

From Treasure Hunting to Archaeology as a Science

Causes and Motivations for the Commencement of Archaeological Research in Iran and the Role of Iranian Intellectuals

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Introduction

It is the aim of this article to describe and discuss the specific developmental trajectory of archaeology as a discipline in Iran. This trajectory is intersected by various historical and political events that caused dramatic changes in the understanding, awareness, aims, and methods of Iranian archaeology. In general, it is assumed that all humans are interested in where they came from, and they carry out research to find evidence pertaining to their ancestors or predecessors whenever possible (Negahban 1385, 15). The desire to understand one's place in history, as well as one's identity, ethnicity, and origin, can be observed in Iran since the Parthian period. Already at that time, the awareness of a great ancestry became visible in recourses and reminiscences to the artistic and iconographic heritage of the Achaemenids. This trend continued during the Sasanian period. The accomplishments of the Sasanian kings were in turn a topic canonized in the epic literature of Iran, especially in the *Šāhnāmeḥ* (Jeyhuni 1379). The *Šāhnāmeḥ* continued to remain an important source of influence on royal ideology. Yet it wasn't until the Qajar period that the Sasanians, and subsequently the Achaemenids were rediscovered as a source of inspiration. On the literary side, promoted by the *Bāzgašt* (return) movement, the *Šāhnāmeḥ* was rediscovered as a historical source. The iconographic traditions of the Qajar kings, for example in their rock reliefs, were conscious

reminders of the Sasanian past (Haji Alilou 1384; Luft 2001; Robinson 1983).

The real beginning of archaeological activities, official organization, and conservation of cultural heritage in Iran dates back to the early part of the period of Reza Shah. Despite not being an educated person (in terms of being an academic intellectual), the history of ancient Iran and its cultural remains were important to him throughout the 20 years of his regime. His sensibility towards the history of Iran and the influence of some Iranian intellectuals around him formed the foundations for national organization of archaeology in Iran. This article focuses, in particular, on the catalyzing elements in this process; however, the historical and archaeological evolutions during the last phase of the Qajar period and the first foreign archaeological activities will also be briefly reviewed.

The first activities of Europeans at historical-archaeological sites and the Qajar's reaction

It is under these circumstances that, during the 18th century, the first attempts at excavation of standing ancient monuments took place. In Europe, interest in antiquities had a long tradition. Among the educated classes, an understanding of antiquities as testimony to past civilizations had grown over some time, thanks to the visibility of standing Roman monuments and literary traditions

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in the form of Latin and Greek texts. From the 18th century onwards, a more systematic preoccupation with antiquities culminated in excavations at Pompeii (Richardson 1988), and in the systematic descriptions of ancient monuments and objects of art by scholars such as Johann Joachim Winckelmann (Irwin 1972). The first information on the ancient history of Iran can be found in the works of European travelers during the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries (Brentjes 2010; Negahban 1385). Descriptions of historical monuments and presentations of plans, sketches and paintings, as well as copies of ancient inscriptions can be found in the works of some European travelers like the Shirley brothers, Jeffrey Duquette, Adam Olearius, Pietro Della Valle, Jean Chardin, and Engelbert Kämpfer.

Early documentation in illustrated travelogues informed the educated public in Europe about Iranian monuments. However, different types of ancient monuments received unequal attention. Artistic monuments, such as rock reliefs, were openly visible. These monuments were therefore always represented, but perhaps not fully understood. Textual monuments were equally identified as evidence of ancient civilizations. Once again, European travelers were the first to document these. The deciphering of cuneiform is owed to the efforts of Carsten Niebuhr (Hansen 1999), Georg F. Grotefend (Schoof 1957), and Henry Rawlinson (Rawlinson 2005). Archaeological sites, however, rarely received the same attention.

The early European interest in Iranian monuments had a two-prong effect: knowledge about Iranian antiquities was disseminated throughout Europe. But, at the same time, the 19th century quest for material to fill European private collections and museums caused considerable damage to monuments in Iran (Ma'soomi 1388, 18). The European interest in Iranian cultural heritage had some impact on the educated classes in Iran, and led to a growing interest in ancient monuments

among educated Iranians. The search for finds of gold and silver to enrich the Qajar treasury also gained momentum. The 19th century was a period when the first Iranian excavations were carried out by order of the kings (Malek Shahmirzadi 1365, 137). The early Qajar kings, for example Agha Mohammad Khan and Fathali Shah, did not show any interest in antiquities despite digging at ancient sites in Rey (Ma'soomi 1388, 15). The desire of the Qajar kings, their courtiers and local governors, to excavate ancient sites, for example Mo'tamedoldole Farhad Mirza's excavation from 1875 until 1877 at Persepolis or Haj Ali Akbar Amin's excavation at Tepe Hesār, were never motivated by an interest in the history and culture of Iran, but instead were performed with the aim of collecting antiquities (Mostafavi 1334, 10; Malek Shahmirzadi 1365, 136; Negahban 1385, 39).

Systematic archaeological research only began in earnest during the second half of the 19th century, again with the impetus of Europeans. During the heyday of imperialism, when archaeological investigations by the British and French diplomats had begun in Mesopotamia, similar attempts were also undertaken in Iran. In 1852, for example, William Kenneth Loftus excavated at Susa (Loftus 1857), but he soon gave up excavating since his finds were not spectacular enough. The first Iranian excavations were carried out in the 1870s by the governors of Fars province at Persepolis (Mostafavi 1334, 10). As was the case with photography, European expertise was welcomed by the Shah, and it comes as no surprise that he offered the site of Persepolis for excavation to the German expedition of Friedrich Carl Andreas and Franz Stolze (Negahban 1385, 39).

Ultimately, a French mission was granted sole permission to excavate in Iran. The French monopoly (Ma'soomi 1388, 30; Negahban 1385, 41), which was renewed three times and was valid until 1927, marks the development of the second phase of archaeological research in

Iran (Mostafavi 1334, 34; Malek Shahmirzadi 1365, 140). Excavation methodology was still not very well developed. The French mission at Susa excavated huge areas of the site, but little information can be reconstructed from their reports. Again, the effect of this phase were two-pronged: the greatness of ancient Iran became known in Europe as a result of large displays at the Louvre Museum in Paris, but this benefit was outweighed by the heavy loss of archaeological information.

Reza Shah and the first steps towards establishing a national archaeological organization

The third phase of Iranian archaeology began with the rise of Reza Shah and the subsequent abolishment of the French monopoly and the establishment of an Iranian antiquities service. Under the guidance of European archaeologists, namely Ernst Herzfeld and André Godard, an administrative structure was created and an antiquities law (*Qānun-e Atiqāt*) (Malek Shahmirzadi 1365, 140; Negahban 1385, 59) was issued to regulate archaeological research in the country (Negahban 1385, 58; Mostafavi 1334, 38). Reza Shah took personal interest in archaeology, with a special attention to Fars province and its historical monuments (Hekmat 1355, 6), which he regarded as a source of national pride (Abdi 2001, 65).

Reza Shah's vision of a modernized Iran motivated him to put efforts into European style educational institutes, develop a modern economic structure, establish communication and transportation networks, as well as invest in banks and a modern army. In this pattern, Reza Shah began to secularize the Iranian society and to eradicate tribal affiliations besides strengthening nationalistic attitudes and educational development (Dashti 1382). He was always keen to mention this, as witnessed in his account of his travels to Kuzestān and Māzandarān (Vohouman 1386).

Simultaneously, the conduct of the French had produced a sense of distrust among Iranians towards their activities in Iran, and local governors such as Faraj Allah Agh Owli (who was governor of Kuzestān and a commander of the Kuzestān army) were not at all happy with French activities at Susa (Mostafavi 1334, 37). With the increased importance of ancient history and cultural heritage, and Iranians' sensitivity with respect to their national identity, in addition to Reza Shah's particular consideration of this issue, this led to the abolition of the French monopoly on archaeological activities in Iran (Malek Shahmirzadi 1365, 138).

Reza Shah was constantly attempting to explore Iranian national origins and, thereby, construct an Iranian national identity in order to associate his dynasty with Iran's national history (Cronin 1383). Most of his plans were based on his nationalistic worldview. For instance, the establishment of the University of Tehran in 1934 (Ma'soomi 1388, 52; Negahban 1385, 68) and the sending of students abroad to study in foreign universities were all aimed at generating experts to serve the country on its progressive path (Hekmat 1355, 7). According to Mostafavi, Reza Shah was shocked and angered during his visit to Susa when he saw that the French had built a new castle right on top of the ancient mounds (Mostafavi 1334, 35). After this visit, he gave the order to control the French mission and their activities in Susa.

The role of Iranian intellectuals in the appearance of a "national archaeology" during Reza Shah's rule

The abolition of the French monopoly in 1927 was a consequence of Reza Shah's insistence and Mohammad Tadayon's (the minister of culture at the time) persistence, and was executed with the national parliament's approval (Mostafavi 1334, 379). This event had a significant role in the formation of an

administrative apparatus for archaeology and the preservation of cultural heritage, and eventually paved the way for the rise of academic archaeology in Iran. As a result, constructive achievements were accomplished one after the other, including: the establishment of the antiquities service, the approval of the antiquities law, the formation of the society for National Monuments (*Anjōmane Āsāre Mellī*), and the establishment of the Iran National Museum (Malek Shahmirzadi 1365, 142; Ma'soomi 1388, 39).

It can therefore be concluded that archaeology in Iran as an academic discipline was the result of the work of foreign archaeological expeditions combined with the Iranians' endeavors in learning the practice of archaeology through participating in foreign projects. Undoubtedly, development of archaeology in Iran made its greatest advances during Reza Shah's period, a king who considered the gold and silver plaques found by Friedrich Krefter and Ernst Herzfeld at Persepolis (Krefter 1979) as documents of evidence for the longevity of the Iranian kingdom (Hekmat 1355, 40). Persepolis was described as Iranian *Ka'beh* by Mostafavi (Mostafavi 1334, 43), who had played an influential role in founding the archaeological apparatus in Iran.

As soon as the antiquities law was approved in 1931, several foreign teams began to excavate in Iran (Ma'soomi 1388, 57; Malek Shahmirzadi 1365, 139), among them the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago at Persepolis. Meanwhile, the University of Pennsylvania contracted Erich Schmidt to excavate at Tappe Hesār and Rey, while the French expanded their activities by sending Roman Ghirshman to excavate at Tappe Giyan and Tappe Sialk.

Before starting any national archaeological activities in Iran, some Iranian intellectuals made efforts to highlight the significance of the history, archaeology, and historical heritage of Iran for the advancement and

improvement of the country. Most of them had not studied archaeology but they informed Reza Shah about this issue. The personal interest of Reza Shah in the history of Iran was also an important reason for the developments that led to the establishment of national archaeological activities in Iran, as well as the scientific identity of archaeology in the country.

As a politician, author, intellectual and prime minister, Mohammad Ali Foroghi was undoubtedly one of the most important people in the period of Reza Shah. He was also a close friend of Reza Shah, and established the society for National Monuments (*Anjōmane Āsāre Mellī*), and also the Academy of Iran (*Farhangestān-e Irān*) (Mostafavi 1334, 21).

Ali Asghar Hekmat is another person of note. Hekmat was a politician, poet, author, translator, and minister of culture. He had a good influence on Reza Shah and played an important role in cultural and social achievements during his time in office. His term at the Ministry of Culture is renowned as a period of cultural change. He was also the first director of the University of Tehran and the founder of the National Library of Iran. According to his own account, in 1934, after a meeting with Reza Shah to discuss the number of overseas students and the cost of their study abroad, he proposed establishing a national University in Tehran (Hekmat 1355, 70).

The first Iranian archaeologists were still educated at the Dar-al Fonun, since Tehran University was only established in 1934. S. M. Taghi Mostafavi (Anvar 1385; Sadri 1385; Zare 1387; Fahimi 2012a, 92), Ali Sami (Fahimi 2012b), Mehdi Bahrami, Javad Kambiz, and Isa Behnam were among the first professional Iranian archaeologists. They received field training by foreign archaeologists, as a result of participating in the excavations directed by Herzfeld at Persepolis and Schmidt at Rey. In 1936,

Mostafavi, who studied law, took over the Rey excavations as the first project under direct Iranian responsibility. Furthermore, independent archaeological excavations were carried out in K̄orvin, Hasanlu, and K̄orhe by Iranian archaeologists such as Ali Hakemi (Fahimi 2012c) and Mahmoud Rad. When Tehran University established a Department of Archaeology in 1934, the history of architecture and art was taught to the next generation of Iranian archaeologists by some of the same scholars; among them Andre Godard, Friedrich Krefter, and Maxime Siroux.

After World War II, and even more so in the 1950s, archaeology in Iran experienced its first 'gold rush'. Foreign research projects were started all over the country. The first archaeologists who graduated from Tehran University were active, among them; Ali Hakemi, and shortly afterwards Ezat O. Negahban (Fahimi 2012d, 127) who was the first Iranian student who travelled to the United States to study archaeology at the University of Chicago. Negahban, often described as the father of Iranian archaeology, subsequently became a key figure in establishing academic curricula and

administrative structures in the antiquities service. He was a supporter of foreign missions in Iran because, as a result of his studies abroad, he was aware of the methodological deficiencies in Iranian archaeology. He strongly supported the idea of foreign archaeologists working in Iran and encouraged them to educate Iranian students, with the aim that the following generation should be able to run Iranian archaeology by themselves. Negahban also made many efforts to ensure that antiquities excavated in Iran should remain in the country, and his work was crucial in preparing the legal basis for this crucial endeavor (Negahban 1385; Fahimi 2012d). With this basis of official administration and education in archaeology, which were prepared by the first generation like Mostafavi, Sami, Hakemi, and after that Negahban, a new generation of Iranian archaeologists like Firouz Bagherzadeh (Kaboli 1387), Massoud Azarnoush (Fahimi and Helwing 2009; Mousavi 2010; Tajbakhsh and Fahimi 2012), Mehdi Rahbar, and Mir Abedin Kaboli emerged. These were able to make reforms in Iranian archaeology during the last decade of the second Pahlavi regime, which would provide a suitable topic for a future paper (Abdi 2001).¹

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1 With the beginning of systematic and scientific fieldwork, which in Iran is best exemplified by the Prehistoric Project of the University of Chicago under Robert Braidwood, which started in 1959, the fourth phase of Iranian archaeology commenced. This period can be characterized as scientific, problem-oriented and, in terms of fieldwork methods, up-to-date. This phase of prolific work lasted until 1979, when the revolution and the subsequent Iran-Iraq war brought all fieldwork to a halt.

2 For references in Persian, the publication years are given according to the Solar Hijri calendar.

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