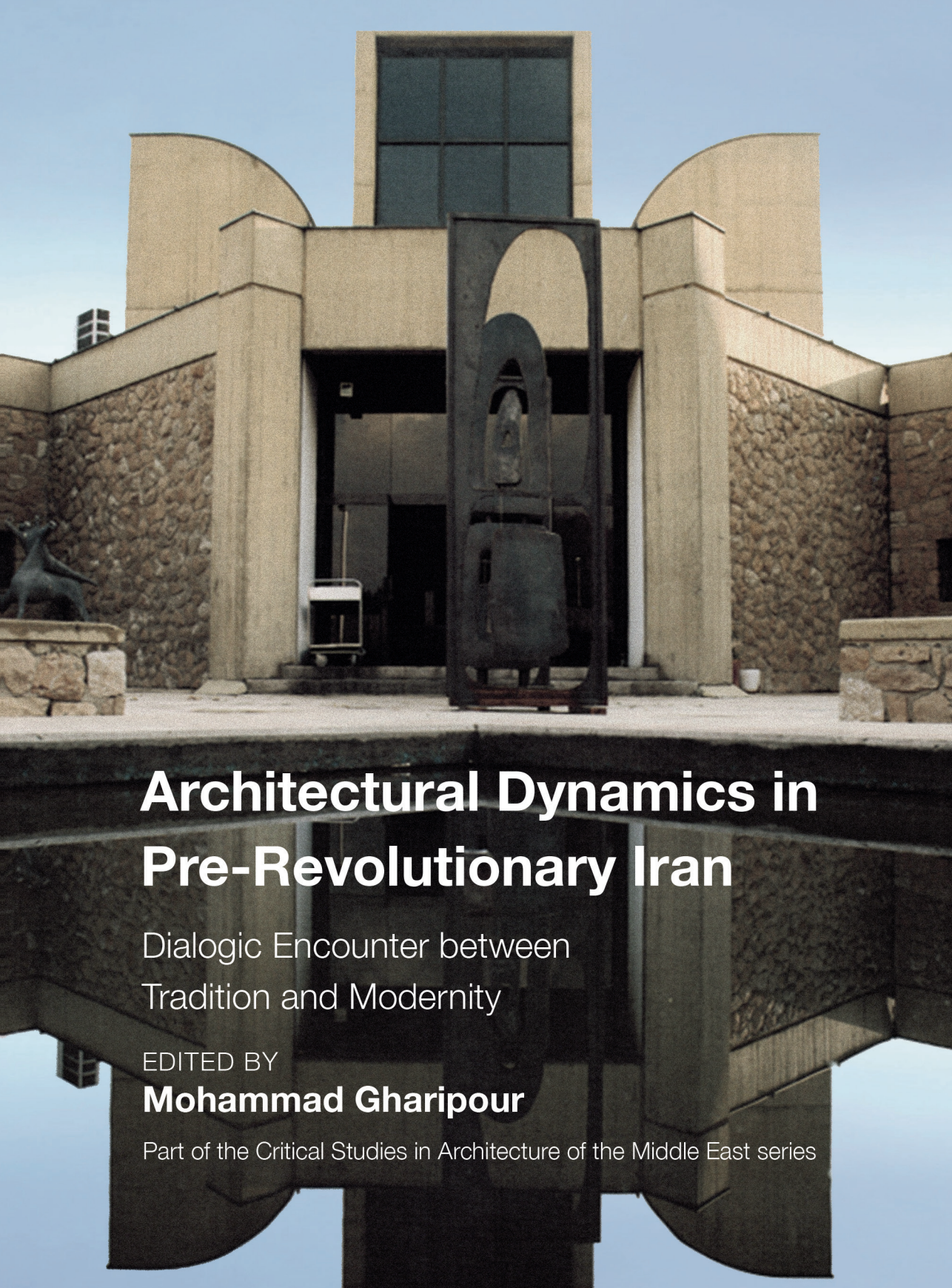




Architectural Dynamics in Pre-Revolutionary Iran

Dialogic Encounter between
Tradition and Modernity

EDITED BY

Mohammad Gharipour

Part of the Critical Studies in Architecture of the Middle East series

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Preface

Mohammad Gharipour

The Architecture of the Pahlavid Period in the 1960s and 1970s

The Pahlavid period (1925–79) of Iranian history is one of rapid change and progress – especially in contrast to the preceding Qajar dynasty (1785–1925), which historians typically characterize as incompetent and weak. The driving force behind Iran’s modernization during this period was the Pahlavid king Reza Shah, who ruled from December 15, 1925, until he was forced to abdicate on September 16, 1941, by Allied Powers. He cuts a highly controversial figure, even today. On the one hand, he established a largely totalitarian regime that diminished the role of parliament and suppressed journalists and activists seeking a greater role for self-determination in the country’s social and political life. On the other, he was steadfastly committed to reversing centuries of Qajar corruption, ineptitude, and backwardness by establishing new public institutions, including modern judiciary and educational systems – the University of Tehran being one example of his legacy – and by building clinics and hospitals across the country, thereby improving public health standards. He also formed an organized army, founded museums, and built roads, railroads, and bridges. While historians often marvel at the breadth of such transformation in so short of time, his critics, both then and now, condemn his authoritarian agenda and top-down approach towards overturning longstanding socio-cultural norms. His social reforms included banning the *hijab*, limiting the power of clerics – whom he saw as enemies of modernity – and requiring males to dress in western attire, as he considered traditional garb a symbol of ignorance.

After Reza Shah’s abdication in 1941, his son Mohammad Reza Shah reigned until the Islamic revolution on February 11, 1979. The new Shah was determined to continue his deposed father’s ambitious and heavy-handed modernization efforts – notwithstanding heavy domestic and foreign opposition. Mohammad Reza Shah staged a major coup against his political enemies, particularly aimed at removing Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh. His new totalitarian regime established strategic relations with religious clerics, while diminishing the role of the prime minister and democratic organizations such as the parliament.

Spanning nearly four decades, the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah can be divided into three eras. The first period began with the young king's coronation in 1941 and extended to the coup d'état of 1953. The coup initiated a second era, one of targeted economic and social reforms known as the White Revolution (1963), which some saw as a bid to contain the appeal of communism. The third era commenced with the sudden and precipitous rise in oil revenue in the 1970s, prompting the king to accelerate a range of cultural and development programs. Central to the Shah's remarkable legacy were architectural achievements.

The economic revolution of the 1960s, spurred on by the White Revolution, sought to empower farmers and peasants by distributing lands that had long been concentrated in the hands of wealthy feudal lords. This populist measure was partially a response to the rising interest in communism and, as such, members of different social strata viewed it quite differently from one another. Moreover, while its main goals – to stimulate agricultural production, reduce poverty, and distribute wealth and economic opportunities to the lower classes – were generally viewed as laudable, the reform programme did not play out as envisioned. For example, tenant farmers who were given ownership of the land did not have sufficient resources (e.g., water, agricultural tools, and farming equipment) to maximize the potential output of these farms. While these reforms had positive impacts in some regions, they actually increased poverty rates in other rural areas. Meanwhile, a rising class of wealthy villagers started emigrating to urban areas in order to spend their new wealth and pursue other dreams. Indeed, the rise of national TV and its availability to the nouveau riche showcased cities, and especially Tehran, as manifestations of national hope and ambition. But the increasing level of unemployment in rural areas accelerated mass migrations into major metropolitan areas, creating a range of unanticipated social issues and conflict.

Oil revenue was also spent on creating new industries in order to provide goods and services for a growing middle class. And what could not be produced in country was imported from abroad, further promoting consumerism. By propping up new industries and factories and buying new technologies and weapons from the US, properties in high-demand areas (e.g., New York and London), and shares in multinational companies (e.g., Mercedes Benz), the government was able to improve the country's economic stability, and ultimately, make Iran a regional economic power. These efforts aligned with moves outside Iran that promulgated the image of the country as a new regional and international power.

This era is also marked by significant social changes, some of which had their genesis during Reza Shah's reign. The government created a national public health programme for the entire country (extending even to its remote areas), established an organization (*Sepah-e Danesh*) to educate youth and increase literacy in under-served regions, and started initiatives to educate and empower women. As historians of architecture recognize, during the 1960s and 1970s, the government's decentralization plan resulted in several major master planning projects and construction initiatives outside Tehran – although the spatial politics embedded in administrative planning emphasized the development of the capital.

Despite the inevitable internal crises, the government of the Shah brought stability to Iran and to the region, cementing his role as a regional leader. Some observers even viewed him

as the policeman of the Middle East. While Iran's improved relations with the West opened the door to foreign investment, its expanded international relations – and particularly with Israel – were highly criticized by some people who viewed Iran's development as coming at the expense of longstanding Islamic values. Meanwhile, corruption within the administration and repression by SAVAK (Organization of National Intelligence and Security) created growing public dissent. A somewhat exaggerated narrative of the situation was disseminated by leftists, clerics, and religious intellectuals (e.g., Ali Shari'ati, Mehdi Bazargan) who openly criticized the Shah for his totalitarian agenda and social reforms, which they believed marginalized the poor and subverted their religious beliefs. Although to a certain extent distorted, these views gradually spread throughout the country, initiating a social movement that eventually snowballed into the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

These social and cultural reforms also triggered major developments in urban planning, architectural design, and construction. An important cultural outcome of Iran's growing global presence can be seen in the Shiraz Art Festival, which provided a platform to showcase the government's international influence. Attended by hundreds of foreign leaders and artists, the festival fostered a thriving arts community in Tehran and elsewhere in Iran and defined a new national agenda for progressive/avant-garde art and architecture. Iran's queen, Farah Pahlavi (1938–), was a graduate of the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris and thus played a crucial role in establishing cultural institutions and providing amenities intended for the newly established middle class. Under her patronage, parks, museums, cultural centres, libraries, and theatres were developed in major urban areas. These efforts reflected a cultured conception of the middle class and conceived of development as a cultural process tied to place, space, and architecture. In addition, the state supported the development of ambitious major architectural projects, both public and private, which were geared towards making Tehran the regional centre of arts, education, and commerce.

The architectural development of the Pahlavid II era can be divided into three categories: the vernacular architecture of villages and towns; a range of commercial architecture mostly created by traditional architects (*memars*); and monumental projects conspicuously designed to support the modernity of urban centres, as well as gradually change the public aesthetic. While the development of these first two categories (vernacular and commercial architecture) was not much changed during the 1960s and 1970s, the state went to great lengths to promote the aesthetic of the third category (modernist) in everything from urban planning to architecture, landscape design to art, and even furniture design.

Consider, for example, the introduction of modern art through newly constructed museums, such as the Tehran Modern Art Museum, and cultural centres (*farhangsara*), which cultivated a taste for modern design amongst the elite. This intellectual discourse was supported by the publication of new architectural periodicals and the organization of architectural conferences and competitions involving leading international architects such as Kenzo Tange and Louis Kahn. The arrival of these master architects, and that of American and European commercial firms hired to design urban projects (e.g., Pardisan Park and Shahistan), allowed a generation of Iranian architects to collaborate with some of the best

minds in design in the world. Iranian architects attempted to internalize and localize an international modern aesthetic in their projects.

Coinciding with this modernist movement in architecture was a national initiative to promote a deeper understanding of Persian art and architecture, especially from the pre-Islamic era. As an example, Houshang Seyhoun, a renowned architect and dean of the College of Fine Arts at Tehran University, organized group excursions to small cities and villages in Iran in order to document indigenous architecture and domestic landscapes. At the same time, a programme was established to preserve and restore historical sites. These preservation efforts were, in part, a political tactic by the Shah to portray Iran as a progressive country with a magnificent history. Scholarship on modern and historical Persian architecture flourished with the publication of books such as *The Sense of Unity* by Nader Ardalan and Laleh Bakhtiar, under the supervision of Hossein Nasr, the head of Queen Farah's Private Bureau. This book, which elucidates the spiritual principles of Persian architecture that have endured across the ages, was intended to re-inspire students of modern design and architecture and lead them back to the foundations of tradition and culture in Iran, while also reflecting the widespread quest for a national identity and style amongst architects and even policy-makers. The ongoing discourse of tradition versus modernity, which was the main dilemma in architectural design in Iran in the 1960s and 1970s, still poses a dominant challenge for every architect practicing in Iran today.

About this Book

This volume was initially conceived as a collection of essays on the influence of the West on the modern architecture of Iran during the Pahlavid era. After consulting with colleagues, however, I decided to add more chapters on the historical and political context of the modern movement and the internal forces behind it. In that sense, the two sections of this volume complement each other by providing a holistic view of the development of architecture during the two decades prior to the Islamic revolution in Iran. The first section of this volume, entitled *Vernacular Integrated with Modernism*, includes two chapters that examine the internal political, social, and economic forces impacting Iranian architecture. The second section includes chapters that explore the western influence on Pahlavid architecture in Iran, especially after the 1960s.

The first chapter by Nader Ardalan includes his personal observations as a preeminent architect working in Iran during the 1960s and 1970s. Ardalan details some of the salient design themes and the general intellectual discourse motivating Iran and the world during that epoch, while also addressing the symbiotic relationship between universal design elements and local influences. He identifies and describes the worldviews of the key architects, both Iranian and western, who had a major impact on design during the Pahlavid era. Given Ardalan's retelling of his involvement in pivotal architectural projects and conferences, this chapter should be read more as a personal memoir and reflection rather

than as a purely scholarly essay. As such, one should note that Ardalan's narratives may differ from those of contemporaneous practitioners and scholars of architecture, as he perceives the progress of Pahlavid architecture through a highly personal lens – but one that in no way diminishes the power of his voice or his insights into a consequential era of design and construction. Moreover, because Nader Ardalan is the only contributor to this volume who lived through this movement and played a role in it, his insider's view – which at times could be challenged as perhaps biased – is of enormous value to our understanding of the period.

The history and evolution of modern architecture are always tied to the goals and dogmas of those who engage in the practice. In the second chapter, Shawhin Roudbari limns the evolution of the profession in mid-twentieth-century Iran and how it reflected the development of political power. Using archives of professional associations as source material, Roudbari reveals how the profession was founded on transnational networks of knowledge exchange and through individual and institutional practices, from the founding of Iran's first architectural professional society in 1945 through its persecution during the 1979 revolution. Specifically, he illustrates how the modern profession defined itself – which to a significant degree emerged through connections with foreign architects and transnational institutions and via the global exchange of architectural ideas. He then explains how Iranian architects employed design magazines and other publications to craft and disseminate an idea of a modern profession during the second Pahlavi era. The chapter develops useful analytical and methodological approaches for the study of modern architectural practice.

In the next essay, Farshid Emami explores the social context in which many of Tehran's commercial centres, emblems of the state's drive to modernize the country, were developed. Emami demonstrates how architects adopted and created shopping spaces as part of an effort to appropriate, localize, and negotiate images and spaces of modernity. This approach was not only promoted by local practitioners and technocrats, but also dovetailed with the state-led reformist project of creating a modernized nation-state with a secular middle-class. Using the Golestan Mall in Tehran as a case study, Emami argues that it epitomizes the modern commercial complex, partaking in the advent of 'scientific' urban planning. Here was a venue for the secular bourgeoisie to enact its tropes of taste, largely secluded from the lower and conservative classes. With special attention to Golestan's design, which draws on the mall typology, Emami explains that a hallmark of Iran's architectural scene in the 1970s was the blending of established local concepts with modernist aesthetics.

In Chapter Four, Sahar Hosseini explores the development of architecture as part of a larger campaign to modernize cities in Pahlavid Iran. Specifically, he discusses the US Point Four programme and its impact on urban planning in Iran. Hosseini attempts to pinpoint the transition from piecemeal interventions to long-term programming; explain how foreign experts influenced the method and framework of architectural projects; and describe the role of local agents. He relies on archival material to explore the first two master planning pilot projects that were carried out in Isfahan and Sanandaj (1957–62) under the supervision of the US Operations Mission (USOM) to Iran. The chapter highlights the geo-political conditions that affected the implementation of urban master plans during the Pahlavid era.

The next chapter, by Neta Feniger and Rachel Kallus, sheds light on Israel's contribution to modern architecture in Iran – a topic that has remained largely unexplored until now. After the September 1962 earthquake in the Qazvin region of Iran, Israel sent planning experts to assist Iranian relief efforts. Feniger and Kallus explain how a relatively small project – namely, the reconstruction of one village – led to a larger project initiated by the United Nations, in which an Israeli team assisted reconstruction efforts in several villages and surveyed an area devastated by the earthquake in order to provide a comprehensive regional development plan. While Israeli assistance to Iran was mostly intended to reinforce relations between the two countries, the disaster offered an opportunity to demonstrate Israeli expertise in a range of fields including architecture, and to consolidate Israel's international image as an agent for wider regional development. Using the participation of Israeli architects in the rebuilding of Qazvin as a case study, this chapter demonstrates how the architects' professional objective to create a modern plan for the region and its villages was intertwined with the Shah's national modernization plan, which gladly welcomed Israel's gestures of good will.

In Chapter 6, Mehdi Azizkhani highlights the challenge of western architects in making a connection to the traditions and local history of a place, and how these influences have become the source of inspiration for modern designers. Discussing the Group Apartments in Isfahan (GAI), which was designed by Philip Johnson, Azizkhani looks at the interactions and contradictions between the past and the future, and the ways that traditional buildings may inspire modern design, thereby providing a rich context for analysing a range of other modern architectural projects throughout the Middle East. In particular, he investigates the formation of GAI, including its design features and the architect's design thinking and practice within the local context of the historical city of Isfahan. Azizkhani argues that for Johnson, tradition was at the heart of modernization efforts in Isfahan.

The last chapter, authored by Kathleen John-Alder, chronicles the partnership between Iranian and American architects in designing Pardisan Park in Tehran. Pardisan was envisaged as a shining symbol of enlightened stewardship that would be the envy of the world. It was also intended to establish a precedent for the integration of ecology into Iran's modernization schemes, and to display the country's rich natural and cultural history – not to mention the forward-thinking vision of the government as well. Pardisan was also seen as a means for Iran to cement its position as one of the world's most sophisticated civilizations. John-Alder examines the project's preservation objectives, broad educational mandate, and desire to provide an oasis-like recreational setting for the Iranian middle class in line with the Queen's vision of modernization. Drawing upon archival resources, project reports, and personal interviews, the author of this chapter reveals the complex interplay of motivations, aspirations, ambitions, and politics that ultimately shaped the design of Pardisan Park.

As mentioned in individual chapters, four chapters of this volume are based on earlier publications. The chapters by Shawhin Roudbari and Kathleen John-Alder were published in my earlier edited volumes *Historiography of Persian Architecture* (Routledge, 2015) and *Contemporary Urban Landscapes of the Middle East* (Routledge, 2016). The two chapters

by Mehdi Azizkhani and Neta Feniger and Rachal Kallus were initially published in the *International Journal of Islamic Architecture*. These chapters went through revisions based on the feedback shared by the editor and anonymous reviewers. While republishing these chapters may not necessarily create any new knowledge, including them in this anthology does contribute to a more cohesive understanding of modern Iranian architecture in 1960s and 1970s.

With their thematic and/or methodological variance, the essays in this volume consider the major trends and developments in Iranian architecture during the 1960s and 1970s in order to further our understanding of the underpinnings and intentions of Persian architecture during this period. The reader should note that this volume presents a limited number of case studies, and the work still to be done in this area is considerable. Indeed, so much of the earlier scholarship in this field carries subjective nationalist, ideological, and political baggage that has not yet been examined. While narratives of modernism have relied heavily upon classifications based on western experiences and influences, this book seeks to provide a more holistic view of the development of architecture by studying both internal and external driving forces. Ultimately, this volume is intended to shed light on the fascinating, sometimes controversial evolution of Iranian architecture and its constant quest for a new paradigm of cultural identity – one that is in many instances also mindful of its history of rich architectural achievements. While the historiography of Pahlavid architecture has been accused of bias, no one may deny the achievements of architecture and the dynamic transformation of culture and architecture during this age, with all its complexities.