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## THE EFFECT OF IRAN'S QAJAR ARCHAISM ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF STATE ARCHITECTURE UNDER THE REZA SHAH PAHLAVI'S RULE

Javad Neyestani

*Department of Archeology, Faculty of Humanities, Tarbiat Modares University, Iran,*  
jneyestani@modares.ac.ir

Farshad Rahimian

*Department of Archeology, Faculty of Humanities, Tarbiat Modares University, Iran, rahimianf@ymail.com*

Reza Afhami

*Department of Archeology, Faculty of Humanities, Tarbiat Modares University, Iran, afhami@modares.ac.ir*

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# THE EFFECT OF IRAN'S QAJAR ARCHAISM ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF STATE ARCHITECTURE UNDER THE REZA SHAH PAHLAVI'S RULE

BY

Javad Neyestani, Farshad Rahimian & Reza Afhami

Department of Archeology, Faculty of Humanities, Tarbiat Modares University, Iran

## ABSTRACT

[AR]

تأثير الفكر القاجاري الأثري على تكوين وتوسع العمارة في الدولة خلال فترة رضا شاه بهلوي

أصبح نشر وتعزيز الهوية الوطنية لإيران الحديثة من خلال التأكيد على الإرث الحضاري لعصر ما قبل الإسلام، والذي تم طرحه في الأوساط الفكرية للفترة القاجارية، سياسةً رسميةً للبلاد خلال الحكومة الهلوية الأولى وانعكس ذلك في تصميم عدد من المباني الحكومية الجديدة تحت عنوان الطراز «الأثري»؛ كما أن الأعمال التي تنتمي إلى الطراز المذكور تعتبر اليوم سمات دائمة للعصر الهلوي الأول. تتناول هذه المقالة مسألتين تتعلقان بهذا النوع من الهندسة المعمارية؛ أولاً، من أجل إنشاء طراز أثري وطني، كان هناك نوعان من الأنماط هي الأخمينية والساسانية، تجاهل المهندسون المعماريون عن وعي الطراز الساساني - باستثناء نماذج قليلة - وجعلوا العمارة والزخارف الأخمينية النموذج الرئيسي لعملهم. ثانياً، على الرغم من الأهمية الكبيرة لبناء الهوية التاريخية لدى النظام الهلوي الأول، فإن المباني الحكومية التي تحمل هذا الطراز من العمارة تم بناءها في الغالب في العاصمة فقط، وتتواجد بقلة في الأجزاء الأخرى من البلاد. من خلال دراسة أفكار الشخصيات الجوهرية الأثري مثل فتح علي أخوند زاده وجلال الدين ميرزا قاجار وأغا خان كرمانى، تم دراسة وتحليل المكونات الرئيسية لهذه الأفكار مثل الحاجة إلى الخروج على التقاليد، التنافس مع الغرب، إظهار القوة والنظر إلى التاريخ باعتباره كأداة، حيث اتضح أنه لا يمكن لأي طراز معماري أن يشمل جميع هذه المكونات سوى الطراز الأخميني. فيما يتعلق بالعوامل التي تحدد عدد الأعمال التي تحمل هذا الطراز، فقد أثرت القضايا الاقتصادية والثقافية المتزايدة كعوامل رئيسية محددة لذلك. تخلى المعماريون الإيرانيون الداعون للحداثة عن طراز العمارة القديمة عند توليهم المشاريع الحكومية الكبيرة أواخر الثلاثينيات من القرن الماضي. يعتمد النهج النظري لهذه المقالة على نهج التاريخ الثقافي والطريقة التاريخية التحليلية.

[EN] Discussions among Qajar intellectuals on promoting modern Iranian national identity with an emphasis on pre-Islamic heritage became official state policy in the Reza Shah Pahlavi government. This was manifested in several «archaic» public buildings now seen as the lasting monuments of this period. This study explores two points on this architectural style: Firstly, despite the availability of Achaemenid and Sassanid models to inspire their indigenous archaic style, most architects consciously ignored the Sassanid style and modeled their works after Achaemenid architecture. Secondly, despite the profound importance of archaic identity in the Pahlavi government, most such buildings were built in the capital and only a few in other regions. The ideas of major figures such as Fath-Ali Akhundzadeh, Jalal-al-Din Mirza Qajar, and Aqa Khan Kermani were explored to study the main components of archaism, such as anti-traditionalism, confrontation with the West, manifestation of power, and historical instrumentalism. Only the neo-Achaemenid style could have provided all these components, and economic and cultural problems explain the limited number of works. Iranian archaic architecture was rooted in 19th-century AD European eclecticism with a similar end. Like the western modernist movement's ability to put aside eclecticism in the early 20th century AD, modernist Iranian architects designed most state projects in the late 1940s and dropped archaism. This historical-cultural study is based on a historical-analytical methodology.

**KEYWORDS:** Archaism, Qajar era, Pahlavi era, Qajar architecture, architecture during Reza Shah period, Fath-Ali Akhundzadeh, Jalal-al-Din Mirza Qajar.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The beginning of Reza Shah's reign in 1925 AD marked a turning point in contemporary Iranian history. With the support of a new generation of intellectuals, he came to power amidst public discontent with the post-Constitutional Revolution political turmoil and began to modernize the country under an authoritarian centralized government<sup>1</sup>. This period was characterized by an urban style for new public buildings with pre-Islamic Iranian monumental architecture famously seen in the Tomb of Ferdowsi in Tus, the headquarters of Bank Melli Iran, Şahrbāni [*Police*] Palace, and Museum of Ancient Iran in Tehran. Although under Reza Shah's reign archaism was mostly restricted to Tehran, it is still an architectural symbol of the First Pahlavi period.

Pahlavi state theorists consistently tried to introduce the absolute dissonance of the new identity with the Qajar past –seen as reactionary and humiliating<sup>2</sup>– by, for example, using archaist style to end the «decadent» Qajar architecture<sup>3</sup>. Meanwhile, reformism, from a modernized military to the Unveiling [*Kašf-e Hejāb*] policy, was rooted in the Qajar era and implemented by its elites.

This study regards archaism as a continuation of Qajar and Pahlavi reformism and reviews its root causes to show the manifestation of Qajar intellectuals' activism in Pahlavi archaist architecture and its stylistic features.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Until the Islamic Revolution of Iran, researchers have somewhat neglected architecture of the First Pahlavi period. Parviz Rajabi<sup>4</sup> was a pioneer in this field. He divided Iranian architectural history to the periods preceding and following Reza Shah's reign and categorized each period's works into three groups based on their origins, namely the government, the wealthy, and the plebian. His biased and idealistic view of Pahlavi architecture is rejected due to his description of the Constitutional Revolution as the period of quiescence<sup>5</sup> and its architecture as the embodiment of decadence, inelegance, and instability, and brusque<sup>6</sup>. He also attributes to Reza Shah the initiative to combine Western architectural techniques with traditional Iranian architecture<sup>7</sup>, which will be proven to be incorrect. Rajabi's writings represent the official stance of the Pahlavi state regarding contemporary architecture. Banimasoud<sup>8</sup> has studied Iranian architecture since the dawn of modernity during the reign of Fath–Ali Shah Qajar to the first decade of the Islamic Republic by describing works based on their cultural and political background. The author has dedicated his book to influential figures in contemporary architecture, including architects, intellectuals, and statesmen. With a focus on the First Pahlavi period, Mostafa

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<sup>1</sup> ABRAHAMIAN 2018: 120.

<sup>2</sup> ATABAKI & ZÜRCHER 2004: 71.

<sup>3</sup> RAJABI 1976: 28-26, 40.

<sup>4</sup> RAJABI 1976: 13-34

<sup>5</sup> RAJABI 1976: 40.

<sup>6</sup> RAJABI 1976: 28-26.

<sup>7</sup> RAJABI 1976: 41.

<sup>8</sup> BANIMASOUD 2019: 53-70, 228-261.

Kiani<sup>9</sup> has tried to identify the various factors shaping this period's architecture according to archaeological findings, modernism, militarism, and new functions using state documents from this period's development plans. Unlike the previous eras, the major Pahlavi civil projects paved the way for well-documented architects. Monographs about famous architects, including Nikolai Markov<sup>10</sup> and Vartan Hovanesian<sup>11</sup> provide an accurate evaluation of their approach and influence.

The archaism manifested in this period's architecture requires a careful examination of late Qajar and early Pahlavi political and cultural changes. Atabaki and Zürcher<sup>12</sup> have investigated Reza Shah's modernization of Iran and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's in Turkey and their effect on the two nations' governments, societies, and clergy. Zia-Ebrahimi<sup>13</sup> has explored Iran's romantic nationalism – named dislocative nationalism– since its inception in the writings of Fath-Ali Akhundzadeh (1812-1878 AD), Jalal-al-Din Mirza Qajar (1827-1872 AD), and Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani (1854-1896 AD) until the end of the Pahlavi period and the major historical factors contributing to their creation.

### Questions

Two points related to archaic Pahlavi architecture were studied:

1. Why did Reza Shah Pahlavi's state architects mostly follow the Achaemenid architecture in their nationalistic style?
2. Despite the central government's extensive reach, why did this specific architectural style nearly fail to reach beyond the capital?

### Research Method

The data was collected with field and library research of works and the theoretical historical approach to cultural studies.

### III. Qajar Archaism

Modernity in Iran began with a sense of dread over severe backwardness compared to the West and the strategic need to address it. The humiliating military defeats of the Qajars against Russia and Britain, covert and overt encroachments by the two superpowers, and the corruption and mismanagement of the ruling class made certain political and cultural figures seek solutions for the forthcoming crisis in the nation.

Theories by Qajar elites presented over decades to identify crises and find solutions can be expressed as follows:

1. Technological backwardness that Abbas Mirza Qajar (1789-1833 AD) and his minister Mirza Issa Qa'em-Maqam sought to rectify following defeat at the hand of the Russians<sup>14</sup>. This view was based on the lived experience that technological inferiority

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<sup>9</sup> KIANI 2014.

<sup>10</sup> DANIEL & SHAFE'I & SOROUSHIANI 2004.

<sup>11</sup> SOROUSHIANI & DANIEL & SHAFE'I 2008.

<sup>12</sup> ATABAKI & ZÜRCHER 2004.

<sup>13</sup> ZIA-EBRAHIMI 2016: 41-73.

<sup>14</sup> ADAMIYAT 2015: 21-20.

was Iran's main vulnerability, especially in defense, and the solution was scientific and technological development<sup>15</sup>.

2. Certain intellectuals, who had lived or studied in Europe and were able to thoroughly evaluate its conditions believed that the prosperity of Western nations was rooted in their political structure and their government's adherence to the law<sup>16</sup>. Mirza Saleh Shirazi was a leading figure with this belief<sup>17</sup>, which was also shared by Mirza Yousuf Khan Mostashar-al-Dowleh (1824-1896 AD)<sup>18</sup>.
3. Archaists saw tradition as the root of Iran's problems and an infertile mother for a rebirth. They believed that Iranian civilization could be reanimated and brought to parity with the West were it not for centuries of «Arab-Islamic» cultural dominance waning its creative power. Therefore, they argued that the effects and manifestations of this culture should be wiped from society and people's minds to return Iran to its ancient «originality» with the power to progress<sup>19</sup>.

Particular beliefs, such as honoring ancient history or linguistic purism, were common in the late Qajar intellectual community; but archaism was distinguished from other discourses as a politically-motivated negative view toward social culture. Thus, Mohammad-Hassan Khan E'temad-al-Saltaneh (1843-1896 AD), author of *Durar al-Tijan fi Tariḥ Bani Aškan* (on Parthian History) or Mohammad-Nasir Forsat-al-Dowleh Shirazi (1854-1920 AD), author of *Ātār-e 'Ajam [Persian Monuments]*, cannot be considered archaists. In fact, early archaism owed its views to a minority of dissenting intellectuals such as Mirza Fath-Ali Akhundzadeh<sup>20</sup>, Jalal-al-Din Mirza Qajar, Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani<sup>21</sup> and Maneckji Limji Hataria (1813-1890 AD)<sup>22</sup>.

#### IV. Components of Archaism

The authors believe that the archaic components in Qajar literature and Pahlavi architecture can be identified from the writings and buildings left from these periods. It appears that Fath-Ali Akhundzadeh, Jalal-al-Din Mirza, and Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani's ultimate goal in writing was not merely to promote knowledge, but to fundamentally change society. Akhundzadeh tried to reach some wider audiences by turning to critical playwriting<sup>23</sup>, and had the simple-minded belief that publishing *Maktubāt-e Kamāl-al-Dawla [Letters of Kamal-al-Dawla]*, in Asia and Africa would destroy Islam<sup>24</sup>. The full title of Jalal-al-Din Mirza's book, *Nāme-ye Hosrovān: The Story of Persian Kings in Persian, which Benefits People, Especially Children*, also reflects the author's promotional objectives.

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<sup>15</sup> BANIMASSOUD 2019: 2; SARIOLGHALAM 2018: 12, 59-58; BUSSE 1987: 80-82.

<sup>16</sup> ZIA-EBRAHIMI, 2016: 26-27.

<sup>17</sup> SHIRAZI, 1969: 207, 219-323.

<sup>18</sup> MOSTASHAR-AL-DOWLEH 2018: 75-79; KERMANI 2006: vol.1: 186-205.

<sup>19</sup> ZIA-EBRAHIMI 2016: 2.

<sup>20</sup> AKHUNDOV 1963; AKHUNDZADEH 1977: 7-13; ADAMIYAT 1971: 9-32; MOWLAVI 1995: 153-154 Number

<sup>21</sup> MIRZA AGA KHAN KERMANI, 2016: 66-77, 2000; BAYAT, 2011.

<sup>22</sup> KOTWAL & ET AL: 2016.

<sup>23</sup> AKHUNDZADEH 1977.

<sup>24</sup> AKHUNDOV 1963: 235-234; MOWLAVI 1995: 157.

These pioneers never tried to formulate the ideological foundations of archaism. After Akhundzadeh's death, it took Abd-al-Hossein Teymourtash half a century to introduce some of these principles in the New Iran Party manifesto<sup>25</sup>. However, the following shows that Qajar archaism had specific identifiable components in the First Pahlavi period's architectural expression:

The inferiority/power complex, shared between archaism and mainstream reformism, is rooted in the bitter experience of the Russo-Iranian wars. The annexation of the Caucasus from Iran by a non-Muslim superpower stunned Fath-Ali Shah's statesmen. Europe, considered Dār-al-Kufr [*land of infidelity*] and a despised distant land, was suddenly at Iran's doorstep and threatening their political existence<sup>26</sup>. The Iranians had woken up to a new geopolitical reality of Eurasia that the Ottoman Empire had faced a century earlier. The next developments, especially Herat's annexation with Britain's military pressure, superpowers turning Iran into the arena for their «Great Game», and the political turmoil of the Constitutional Revolution made a strong government a pipe dream for Iranian intellectuals<sup>27</sup>. Thus, Reza Khan's actions as Prime Minister and Minister of War toward the end of the Qajar period in organizing the army and suppressing rogue forces were favored by the elites, who accepted him as Shah with open arms<sup>28</sup>.

Reza Shah's architectural prowess was not bound by archaist style and covered all urban architecture; and the Pahlavi government had both the ability and the will to turn construction into a symbol of its greatness and efficiency. Significant historical sections of cities were destroyed to build streets, parks, and boulevards. The long, wide streets that connected cities end to end became a symbol of modernity and the government's power<sup>29</sup>. European-style street projects in Iran dates back to the Naser-al-Din Shah Qajari period, and the first cobblestone street was paved inside the Tehran's Arg [*royal citadel*] in 1850 AD<sup>30</sup>; but such projects were restricted to the capital and sparsely populated areas outside downtown due to the central government's weakness and empty treasury<sup>31</sup>. The government neither wanted nor could rebuild the dense historical districts of cities with residential and commercial properties. Unlike the Qajar period, the Pahlavi municipal authorities, especially the mayor of Tehran Karim Bouzarjomehri, did as they pleased when it came to appropriation and destruction<sup>32</sup>. Kilometers of streets and thousands of new office buildings were constructed and some cities were visually transformed in short order, showing that the central government's power extended throughout Iran.

A comparison of some government buildings before and after the beginning of Reza Shah's reign shows the resulting morphological transformation of urban architecture. Telegrāfhāneh [*the Telegraph House*]. [FIGURE 1] was built by the Reza Shah-appointed mayor Karim Bouzarjomehri's order between 1926-1928 AD on the south side of Tehran

<sup>25</sup> ATABAKI & ZÜRCHER 2004: 71.

<sup>26</sup> ZIA-EBRAHIMI 2016: 21-23.

<sup>27</sup> ABRAHAMIAN 1983: 103-118.

<sup>28</sup> ABRAHAMIAN 2018: 108-109; ATABAKI & ZÜRCHER, 2004: 17-19, 22, 130-131.

<sup>29</sup> BANIMASSOUD 2019: 192.

<sup>30</sup> VAQAYE'-E ETEFAQIYE 1850: 1.

<sup>31</sup> GHOBADIAN & GHOBADIAN 2018: 75.

<sup>32</sup> KIANI 2014: 111.



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Tuphāneh Square with a neo-renaissance style, a giant metal dome, and an alien appearance. It was a fitting example of an institution that fearlessly accompanied the visual transformation of the city. The Qajar Baladiyyeh [*Municipality*] Palace [FIGURE 2] on the north side of the square built between 1921-1923 AD during Seyyed Zia'-al-Din Tabatabai's premiership appears humble compared to Telegrāfhāneh. The two buildings were separated by less than a decade and demonstrate the extent of changes in courage and financial and executive ability of statesmen and municipal authorities.



[FIGURE 1]: Telegrāfhāneh, south side of Tehran's Tuphāneh Sq.  
TAHAMI & HADDADI 2013: 18-19.



[FIGURE 2]: Baladiyyeh, north side of Tuphāneh Sq.  
KIANI 2014: 293.

The Qajar Naẓmiyyeh [*Police*] Palace [FIGURE 3] on the west side of Tuphāneh Square and Pahlavi Şahrbāni Palace [FIGURES 4-5] in Bāq-e Melli [*the National Garden Area*] better illustrate this difference. The first is a typical functional building with intricate column pairs and a metal gable roof that is a rather unadorned example of residential architecture of Qajar nobles. In contrast, the Pahlavi Şahrbāni Palace is a spectacular office building in the capital. The massive crenellated structures on either side of the main entrance and the sturdy columns of the main portico with bull-protome Capital and rows of sculptured reliefs of lancer-bearers with spears on the outer stairways wall symbolize the Pahlavi government's iron-fist of discipline and punishment.

Another feature of Qajar archaism is its instrumental view of history seemingly focusing on cultural heritage and history but with inaccurate and biased references. To understand this feature, remember that archaism has an inherently political approach and specifically aimed to discrediting the Islamic tradition and replace it with secular nationalism<sup>33</sup>. To this end, history, art, architecture, archeology, and literature are mere instruments. Archaism boldly combines the myths of Šāhnāmeḥ, Dasātir, and Islamic and Western histories to present a magnificent ancient Iran against a dark and corrupt Arabic culture<sup>34</sup>. Thus, it is not important to verify sources and citations. For example, the first volume of Jalāl-al-Dīn Mirza history textbook only cites Dasātiri sources, such as Dabestān-e Maḍāheb [*School of Religious Doctrines*] and Šārestan-e Chahār-Chaman and their mythological narratives. In the liberation of the Jews of Babylon by Cyrus the Great and the story of the false Bardiya (Smerdis), he replaces Bahman and Tahmuras with historical figures<sup>35</sup>.

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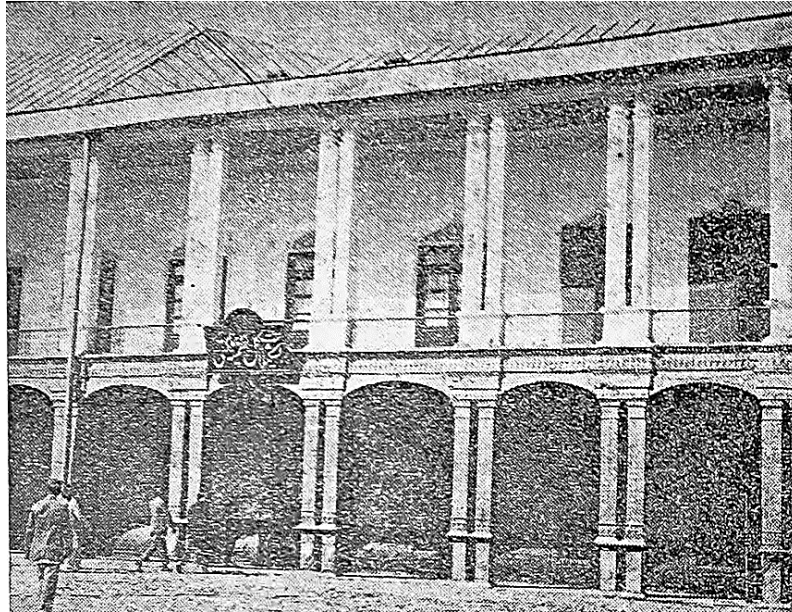
<sup>33</sup> ZIA-EBRAHIMI 2016: 71.

<sup>34</sup> KERMANI 2016: 62-55.

<sup>35</sup> JALAL-AL-DIN MIRZA 1868: 64, 184.



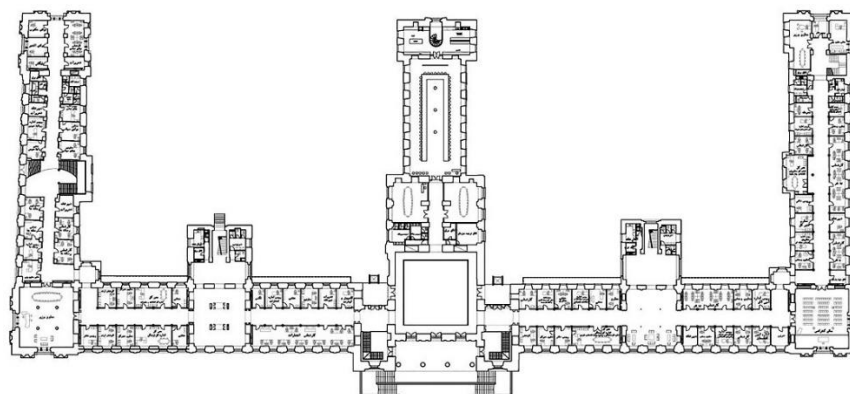
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[FIGURE 3]: Nazmiyyeh, west side of Tehran Tuphāneh Sq.  
JAHED 1929: 179.



[FIGURE 4]: Former Şahrbāni Palace, Tehran Bāq-e Melli.  
@ Taken by the researchers.



[FIGURE 5]: Ground Floor Plan of Şahrbāni Palace, Tehran Bāq-e Melli. EMARAT-E KHORSHID  
CONSULTING ENGINEERS 2007.

Reza Shah's rule gave the archaists the highest levels of executive authority, such as extensive governmental construction. To express their pre-Islamic architectural nationalism, these statesmen could seek inspiration from Achaemenid and Sassanid patterns; but mostly chose the former in practice.

The roots of this tendency should be sought in the instrumentalist view of their progenitors; Politicians who use history and culture as tools and instinctively choose the least costly route. Thus, the Achaemenid style presented undeniable advantages to Pahlavi statesmen, including its prestige due to its affiliation with a glorious period of Iranian civilization, visual charisma and relative recreational simplicity due to the lack of arches made a row of façade columns or half-columns applicable to and harmonious with the modern plan of government buildings.

Pahlavi statesmen were raised in the late Qajar period and were more dependent on its aristocratic culture than they showed, a culture which was influenced by the luxurious architecture of Georges-Eugène Haussmann's Paris (1809-1891 AD), St. Petersburg, Vienna, and Istanbul<sup>36</sup>. In this period, the classical columns adorning buildings with or without round Roman arches were common among renewed architecture imitating «Farangi» style. Solidifying columns and replacing Corinthian capitals with the Achaemenid double-protome ones resulted in a style consistent with the Qajari taste of Reza Shah's statesmen and the Pahlavi official policy of reviving ancient Iranian culture.

The important feature of anti-traditional/otherism often occurs in under-developed societies when presented with Western civilization. Qajar statesmen, intellectuals and activists saw a huge gulf between Iran and Europe. But none like Akhundzadeh and Kermani had based their ideology on the contradiction of contemporary Iran with its past golden age and the progressive West.

Pahlavi statesmen assented with their predecessors that the West should become the model for progress, and with education, society should return to the correct path and rediscover its cultural originality. However, the argument on where this «originality» could be found was reflected in the period's urban architecture.

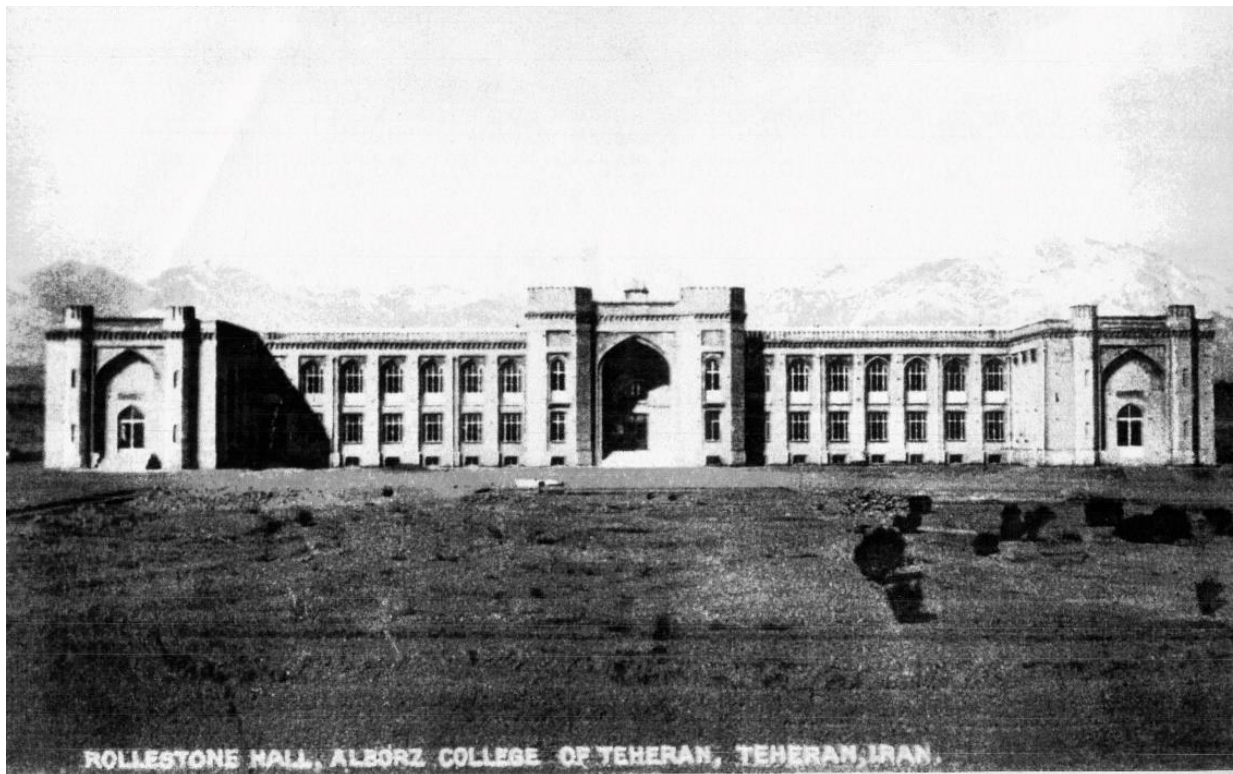
Some connoisseurs, art historians, and especially foreign scholars saw the roots of the deviation in the Qajar era and wish a return to the norms of the Safavid era, which was respected internationally in art and architecture. In a 1925 AD speech with Prime Minister Reza Khan Sardar-e Sepah, members of parliament and ministers, Arthur Upham Pope praised ancient Iran, but pointed his arrow of criticism at the Qajars and called their art a low imitation of «original» Safavid art<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> GURNEY 1996: 31-32.

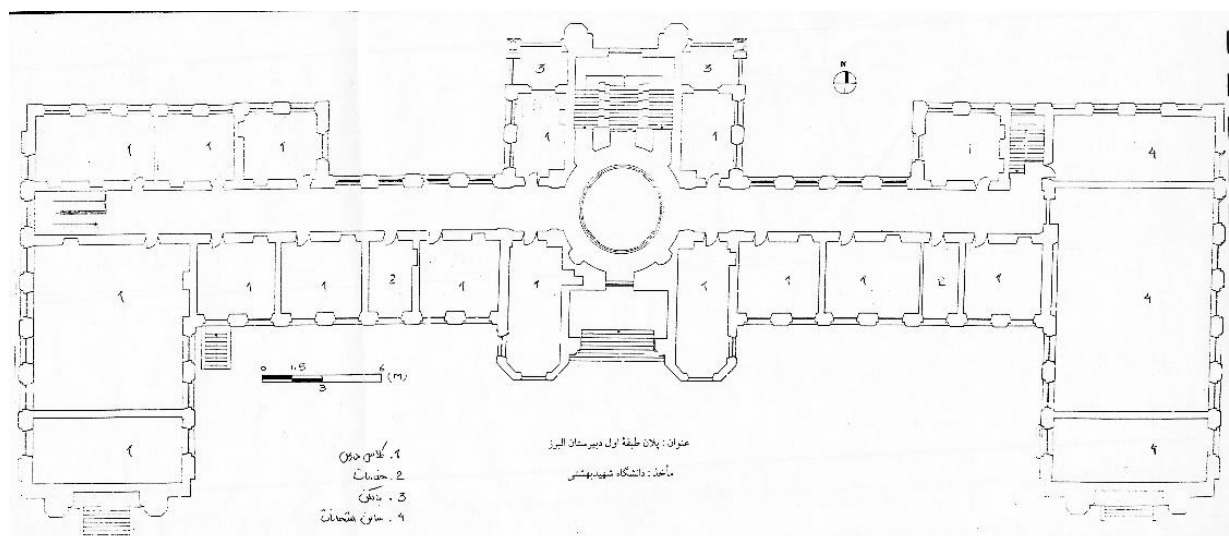
<sup>37</sup> POPE 1976: 56.

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[FIGURE 6]: Alborz College, Rolleston Hall.

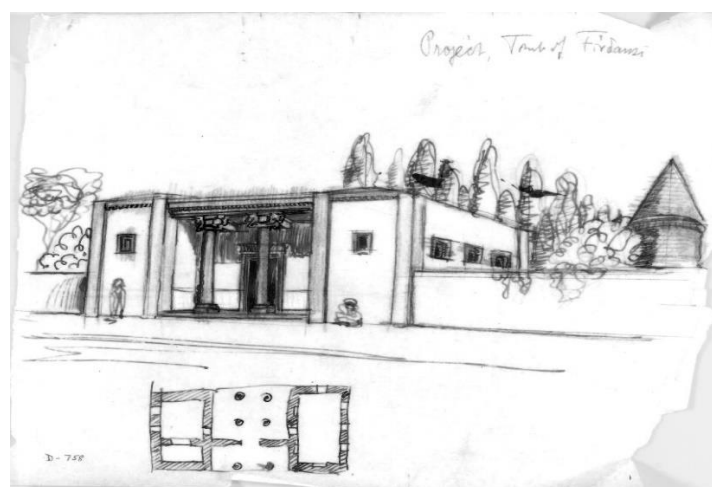
REGISTRATION FILE OF ALBORZ EDUCATIONAL CENTER 1997: 35.



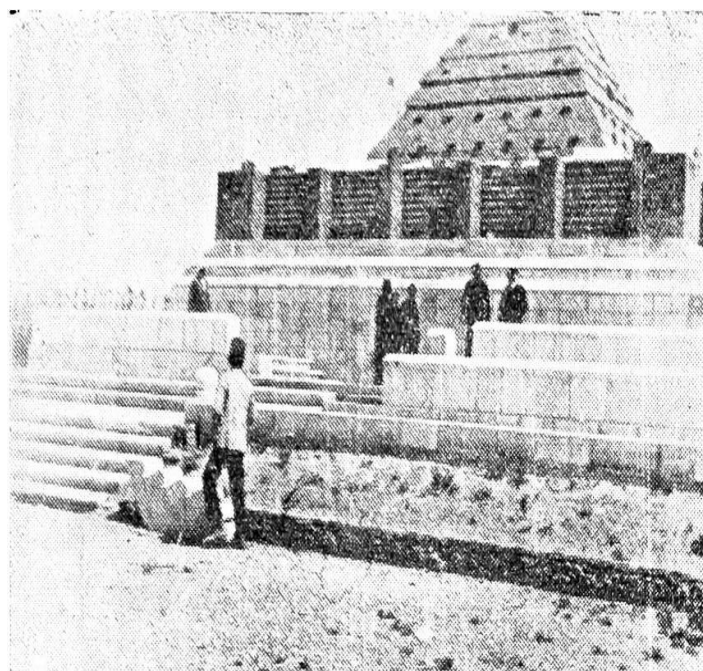
[FIGURE 7]: Alborz College, ground floor plan of Rolleston Hall. Registration file of Alborz Educational Center 1997: 35.

Dānešsarā-ye 'Āli [*The High Teachers' College*] in Negārestān Garden (1928 AD), the two main buildings of Alborz College (Rolleston Hall, 1921-1925 AD, [FIGURES 6-7] and the Science Building, 1931 AD) by Nikolai Markov (1882-1957 AD), and Hāfeḍīyeh in Shiraz by André Godard (1881-1965 AD) represent this sympathetic view toward Islamic Iranian heritage. Ernst Herzfeld's (1879-1948 AD) abandoned proposal for Ferdowsi's tomb [FIGURE 8] is another example of this approach's opposition to radical anti-traditionalism. Herzfeld designed the main structure as a tomb tower with a conical roof in a garden that

was somewhat reminiscent of the tombs of Ferdowsi's contemporaries, such as Gunbad-i Qabus (1006 AD) and Mil-i Gharb Radkan (1016-1020 AD). Meanwhile, the garden's entrance hall adorned with Achaemenid-style columns and Persepolitan-style plan evokes Šāhnāme's ancient atmosphere. This balanced approach incorporating the poet's era and works was rejected in favor of André Godard's pyramidal design [FIGURE 9] (1928 AD) with no semblance of Iranian history, which was demolished and replaced by the present structure<sup>38</sup>. Indigenous anti-traditionalists finally «discovered» the potential of Achaemenid architecture, and found an «original» language far from Islamic heritage, a feat finally achieved by Teymourtash and his proposal to model Ferdowsi's tomb in the form of the Tomb of Cyrus the Great<sup>39</sup>.



[FIGURE 8]: Ernst Herzfeld's proposal for Ferdowsi's tomb Smithsonian Learning Lab.



[FIGURE 9]: The early Ferdowsi Tomb, Tus. JAHED 1933: 122.

<sup>38</sup> MOFID & RAISZADEH 2007: 31-32.

<sup>39</sup> KIANI 2014: 87.

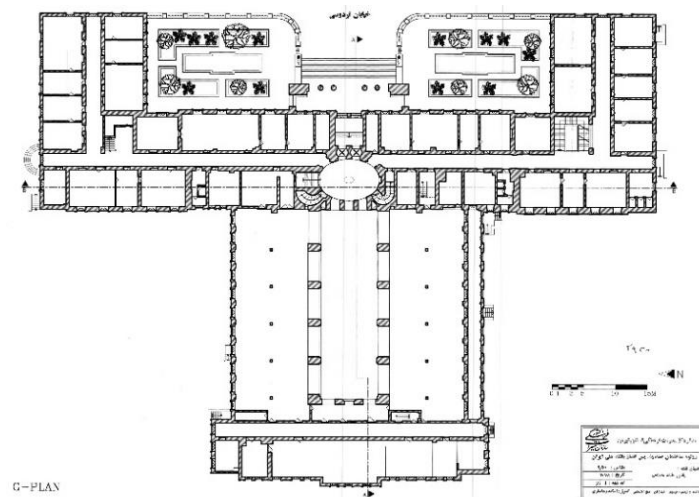
# THE EFFECT OF IRAN'S QAJAR ARCHAISM ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF STATE ARCHITECTURE UNDER THE REZA SHAH PAHLAVI'S RULE



[FIGURE 10]: Final Ferdowsi Tomb, Tus. Registration file of Ferdowsi Tomb 1976: 6.



[FIGURE 11]: Central portico of the headquarters of Bank Melli, Ferdowsi St., Tehran.  
@ Taken by the researchers.



[FIGURE 12]: Ground floor plan of the headquarters of Bank Melli building, Ferdowsi St., Tehran. Bank MELLI IRAN SAVINGS FUND RECORDS 1996: 37.





[FIGURE 13]: Former Imperial Bank of Persia building, east side of Tuphāneh Square.  
@Taken by the researchers.

Architects built such unfamiliar elevation for Ferdowsi's tomb [FIGURE 10] and Bank Melli [FIGURES 11-12] to leave no doubt in the viewer that this chapter of history was closed and a «New Iran» was born. For thousands of years, common Iranian architecture predominately was based on building arches; Achaemenid monumental style with its emphasis on the trabeated system is the exception<sup>40</sup> and a good candidate for archaists due to the lack of arches and domed chamber compared to Sassanid architecture, which Islamic mosques and mausoleums were based on. Comparing the Bank Melli and Imperial Bank of Persia buildings [FIGURE 13] clearly illustrates the different views of rulers and businessmen toward society. Pahlavi aimed to change the public's taste through construction<sup>41</sup>, whereas the Imperial Bank of Persia's British managers did not seek to change, but to be accepted by society. Thus, they called on Hossein Lorzadeh to build an Iranian arched portal for their new building<sup>42</sup> to win the hearts of their traditional Iranian clientele with an architectural element.

Restoration of pride/confrontation with the West, the main stimulant of Iranian archaism, also reflects a self-deprecation complex. Archaists combined history and myth to raise ancient Iran to be on par with Europe and above the Islamic era. Jalal-al-Din Mirza attributed the construction of Istaḥr city to Keyumars to extend its age to thousands of years<sup>43</sup>. That such extravagant claims originated in Dasātiri literature such as Dabestān-e Maḍāheb explains their warm reception among Qajar intellectuals<sup>44</sup>.

Although Reza Shah's ascending the throne satisfied Iranian nationalists, it increased dependence on foreign advisers. The nation was in a predicament in expertise, and traditional architects could not design modern office and industrial buildings. Out of necessity, some offices, hospitals, and factories were planned by European architects contracted by the government and executed by local masters in the capital and towns<sup>45</sup>.

<sup>40</sup> PIRNIA 1991: 5.

<sup>41</sup> GRIGOR 2004: 44.

<sup>42</sup> MOFID & RAISZADEH 2007: 29-28.

<sup>43</sup> JALAL-AL-DIN MIRZA 1868: 20, 24.

<sup>44</sup> TAVAKOLI-TARGHI 2001: 97.

<sup>45</sup> KIANI 2014: 136.



The predilection toward modern architecture provoked a defensive reaction from both groups. First, archaists with claims to the golden age of Iran's millennial civilization did not see traditional architecture adequate for modern needs and considered the unfamiliar soulless Western architecture as inadequate for the country<sup>46</sup>. The second group were the traditional architects who executed these plans. The solution of both groups was to preserve their independence in composition and familiarize the strange appearance of buildings as much possible. Archaists were more attached to the neo-Achaemenid columned façade that fit the bill for reviving Iran's ancient heritage and closely resembled the neoclassical style, implying Iran's equivalence to Europe. Traditionalists, however, utilized the Qajar-Islamic architectural heritage. Many government buildings in cities were built on a modern plan with local and even Qajar execution and appearance [FIGURE 14], or are restrained by a structural or figurative traditional element<sup>47</sup>. Nikolai Markov, a Russian-born Iranian architect, had combined traditional elements with modern planning as his signature style in the Rolleston Hall of Alborz College, Dānešsarā-ye 'Āli, and the Qasr Prison<sup>48</sup>. With this approach, the traditional or archaic façade was a cover for the building that did not interfere with its modern plan and function. The General Post Office of Tehran is a good example of this where Achaemenid columns have been lowered to shallow half-columns on the building [FIGURE 15].

Iranians were among the few nations in the Middle East that entered the era of 19<sup>th</sup>-century AD romantic nationalism with a national awareness of their ancient roots, thanks to Ferdowsi's Šāhnāmeḥ and the ancient tradition of Naqqāli. For many, the Šāhnāmeḥ – even its mythology – was not merely story but history<sup>49</sup>. Since such a strong tradition is not easily withered, Qajar archaists such as Jalal-al-Din Mirza, who knew little of Achaemenid history, based their nationalist discourse on the Šāhnāmeḥ's and Dasātiri literature.

Since the beginning, archaists focused on the Pishdadids and Kayanids in their historical romanticization of Iran, leaving the Parthian and Sassanid ers to professional historians such as Mohammad-Hassan Khan E'temad-al-Saltaneh. Despite their traditional beliefs, certain scholars of this era did not neglect new findings and sought to reconcile two perspectives. Starting in the West until the 19<sup>th</sup> century AD, European historians, like their Iranian counterparts, considered the Kayanid dynasty historical and comparable to Oriental kings. Robert Ker Porter (1777-1842 AD) equated Kay Kawad with Deioces, Kay Kavus with Cyrus the Great, and Esfandiār with Xerxes I<sup>50</sup>.

After his introduction to Achaemenid kings and with the help of Russian sources, Forsat-al-Dowleh compared Cyrus the Great with Kay Khosrow, Darius I with Dārā, and Xerxes I with Esfandiār<sup>51</sup>.

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<sup>46</sup> RAJABI 1976: 41.

<sup>47</sup> E.g. Isfahan Risbāf Factory. KIANI 2014: 333.

<sup>48</sup> DANIEL, SHAFE'I & SOROUSHIANI 2004: 163-162.

<sup>49</sup> FORSAT-AL-DAWLAH 1983: 122.

<sup>50</sup> PORTER 1821: xiv, xv.

<sup>51</sup> FORSAT-AL-DOWLEH 1983: 154.

He, for instance, translated the famous Pasargadae inscription (CMA) «I, Cyrus the king, an Achaemenid» to «I am Kay Khosrow, Kayanid king»<sup>52</sup>.



[FIGURE 14]: Former building of Babol Municipality(right).  
@ Taken by the researchers.



[FIGURE 15]: Former General Tehran Post Office, facing Imam Khomeini St.  
@ Taken by the researchers.

<sup>52</sup> FORSAT-AL-DAWLEH 1983: 234.





[FIGURE 16]: The first building of Bank Melli. JAHED 1929, 142.



[FIGURE 17]: Ministry of Foreign Affairs Building N°. 1, Tehran, @Taken by the researchers.



[FIGURE 18]: Courthouse of Tehran. REGISTRATION FILE OF TEHRAN COURTHOUSE 2006: 7.

Foroughi (1907-1983 AD), Vartan Hovanessian (1895-1982 AD), and Gabriel Guevrekian (1900-1970 AD), who were all followers of the Western modernist movement. These leading modern architects leapt into the lead and even deprecated Nikolai Markov's evolutionary traditional style. It is assumed that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Building No. 1 (1939 AD, FIGURE 17) with a rectangular tower inspired by Ka'ba-ye Zartosht [*Ka'ba of Zoroaster*]<sup>53</sup> and the Courthouse of Tehran (1946 AD, FIGURE 18) depicting Khosrow I Anushirvan the Just is evidence of the rushed marriage of Pahlavi's neo-Achaemenid architecture to Iranian modernist style<sup>54</sup>.

Furthermore, most Achaemenid-style buildings were built in Tehran since it was costly to construct gaudy buildings<sup>55</sup>. Fearing the profiteering of subordinates, Reza Shah barred spending to decorate buildings without his direct supervision<sup>56</sup>.

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<sup>53</sup> RAJABI 1976: 50.

<sup>54</sup>For more information on the academic background of its architect, see: HAKIM 2001: 77-85.

<sup>55</sup> RAJABI 1976: 80-81.

<sup>56</sup> KIANI 2014: 415, Document 5-a.



## V. CONCLUSION

Although the neo-Achaemenid state style is a lasting monument to the not-so-distant First Pahlavi period, like other Reza Shah's macro-endavors, it was influenced by the late Qajar political and intellectual atmosphere and actually implemented by Qajar elites. Like other monumental structures, Pahlavi archaic architecture conveys a message to the audience while reflecting the aspirations of its designers and commissioners. To create a national identity, romantic nationalism does depict the present and the near past as a consequence of domination by oppressive foreigners. Thus, it must be confronted for the sake of national resurrection and replaced by the glorious distant past as a model for the future. Having seen the highest forms of national humiliation in the Qajar era, archaists were determined to overthrow the living traditions and replace them with *hobb-e vatan* [*patriotism*]. They often had Qajar aristocratic upbringing, lacked deep architectural knowledge, and disliked the emergent modernist style; Their tastes were shaped by the lavish eclecticism of Georges-Eugène Haussmann's Paris (1809-1891 AD) – responsible for the massive undertaking to rebuilt Paris during the reign of Napoleon III (r. 1852-1870 AD)– and St. Petersburg, Vienna, and Istanbul. After coming to power and influenced by decades of promotion of neo-Zoroastrian literature and Pahlavi archaeological excavations of Persepolis, they found Achaemenid architecture to fit their revolutionary ideas. A novel style unfamiliar to the public and distant from Islamic Iranian heritage that was «national» but dissimilar to the Sassanid style is not evoking Islamic architecture. An indigenous style that was a match for the distinctive 19<sup>th</sup> century AD European architecture and luxurious like Neo-Baroque that reflected neoclassical authority and majesty and could be applied to buildings with a few plaster and cement sculptures. Clearly, only the renowned Neo-Achaemenid style could satisfy these idealistic statesmen. However, due to its view of national heritage, this style has inherent contradictions since it was inspired by and was a sub-branch of 19<sup>th</sup> century AD European art and architectural eclecticism. Reza Shah's urban renovation began when modernism was gaining prominence in Western academic architecture; In this way; archaist style only had a decade to flourish before young modernist architects took charge of government projects. Despite its compelling manifestation, archaic Iranian architecture arrived late, was soon ignored by its supporters, and could not withstand 20<sup>th</sup> century AD cultural and political disruptions and was inevitably replaced by modernist architecture.

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