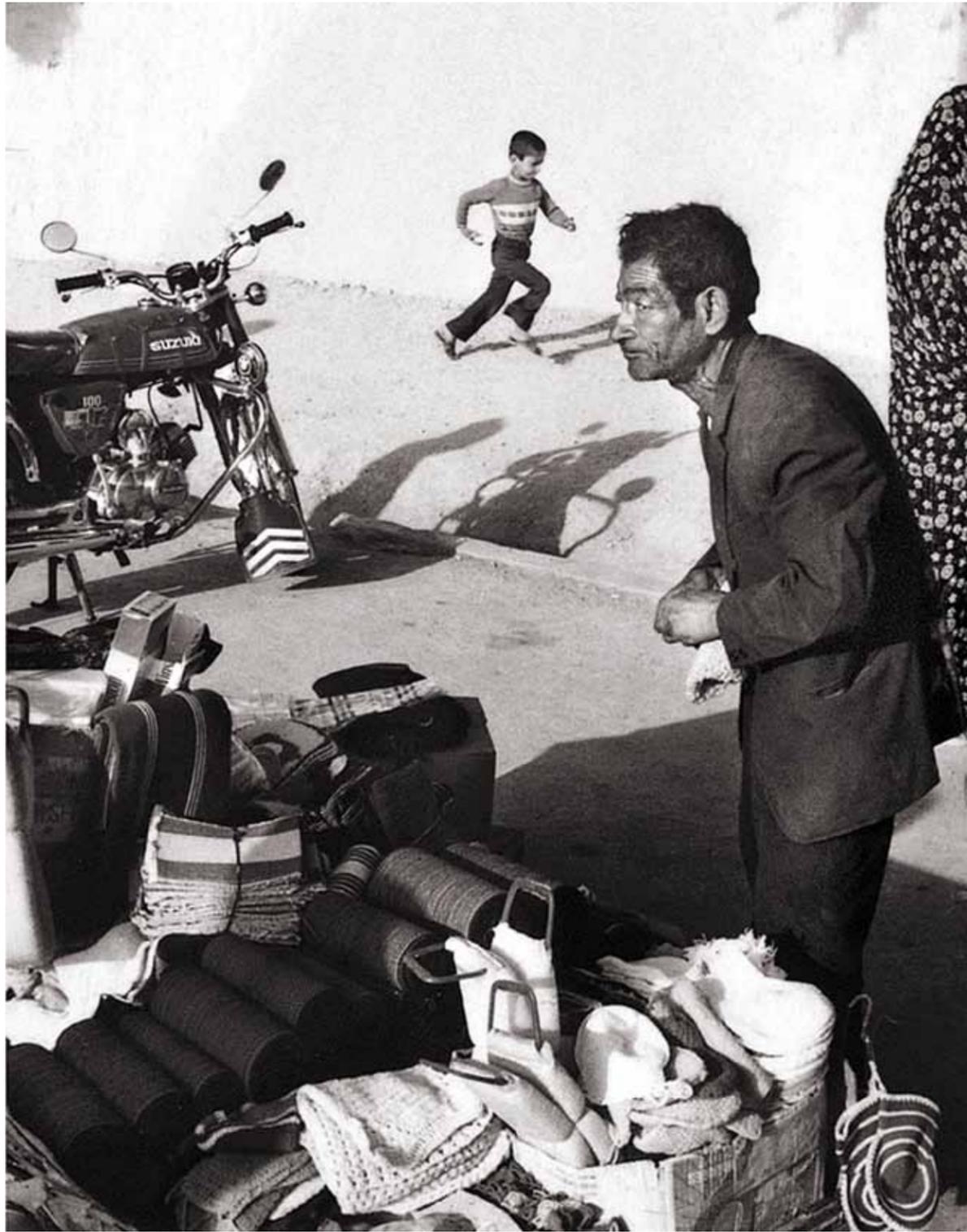
Smoking a hookah at the Tea House.



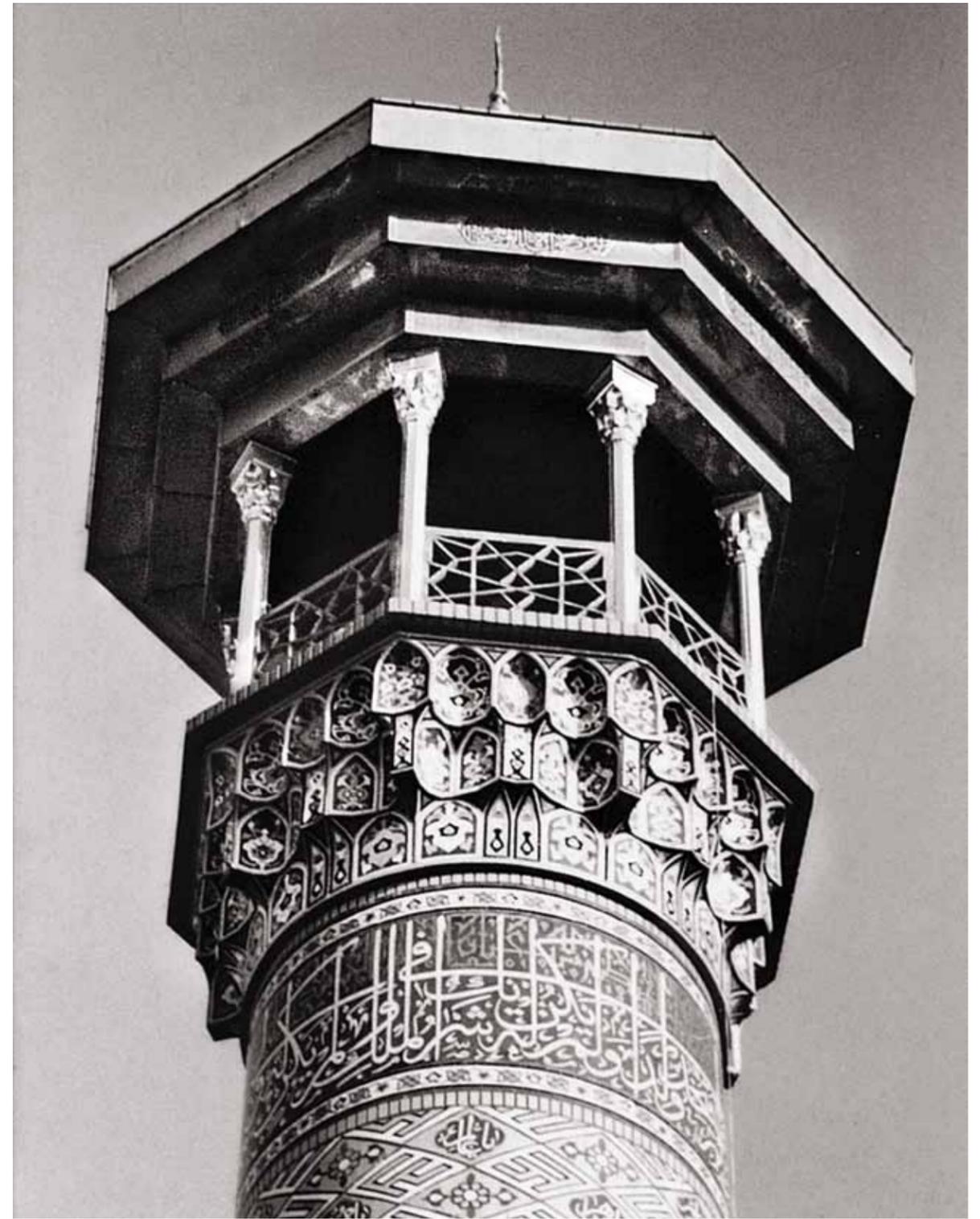
Tea House, Shiraz.



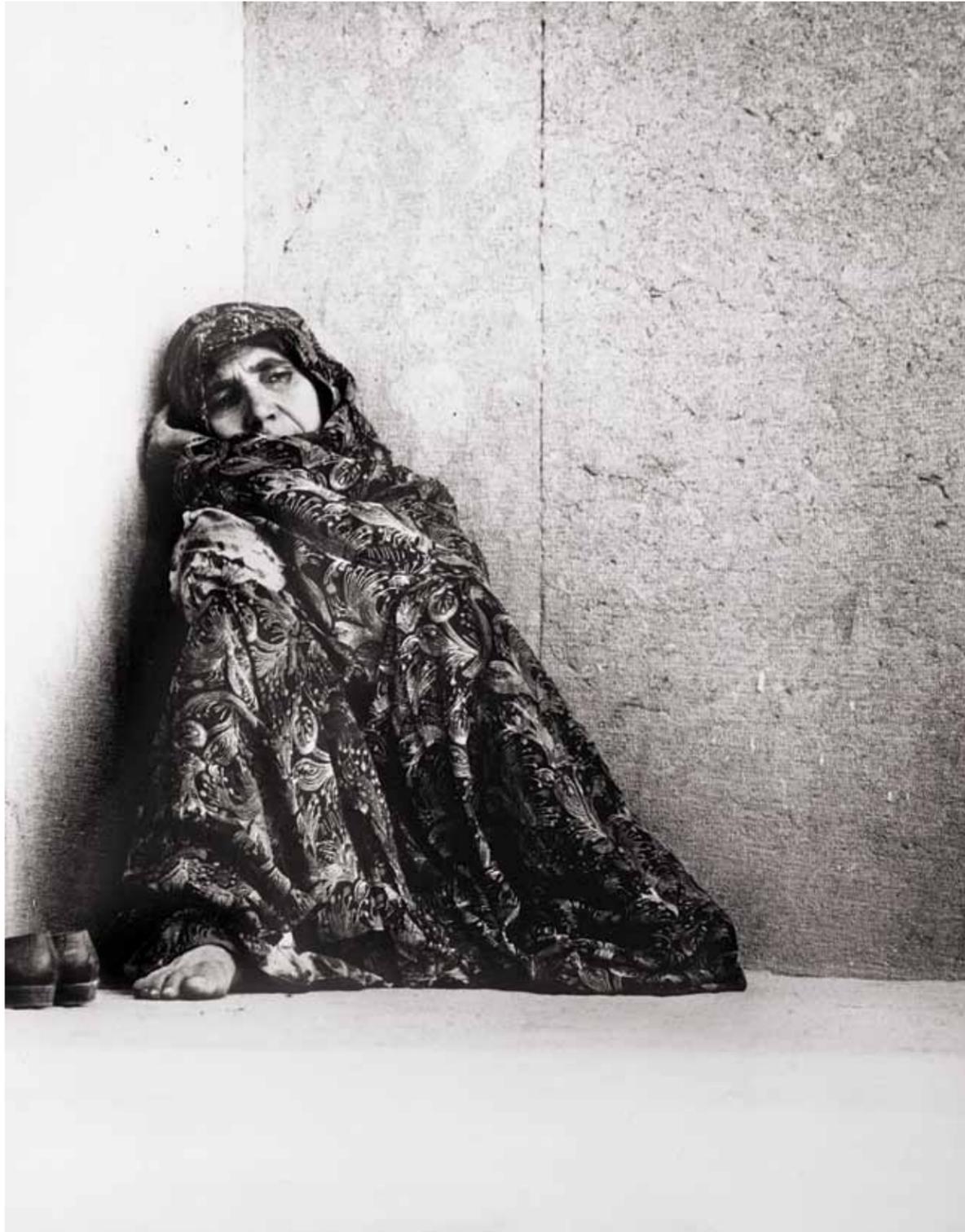
Fountain at the Tea House, Shiraz.



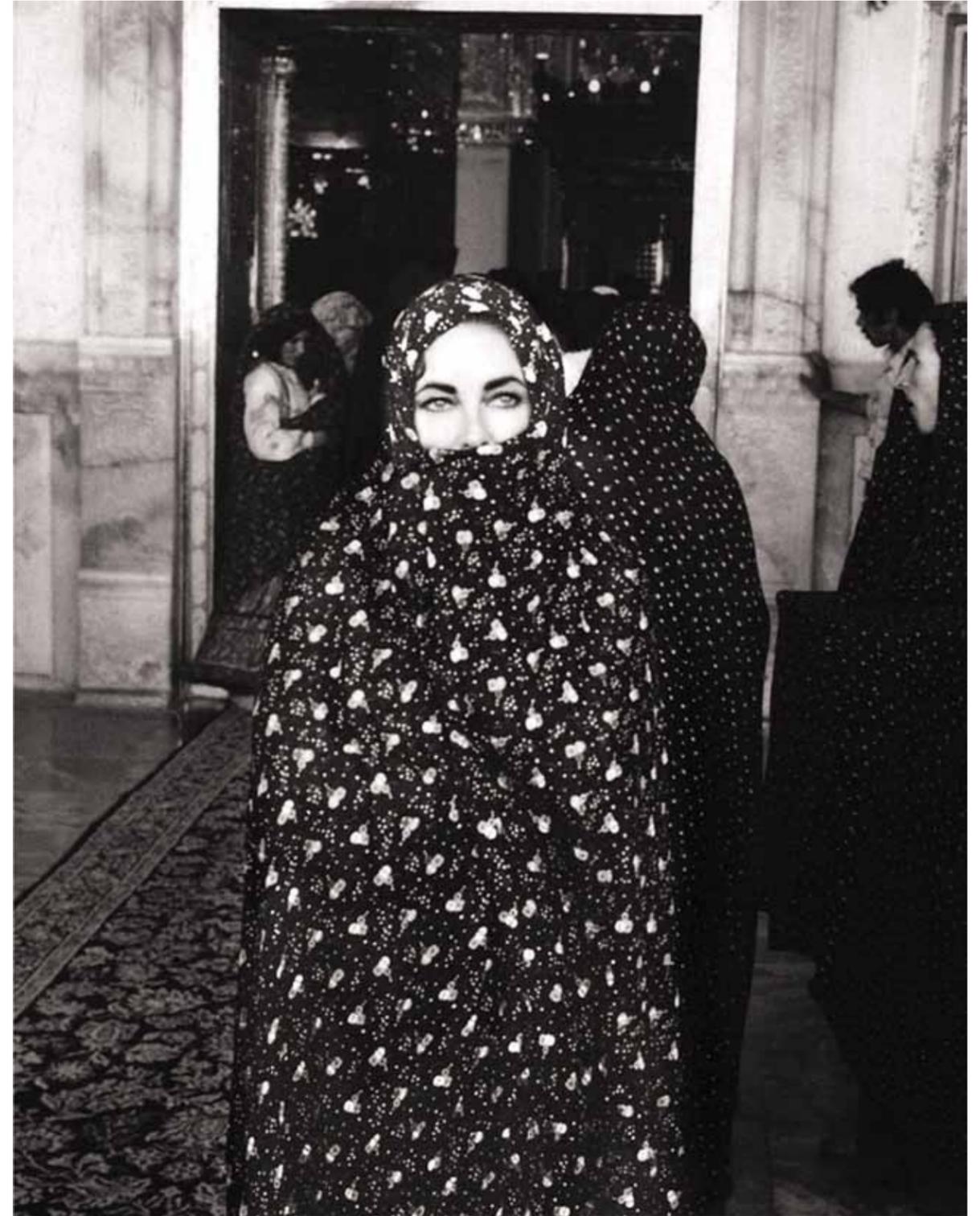
Street vendor, Shiraz.



Minaret at the Shah Chirag Shrine, Shiraz.



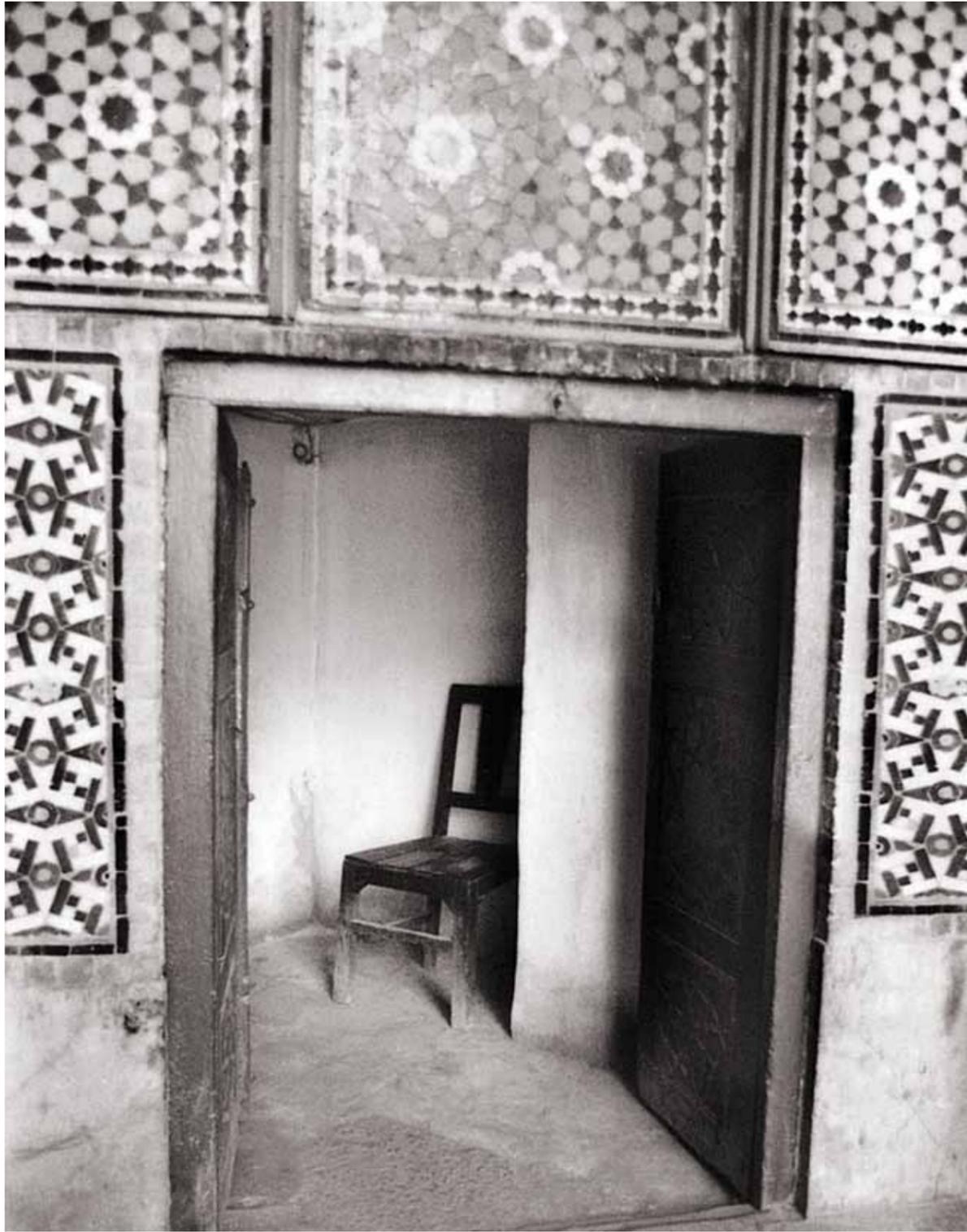
Woman meditating at the Shah Chirag Shrine, Shiraz.



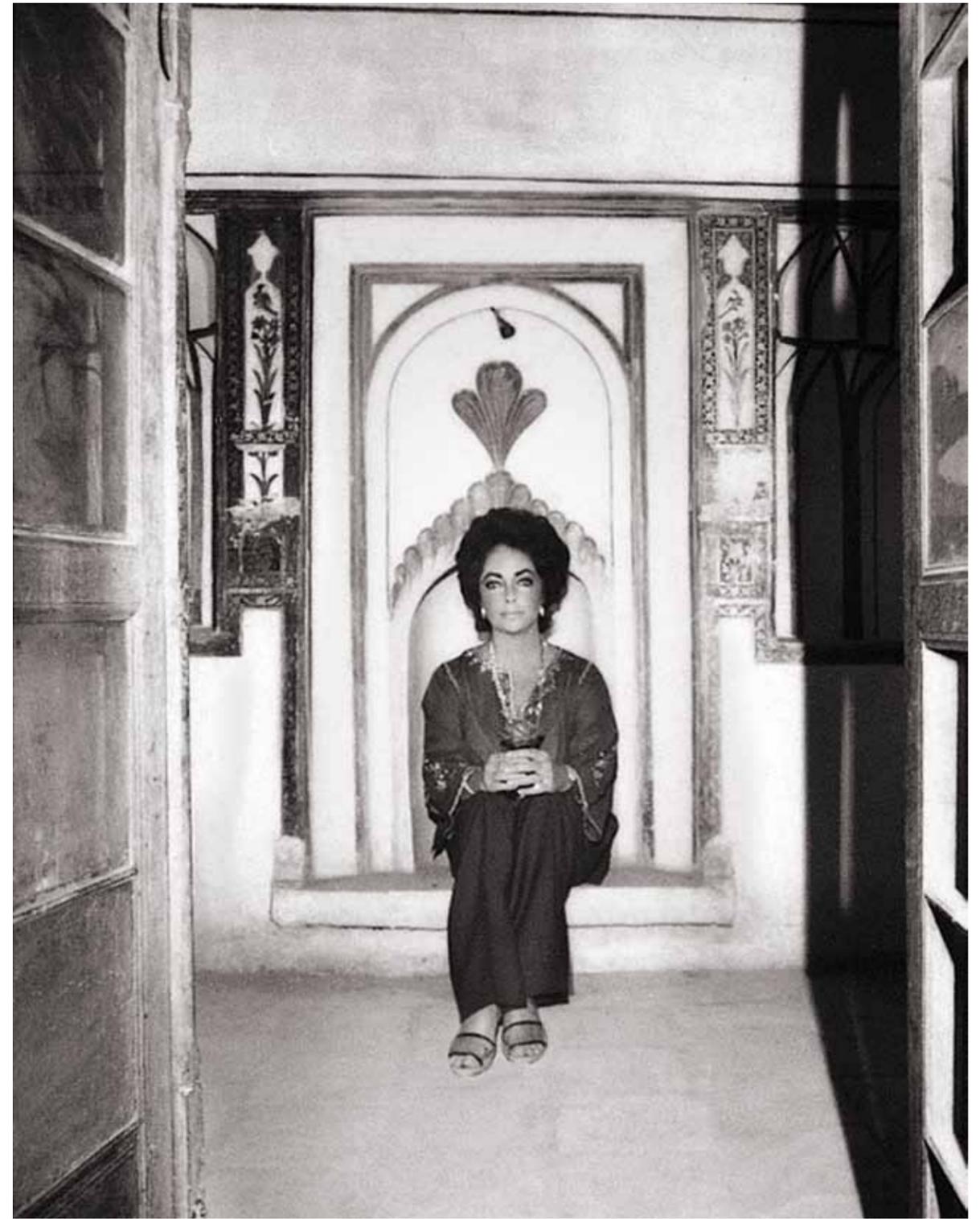
Elizabeth in Chador at the Shah Chirag Shrine, Shiraz.



Carriage in the main town square, Shiraz.



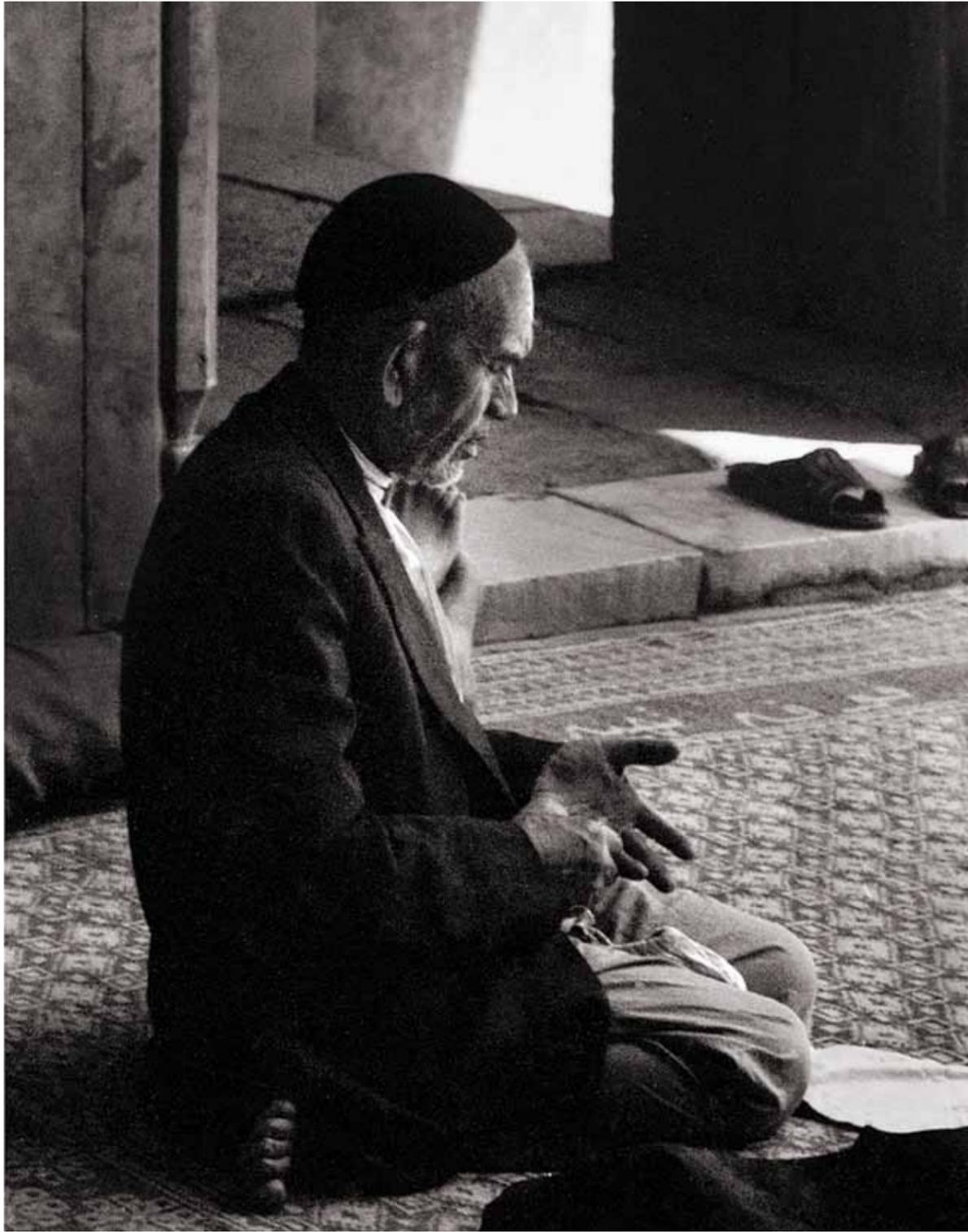
Meditation room in Mosque, Shiraz.



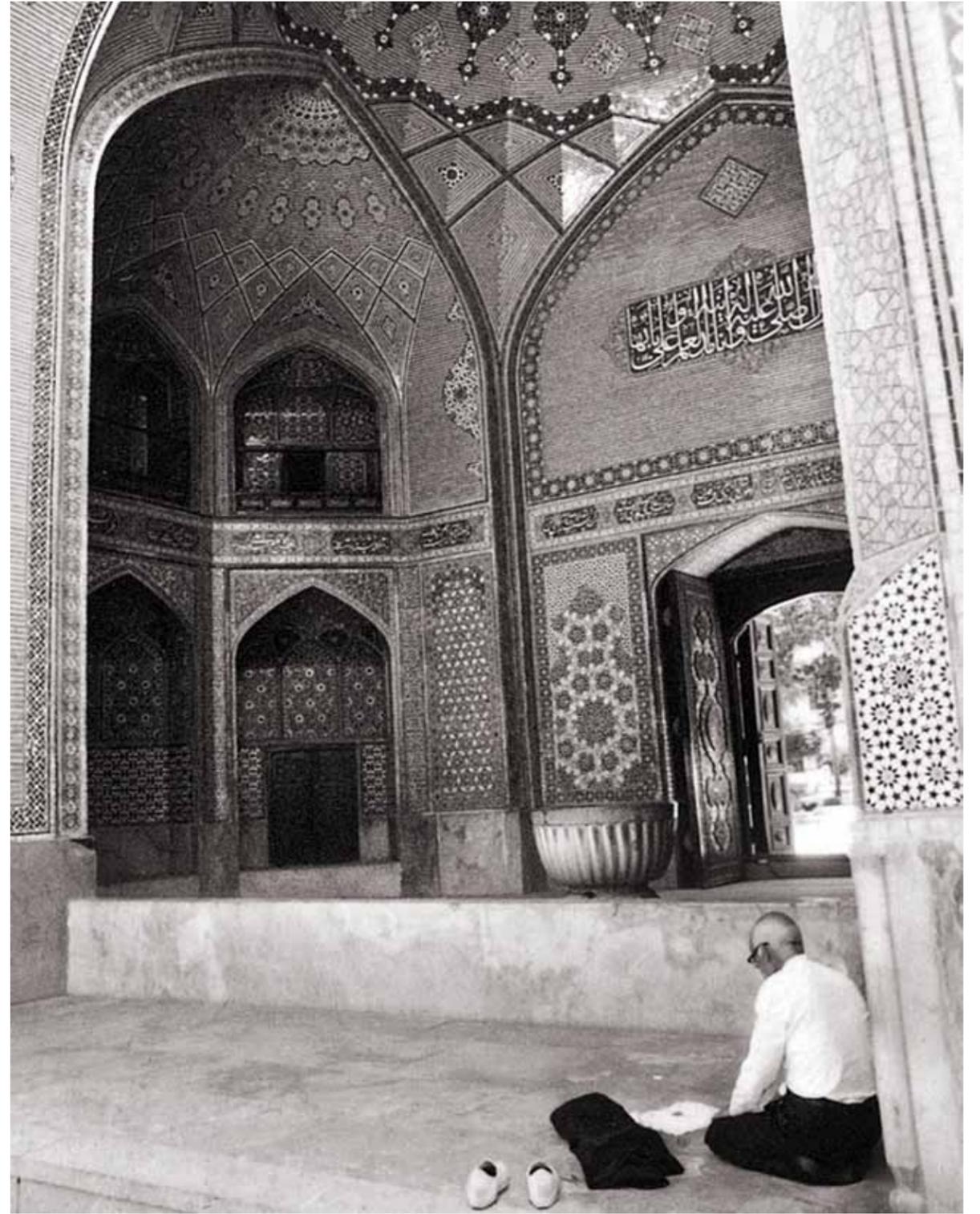
Elizabeth seated in a meditation room.



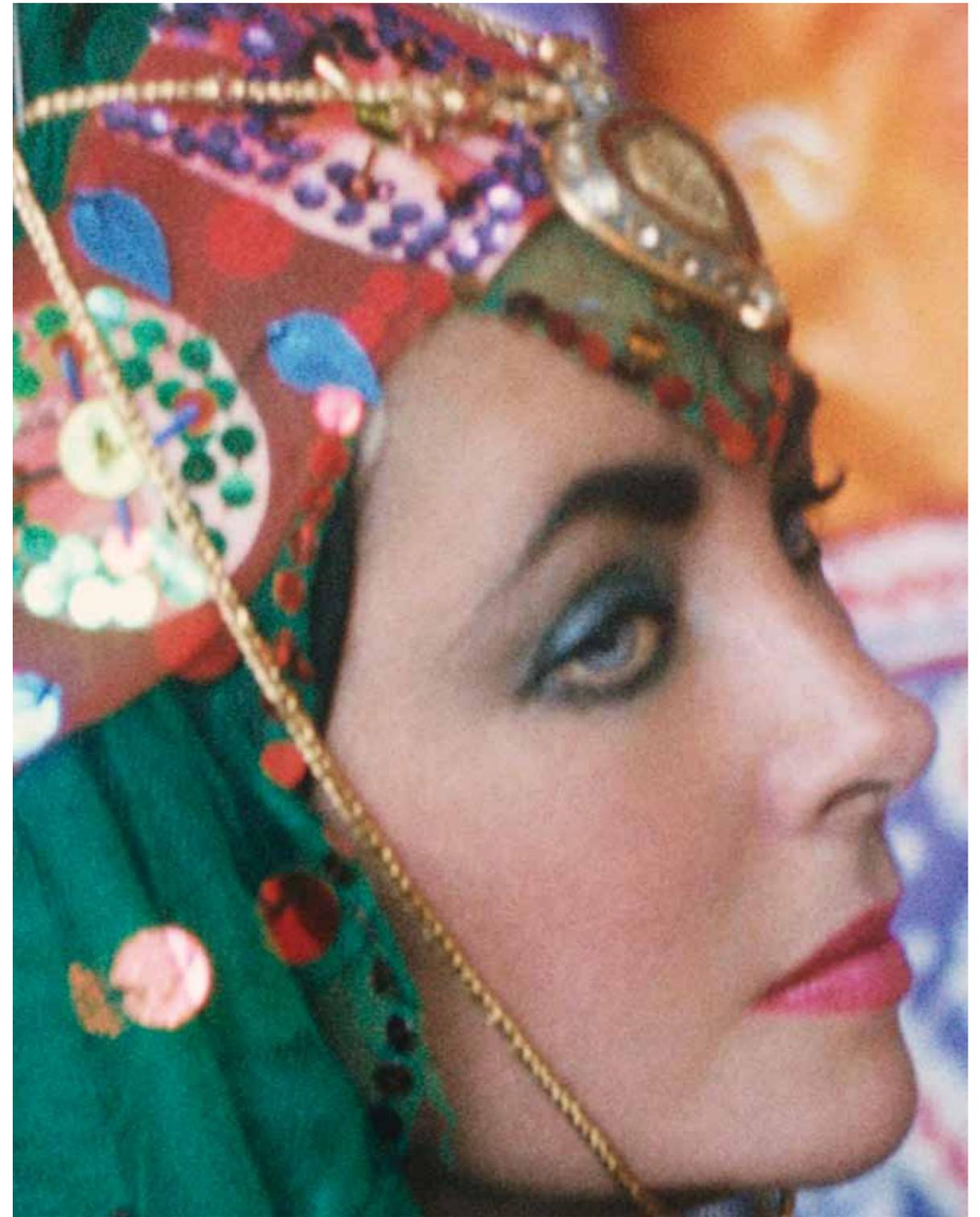
Afternoon siesta outside mosque in Shiraz.



Man at prayer in mosque.



Old man praying at a mosque, Shiraz.



Portrait session at the Tehran Hilton.



Tribal vendors at the bazaar in Shiraz.



Vendor resting at his stall.



Portrait artist at his studio with Elizabeth.



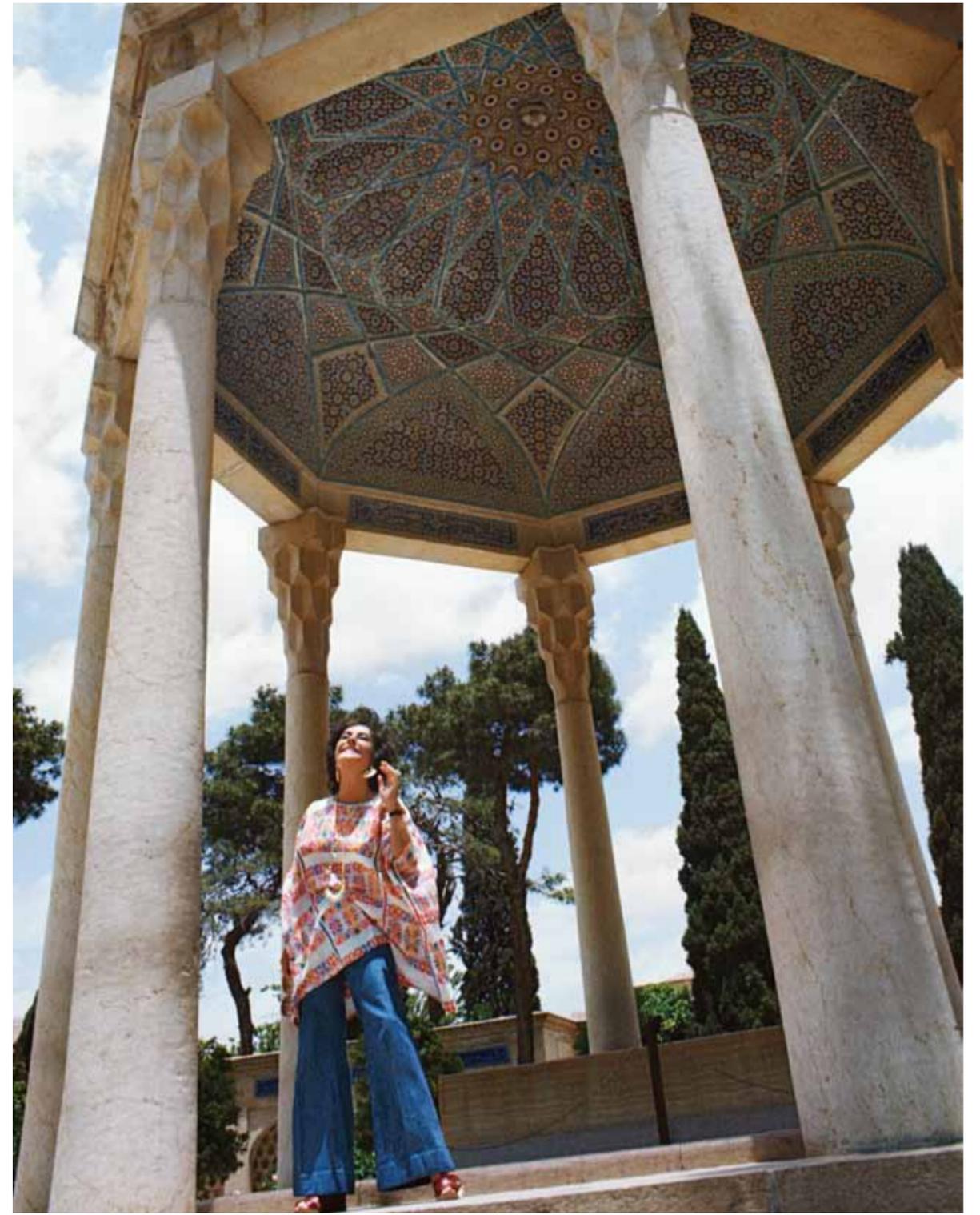
Gardener cooling the grounds at the mosque.



Man posing by an ancient urn.



Tomb of Sa'adi, Shiraz.



Tomb of Hafiz, Shiraz.

FIROOZ ZAHEDI BIOGRAPHY

Firooz was born in Iran in 1949. His family moved to England when he was nine-years old. In 1969 he came to the United States to attend Georgetown University School of Foreign Service. He served as a diplomat for the Iranian government but left to pursue his dream of being an artist. He enrolled at the Corcoran School of Art graduating in 1976 with a degree in Visual Communications. Firooz was appointed as the Washington D.C. correspondent for Andy Warhol's Interview Magazine whilst still at school. His portraits of local celebrities that appeared in that publication culminated in a cover story on Elizabeth Taylor, a friend, who had settled in the nation's capital. Together they had traveled to Iran and Europe where he had photographed her extensively. In 1978 he accompanied Elizabeth Taylor to Los Angeles as her personal photographer on a film project. He decided to settle there and to pursue his career as a portrait photographer. His passion for and knowledge of Hollywood movies combined with his photographic style brought him to the notice of editors and advertisers. An assignment for Vanity Fair proved a great success and soon he was shooting for that publication on a regular basis leading to a contract with Condé Nast in 1991. His photograph of Elizabeth Taylor holding a condom to raise awareness for the AIDS crisis is one of Vanity Fair's most iconic covers. In addition, his editorial photographs have graced many different magazine covers including Time, In Style, Town and Country, Glamour, Esquire, British GQ and Australian Vogue.

Aside from his editorial work he has photographed many popular film posters that include "Pulp Fiction," "Get Shorty," "Edward Scissorhands" and "The Addams Family." Advertising work outside the entertainment world has included clients such as Coca Cola, Motorola, Neutrogena, Ebel and L'Oreal. He has also pursued his fine art photography with shows at the Staley Wise and Leila Heller Gallery in New York amongst others. His work was included in Vanity Fair's exhibition of portraits that was shown at Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 2008 and can be seen in the books Vanity Fair's Hollywood as well as Vanity Fair's Portraits. In February 2011, LACMA presented an exhibition of his photographs of Elizabeth Taylor in Iran shot in 1976. The success of that exhibition led to the museum acquiring those photographs for their permanent collection.

Firooz is based in Los Angeles.

All photographs © Firooz Zahedi 2011

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