The Effect of Iran’s Qajar Archaism on the Development of State Architecture Under the Reza Shah Pahlavi’s Rule

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Abstract

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 explained 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.