



ARCHITECTURE VII. PAHLAVI, BEFORE WORLD WAR II

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Two features of Reżā Shah's (q.v.) efforts for the modernization of Iran were related to the architectural construction of the period. One was his reference to the country's ancient history, which should inspire the present generation to achieve new glories. The other was his desire to adopt aspects of Western civilization in such a fashion that Iran would become equal to the West.

Two significant social factors were decisive in facilitating Reżā Shah's architectural plans and contributing to their speedy accomplishment. One was the new vigor of nationalism and the desire for modernization and reorganization of Iranian society resulting from the Constitutional Movement and the newly established parliamentary system. The other was the direction of the 20th century—with all its characteristics and means—towards construction of new and monumental structures, industrial centers, and urban development (see P. Rajabī, *Me'mārī-e Īrān dar 'aṣr-e Pahlavī*, Tehran, 1355 Š./1976, pp. 40f.).

Shortly after the establishment of the parliamentary system in Iran, a strong desire for preserving and restoring historical monuments was exhibited by educated Iranians and certain influential journals (e.g., *Kāva*, edited by S. H.



Ṭāqīzāda in Berlin). Sharing this enthusiasm, Reżā Khan encouraged the founding of the National Monuments Council (Anjoman-e Āṭār-e Mellī, q.v.). The council, which received support and academic assistance from such scholars as E. Herzfeld, strove to fulfill those aims.

When Reżā Shah spoke of the glorious past, he named the rulers and heroes of pre Islamic Iran. In the 1930s details from ancient monuments were featured on a number of new government buildings, under the academic supervision of E. Herzfeld, A. Godard, and their associates. The police headquarters at Tehran displayed a long facade lined with copies of the columns of the *apadāna*(q.v.) at Persepolis and, also at Tehran, the facade of the Bānk-e Mellī, designed by the German architect H. Heinrich (Rajabī, op. cit., p. 42) offered a portico with engaged columns which derived from one of the palaces at Persepolis. A girls' school displayed a similar portico, which was crowned with the winged symbol of Ahura Mazdā. The Mūza ye Īrān-e Bāstān showed inspiration from a later period; its facade was a version of the principal facade of the Sasanian palace at Ctesiphon.

Admiration of a somewhat more recent past extended to the renowned literary figures of the country. At Ṭūs, an impressive memorial to Ferdowsī was erected, using the ziggurat base and chamber structure of the tomb of Cyrus the Great at Pasargadae as the model, but adorning it with the engaged columns of the Persepolitan rock cut tombs (Rajabī, op. cit., pp. 70f.). Dignitaries from many countries were invited to attend its inauguration. It was designed as a massive cube of marble, and each of its sides was decorated with two columns in the style of Persepolis with additional columns within each corner angle. At Shiraz the site of the tomb of Ḥāfeẓ was provided with an open octagonal structure, approached through a long columnar portico; the capitals of the columns were copies of those of earlier Islamic periods. The tomb of Sa'dī, also at Shiraz and long neglected, was honored with a striking structure which was basically neo classic, but related to the Islamic style by placement of a dome over the central chamber. At Nīšāpūr the tomb of 'Omar Kayyām, not a major poet to the Persians, was renovated but not rebuilt.

The American College at Tehran, renamed the Alborz College (q.v.) as nationalistic feelings waxed, had a remarkable impact on contemporary building. In the 1930s its dynamic head, Dr. Samuel Jordan, inaugurated the Moore Science Hall. The College stated that the style of the building was Persian Saracenic, and it did display such elements as an entrance ayvān, pointed arch windows, and faience decoration. But its impact came as a result



of its construction with bricks of standard Western type which were 20 cm long, 7.5 cm high, and 10 cm wide. Up until this time Iran had employed a brick which was about 24 cm square and 4 cm high, and walls were often rubble fill faced with bricks on both sides. Such thick walls were out of place in modern building, and yet a wall of single bricks would lack cohesive strength. So almost in a moment walls built of bricks of Western type laid as headers and stretchers replaced the square bricks.

Features adapted from the Islamic architecture of Iran began to appear more frequently. The imposing building of the Imperial Bank of Persia at Tehran displayed a facade with a central ayvān with its sides and spandrels covered with faience decoration. A number of the branch offices of the Bānk-e Mellī had entire wall surfaces sheathed in mosaic faience of a quality equal to that of the high points of Islamic architecture in Iran.

Major historical monuments, long uncared for, were rebuilt and restored at the direct orders of Reżā Shah. Safavid Isfahan was the primary recipient of this concern, at such monuments as the Masjed-e Šāh and the Masjed-e Šayḡ Loṭfallāh. The painstaking work of replacing vast areas of vanished mosaic faience took years, and in the process a new generation of tile makers and tile cutters was created. The manufacture of faience tiles spread to other centers, and fresh designs were made and sheathed such structures as the banks already mentioned.

Reżā Shah attacked the cities and towns in order to make them architecturally modern. Old city walls were pulled down at Isfahan and elsewhere; the tiled gates of the Qajar period were destroyed at Tehran, and wide avenues were driven through the prevailing patterns of muddy lanes. Tehran was given a rectilinear network of wide avenues. One was named, somewhat boastfully, the Čehel Metrī (Forty Meters). All were paved with blocks of stone. Such towns as Hamadān, Kermānšāh and Ahvāz were provided with avenues which radiated from a central circle. At the circle rose a statue of Reżā Shah, usually of marble but sometimes of painted plaster which soon deteriorated.

The opening up of the urban areas was done quickly and easily. The course of a new avenue was marked by a line of tall poles with red flags tied to their apexes. Demolition crews moved from pole to pole, leveling everything, with exceptions when a mosque or shrine lay in the way and the avenue bent around it. New buildings were quickly erected on both sides of the avenues. Most were unprepossessing: plain brick walls, square window openings, and



fairly steeply sloped tin roofs. Tehran was to be more elegant than the provincial towns, and Reżā Shah ordered that all buildings must be at least two stories high. At Mašhad a very wide circular avenue enclosed the shrine of Imam Reżā. Land values increased greatly at Tehran; and the traditional house, oriented south and with an open court and pool, gave way to apartment houses. The first skyscrapers of six or more stories were built at Tehran by 1941.

Structures to house some ten of the ministries were built at Tehran. Most of them were neo classic in style, adaptations of current European architecture featuring columns without bases or capitals. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, completed in 1939, displayed a massive simplicity popular elsewhere at this time. Within a quiet quarter of Tehran the ruler erected several palaces. In addition to private palaces for members of his family, the so called Marble Palace was built to house receptions and official functions. The latter structure was in “palace style”: white marble details on the exterior and rich fabrics and priceless rugs in the interior. In constructing this complex of palaces, Reżā Shah deserted the Golestān Palace of the Qajars and raised the banner of the Pahlavi dynasty. In the Šemrān region of the foothills to the north of Tehran, the palace area of Sa’dābād was developed. Unique among its structures was a very small private palace for the ruler which was decorated with the very finest of the inlay work (*kāṭem*) of Shiraz.

The concern for the modernization of Tehran found one expression in an international competition for a design for a stock exchange. Winners were named, and they came to Tehran, but the stock exchange was not built. An opera house was under construction at the end of his reign, and years later the crumbling hulk was pulled down.

Reżā Shah really expected the progress made in Iran to attract numerous visitors from Europe. Two hotels, the Ferdowsī and the Palace, were built in the heart of Tehran, and in Šemrān the Darband, which was to strike a new note of elegance with its accommodations, restaurant and casino. Māzandarān had been the place of the ruler’s birth, and he admired its scenery extravagantly. At Rāmsar he had a hotel and a sanatorium built and first class hotels put up at Čālūs and Bābolsar. These hotels had large rooms, plumbing that worked, and meals prepared by chefs brought from Europe who suffered extreme boredom as the visitors failed to arrive. Personally financed by Reżā Shah, the hotels lost a great deal of money. The constant development of education resulted in a rash of new schools throughout the country and



included the founding, by the ruler himself, of Tehran University. The construction of his favorite project, the Trans Iranian railway, resulted in the erection of scores of stations along the line and of a monumental station at Tehran. Scores of factories were erected, none of which displayed any architectural merit. Who designed the buildings of this period? A sparse handful of Persians who had studied architecture at the *École des Beaux Arts* in Paris. Probably the most talented member of this group was Moḥsen Forūgī, whose designs included the monument to Sa'dī at Shiraz and the branch buildings of the Bānk-e Mellī. As early as 1928, Andre, Godard, a French architect and archeologist who had previously done field work in Afghanistan, was named head of the archeological service of Iran. Among the structures he designed in Iran was the Mūza ye Īrān-e Bāstān, mentioned earlier. He was also in charge of the restoration of the Safavid monuments at Isfahan. Maxime Siroux, a French architect who studied the Islamic architecture of the country, also produced architectural designs. While background material is lacking, it is possible that many of the less imposing structures were designed by Germans, since the rather stark neo classical appearance of these buildings recalls contemporary work in Germany. Iran was fortunate in being spared the worst extravagances of the so called international style. At Tehran University a School of Art and Architecture was founded along the lines of the *École des Beaux Arts*, and graduates of this school began to be active just at the end of the reign of Reżā Shah.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Architectural illustrations were published in *Īrān-e emrūz*, a monthly journal (Tehran, 1939-41). P. Rajabī, *Me'mārī-e Īrān dar 'aṣr-e Pahlavī* (Tehran, 1355 Š./1976) also includes a number of representative illustrations.