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ROUND TABLE

Problematizing the Stereotype of the Iranian Mosque: Qajar Architecture from Shiraz to Mumbai

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Abstract

This article examines the Iranian mosque in Mumbai, known as Mughal Masjid, built in the 1860s by a Shirazi master mason for the Shirazi diaspora community, as a lens through which to reconsider the stereotype of the Iranian mosque. Conceived as a garden mosque, it combines the architectural traditions of mosques in the southern Zagros region with the spatial ambience of a Shirazi garden. With a survey of mosques across the southern Zagros, the article shows that historical mosques in this region are typically domeless, hypostyle structures, challenging the stereotype of the Iranian mosque defined by domes and monumental minarets. The article also critiques the stylistics of Mohammad-Karim Pirnia, arguing that nationalist historiography and colonial scholarship advance different narratives yet share a meta-narrative and epistemology that obscure regional diversity and marginalize Qajar architectural significance.

Keywords: garden mosque; Iranian mosques; Mohammad-Karim Pirnia; Mughal Masjid (Mumbai); Qajar architecture; southern Zagros architecture

I was wandering through the bustling Dongri area in the old city of Mumbai, which Muslim communities simply call the *mohalla*. Walking along Mohammad Ali Road, one of the city's major thoroughfares, I was asking passersby for directions to the Mughal Masjid, as the Iranian mosque is known locally. I was led into Jail Road and assured that I would not miss its entrance amid the local shops. After a brief walk, I arrived at the mosque. Passing through the entrance and into its garden courtyard, I experienced a sudden and unexpected sense of familiarity, as though I had stepped into Shiraz. The sharp contrast between the noisy, congested street outside and the serene garden courtyard produced a striking sense of calm and wonder.

The Mughal Masjid is not a mere imitation of a Shirazi mosque or garden but an innovative expression of Qajar aesthetics, executed by a Shirazi master mason invited to Mumbai by Haj Mohammad Hussein Shirazi[1] in the late 1860s. Although visitors readily recognize the mosque's association with Iranian architecture, it does not fit the common stereotype of the Iranian mosque, a model largely defined by domes and monumental minarets based on central Iranian examples. In contrast, across the southern Zagros region, historical mosques

[1] He was a prominent and wealthy Shirazi merchant in Mumbai. For more on Iranian communities in Mumbai, see Masoudi Nejad, "Ritual and Built Initiatives."

are typically domeless and lack grand minarets, features that are generally reserved for shrines and tombs in that region.

Although reflecting the southern Zagros tradition, the Shirazi master mason did not simply replicate prevailing mosque forms. Instead, he created an innovative "garden mosque" that evokes the sensorial experience of Shiraz, a city long associated with gardens. The mosque exemplifies the creative agency of Qajar-era master builders and challenges essentialist images of the Iranian mosque. Its design also provides a lens through which to examine the broader narratives that have shaped twentieth-century Iranian architectural historiography, which often have obscured regional diversity and downplayed the significance of the Qajar era.

Pahlavi-era historiographies, from André Godard to Mohammad-Karim Pirnia, offer different narratives yet share a meta-narrative that reproduces colonial and orientalist frameworks, celebrating a distant medieval past while discrediting the Qajar era. The Mughal Masjid in Mumbai, alongside mosques in the southern Zagros region, challenges both the stereotypical image of the Iranian mosque and the marginalization of Qajar architecture. Particular attention is paid to Pirnia's stylistic framework—arguably the most influential over the past six decades—which excludes the Qajar era from the broader narrative of Iranian architectural continuity. This paper demonstrates the creative agency of the Qajar period while exposing the biases embedded in dominant architectural historiographies.

Encountering and Problematizing the Stereotype of the Iranian Mosque

I first encountered the problem of the stereotype of the Iranian mosque and its impact on both design practice and architectural studies in the late 1990s. At the time, I was commissioned by Iran's Ministry of Housing and Urban Development to design a mosque in Dezful, a historic city in southwestern Iran. This was part of a nationwide initiative involving several architects. As an initial step, I conducted a field survey of the city's historical mosques to study their typology, aesthetics, and architectural features. To my surprise, none of these mosques featured domes or minarets by which the stereotypical Iranian mosque is defined. A closer observation of the urban landscape revealed that domes were exclusively associated with shrines and tombs. Further investigation showed that the nearby historic city of Shushtar, often described as Dezful's sister city, shared a similar architectural tradition. Accordingly, although my design adopted a contemporary architectural language, it drew its core principles from local historical precedents, deliberately avoiding any form that resembled a dome, which in this context would have signified a shrine rather than a mosque. This approach, however, led to a dispute with the ministry's architectural review board; the members of the board believed that the proposed design did not resemble "the Iranian mosque." Similar disagreements soon emerged with other architects whose designs were rooted in local traditions, including those working in the Caspian region of northern Iran. Later, when I broadened the scope of my investigation, I realized that the pattern I observed extends well beyond Khuzestan: across the entire southern Zagros region, from Dezful to Shiraz, no historical mosque features a dome, and domes have consistently been associated with tombs rather than mosques.

Whenever I shared this observation with fellow Iranian architects, from established professionals to university professors, I witnessed visible surprise, as their assumptions about Iranian mosques were shattered by such a simple point. This was especially evident when I noted that neither of Shiraz's historical Friday mosques has a dome, whereas the tomb of Shāh-e Cherāgh in Shiraz does.[2] Over time, these exchanges made clear to me that the

[2] Shiraz has two Friday mosques: the Old Friday Mosque (Masjid-e Jāmeʿ-e ʿAtīq), built in the ninth century, and the New Friday Mosque (Masjid-e Jāmeʿ-e Now), built in the twelfth century.

stereotype of the Iranian mosque obscures an architectural reality that should be familiar to any graduate of architecture in Iran. More strikingly, this stereotype does not reflect most historical mosques across the country but is instead derived from a limited number of examples, primarily from central Iran, such as the King's Mosque of Isfahan.

Studies by Gholi-Nejad[3], Amiri-Azar[4], Nejad-Ibrahim and Morad-Zadeh[5], and Salavati et al.[6] have focused on mosques in the southern Zagros Mountains, including the Fars, Bushehr, and Kurdistan regions. These studies consistently show that historical mosques in these regions are generally single-sanctuary structures, also known as hypostyle, which do not have a dome.[7] Hillenbrand explains that, in this mosque type, the sanctuary comprises either multiple columns supporting a flat roof or arcades supporting a pitched roof; the emphasis on regularly spaced supports placed fairly close together has led to the term hypostyle.[8] The sanctuary of the Mughal Masjid in Mumbai can be considered a nineteenth-century example of hypostyle. Given that the Mughal Masjid's master mason was from Shiraz, the studies of Fars Province are particularly relevant. Gholi-Nejad's comprehensive catalog of all historical mosques in Shiraz shows that none feature a dome, supporting my observation. Moreover, Amiri-Azar's study of Masjid-e Khan in Jahrom, often cited as a domed mosque in Fars, has an interesting outcome: his investigation demonstrates that the dome was, in fact, constructed over a tomb attached to the mosque and was not part of the mosque itself, highlighting that in this region domes were associated with tombs rather than mosques.

Taheri and colleagues have published two interesting papers on Iranian historical mosques; the first focuses on the typology of the *shabestan* (prayer hall or sanctuary)[9] and the second on the typology of the *ayvan*[10], using the GIS database of over 950 mosques registered by the Iran Cultural Heritage Organization.[11] Here, I focus on the findings of the first paper, in which they examined over 1,400 sanctuaries across 952 mosques (some mosques have more than one sanctuary). Among the case studies, only 8 percent of the sanctuaries were categorized as domed. Regardless of typology, only 15 percent of the 1,400 sanctuaries were fully or partially covered by a dome, with these cases primarily located in central Iran. The study showed that over 85 percent of mosques in the country have a single sanctuary without a dome, and 65 percent of sanctuaries are hypostyle, with their roofs supported by rows of columns. These findings clearly demonstrate that the typical image of the Iranian mosque does not reflect the historical reality.

These studies show that the Iranian mosque stereotype misrepresents the architectural reality of mosques across the country. What is particularly striking, however, is that despite the consistency of their empirical findings none of these studies explicitly address the problem of the stereotype itself. Research focused on specific regions or case studies, such as that by Salavati et al., often treats domeless mosques as exceptional cases shaped by climatic conditions. Even Taheri et al., whose comprehensive GIS-based study surveys mosques across Iran, does not problematize the persistence of this stereotype. This reveals

[3] Gholi-Nejad, *Masājid-e Shahr-e Shiraz*.

[4] Amiri-Azar, "Chīstī va Cherāyī-ye Masjid-e Khān-e Jahrom, Masjid-e Gunbad-Khāneh dar Ostān-e Fārs".

[5] Nejad-Ibrahim and Morad-Zadeh, "Motāleʿeh-ye Dar Meʿmāri-ye Masājid-e Iran Barā-ye Olgūyābī-ye Meʿmāri-ye Masājid-e Būshehr dar Dowreh-ye Qājār".

[6] Salavati et al., "Gūneh-Shenāsī-ye Tahlīlī-ye Masājid-e Tārīkhī-ye Howzeh-ye Farhangī-ye Kordestān-e Iran."

[7] This type of mosque is referred to by various names in scholarly discourse, including Abbasid, Arabic, Arab plan, and even Basilica mosque; in Iran, it is often simply called *shabestan-ye sutoon-dār*, which literally means "columned sanctuary."

[8] Hillenbrand, *Islamic Architecture*, 66.

[9] Taheri et al., "Gūneh-Shenāsīye Shabestān-mehvar-e Masājid-e Tārīkhī-ye Iran va Bāznamāyī-ye Ān bā Bahrevardī Az Sāmānehye Etelāʿāt-e Joghrāfiyāei".

[10] Taheri et al., "Gūneh-Shenāsī-ye Īvān-mahvar-e Masājid-e Tārīkhī-ye Iran."

[11] The Iran Cultural Heritage Organization has undergone institutional changes over time. In 2019, it was officially transferred to the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts.

how deeply embedded the idea is within architectural studies. As a result, the stereotype remains largely unquestioned.

Stereotypes such as "Islamic architecture" or "Iranian architecture" have been widely questioned in scholarship, although they are not entirely baseless. They reflect certain features of the built environment while simplifying highly diverse traditions to make the complexity of reality intelligible. Their significance must be understood in their social register. Social psychologists suggest that stereotypes are by-products of cognitive processes that help individuals navigate complex social realities and facilitate understanding of objects, people, and cultures. They cannot simply be dismissed, as they form part of the social-cognitive framework through which the world is comprehended. The problem arises, however, when such stereotypes enter academic discourse and are treated as interchangeable with analytical categories or representational types.

Stangor and Schaller suggest that stereotypes often emerge in times of crisis, when a group or nation's authority and identity are vulnerable and require reinforcement.[12] This helps explain why many stereotypes arose in late-Qajar and early-Pahlavi discourse, when art and architectural historiography served the political agenda of constructing national identity.[13] Tavakoli-Targhi argues that modern historiography is future-oriented, mobilizing the masses toward the goals of intellectuals and the modern state[14], and Abbas Amanat emphasizes that Pahlavi-era historical studies focused primarily on Iran's national identity.[15] In this context, stereotypes not only entered public and political discourse but also permeated academic historiographical discourse. This development constructed reductive stereotypes of the Iranian mosque, Iranian house, Iranian bazaar, and Iranian city.[16] Although these stereotypes may serve as cognitive tools for navigating complexity, they become historiographical hazards when they are used to systematically marginalize and actively deny regional diversity in favor of a centralized nationalist discourse.

There is no doubt that stereotypes such as that of the Iranian mosque have politically and socially served the country by helping to establish a modern centralized state and defining national identity. However, the stereotype of the Iranian mosque misrepresents the architecture of most mosques, impeding our ability to observe and understand architectural reality, with direct consequences for scholarship and practice. Based on a few exceptional cases, such as Masjid-e Shah in Isfahan, the stereotype presents exceptional mosques as representative, while treating more typical mosques as marginal or secondary. More problematically, it has become a standard by which the authenticity, cultural value, and significance of mosques are assessed.

The Garden Mosque: Innovation, Continuity, and Spatial Synthesis

The atmosphere upon entering the Mughal Masjid is notably distinctive from that of other mosques, where the courtyard is typically free of trees or greenery. The Mughal Masjid is conceived as a garden mosque in which the garden itself dominates the atmosphere of the space. Passing through the mosque's entrance on Jail Road, one is struck by the serenity of the modest yet beautiful courtyard garden. A long blue pool in the center of the courtyard directs the gaze toward the *shabestan* (sanctuary), an elegant pavilion situated at the opposite end. Ascending the steps leads to the *ayvan* alongside the *shabestan*. Standing at the

[12] Stangor and Schaller, "Stereotypes."

[13] Grigor, *Building Iran*. To grasp the broad Iranian intellectual discourse of the time, see Atabaki and Zurcher, *Men of Order*, 1–12.

[14] Tavakoli-Targhi, *Tajaddod-e Bumi va Bāzandishi-ye Tārikh*, 52.

[15] Amanat, "Historiography, Pahlavi Period."

[16] On problematizing the stereotype of the Iranian city and Iranian bazaar, see Masoudi Nejad, "Motaleʿeh-ye Tatbiqi-ye Bazar-e Tejari va Bazar-e Ejtemaʿi ba Negahi Maʿtuf be Bazar-ha-ye Tarikhi-ye Dezful va Shushtar be ʿOnvan-e Bazar-e Tejari."

columned *ayvan* and gazing back at the courtyard garden unmistakably evokes the sense of being in a Shirazi garden due to its spatial arrangement and atmosphere.

I described the Mughal Masjid as "a unique garden mosque" in the introduction of this article, using the phrase both descriptively and analytically. As just described, the garden courtyard is a prominent feature of the mosque. I do not suggest, however, that the mosque replicates the Shirazi gardens of the Qajar era, which typically include a pavilion. Rather, it represents a creative fusion of mosque and garden concepts, realized when a Shirazi master mason was commissioned to design a mosque for the Shirazi community of Mumbai within a garden estate.

The crucial question is how the Shirazi master intertwined elements of a garden and a mosque to produce a harmonious synthesis. The landscape of the Mughal Masjid evokes the ambience of a garden with a pavilion, a feature common in Iran since the Safavid and Qajar periods, while its spatial arrangement accommodates the institutional functions and practices of a mosque. Here, I use "garden" and "mosque" not as building types, but as institutions not confined to physical form. I am borrowing this idea from Qayyoomi Bidhendi, who brilliantly problematizes the reduction of mosques, schools, and caravanserais to building types, a practice that can lead to confusion, particularly among European scholars, because similar forms could historically serve as mosques, schools, or caravanserais. He shows that some abandoned structures were misidentified by orientalists because their analyses focused on form rather than institutional function.[17] To distinguish an institution from its physical arrangement, I employ the concepts of performed and built space.

The Prophet Muhammad is recorded as saying, "Wherever you pray, that place is a mosque"; this is often cited to show that a mosque does not require a specific form.[18] I interpret this hadith as emphasizing that a mosque is fundamentally a performed space, realized through the act of prayer.[19] Its built form should therefore support the performed space, fostering the spiritual and social ambience. The creation of the garden mosque indicates that the Shirazi master mason must have intuitively understood that the mosque and public garden function as institutions rather than building types. Therefore he deliberately shaped a space in which social and religious life could unfold harmoniously, while evoking a sense of belonging and cultural familiarity for the diaspora community in Mumbai.

Rare historical examples of pavilion mosques, such as Masjid-e Akhoond (also known as Masjid-e Khosroo) in Ardestan, are organized around a domed space or consist of a simple domed room, closely resembling the spatial logic of garden pavilions. By contrast, the Mughal Masjid departs from these forms, incorporating a hypostyle prayer hall accompanied by a columned *ayvan*. Its architectural identity, therefore, diverges from both conventional garden pavilions and the typical pavilion mosque. Instead, it represents an innovative synthesis of the Shirazi garden concept with the mosque traditions of the southern Zagros. As noted, mosques in this region historically did not feature domes; moreover, for the Shirazi and Shushtari communities that largely constituted Mumbai's Iranian population in the nineteenth century, a dome would have evoked the imagery of a tomb.[20]

The Mughal Masjid demonstrates how architectural innovation can sustain cultural continuity while responding to a specific social and spatial context. Rooted in southern Zagros traditions, it integrates a hypostyle prayer hall, a columned *ayvan*, and a garden courtyard to evoke Shiraz, while meeting the social and spiritual needs of the Iranian community. I therefore argue that it merits recognition as a garden mosque, exemplifying the innovative vision of its Shirazi master mason. The mosque stands as a testament to Qajar-era

[17] Qayyoomi Bidhendi and Sultani, *Me'māri Khāneghah dar Khorasān-e Sadeh-ye Panjom*, xiii.

[18] Hillenbrand, *Islamic Architecture*, 31.

[19] I have conceptually formulated this idea in Masoudi Nejad, "Performed Ritual Space."

[20] For a detailed discussion on the social fabric of the Iranian community in Mumbai, see Masoudi Nejad, "Ritual and Built Initiatives."

creativity as manifested by a Shirazi master mason, inviting a reconsideration of how Qajar architecture has been positioned within Iranian architectural historiography.

Constructing Continuity, Excluding Qajar: Shared Colonial and Nationalist Meta-Narratives

The language through which European travelers and orientalists articulated the art and architecture of the so-called East evolved over time. As Nasser Rabbat explains, early writings relied on Eurocentric geographical and ethnological categories before consolidating around terms such as "Islamic architecture" in the late nineteenth century.[21] This shift coincided with a broader disciplinary transformation, moving from travel writing and orientalist accounts to anthropological approaches and eventually to art and architectural history. Yet, as scholars from Edward Said[22] and MacKenzie[23] to Blair and Bloom[24] have argued, colonial perspectives continued to shape the field. Islamic architecture was often treated as ahistorical or suprahistorical, framed as a static and closed tradition. This epistemology was evident in the admiration for the distant past and medieval monuments, alongside the systematic devaluation of more recent architecture. As Grabar observed, "Islamic creativity may have meaning for Westerners only if it dated from before 1700."[25]

Whereas the architecture of Safavid Iran and Mughal India was widely celebrated, that of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was often judged negatively and deemed inferior to European architecture. Such assessments frequently targeted the eclectic character of Iranian and Indian buildings, shaped by encounters with European forms, which European observers interpreted as signs of creative decline and aesthetic misunderstanding. As Flood notes, the juxtaposition of northern Indian forms with European neoclassicism was criticized as evidence of decadence among the Muslim rulers of Avadh.[26] James Fergusson, for example, described the Begum Kothi in Lucknow as an "unsuccessful adaptation of the Italian style to Oriental purposes," adding that natives "in the vain attempt to imitate their superiors, have abandoned their own beautiful art to produce a strange jumble of vulgarity and bad taste."[27] Yet architectural eclecticism in Europe, including the imitation of Egyptian, Indian, or Chinese forms, was rarely criticized and instead often celebrated. The Royal Pavilion in Brighton exemplifies this asymmetry: John Nash, one of Britain's most prominent nineteenth-century architects, combined Indo-Islamic forms with Chinese-inspired interiors. This royal palace has been admired for its "eclectic mix of Gothic and Mughal-Islamic architecture," despite embodying a juxtaposition that would likely have appeared equally incongruous to Indian or Chinese observers.[28]

This discussion reveals the colonial roots of discrediting Qajar-era architecture. Orientalist narratives carried their own epistemologies, but these were later reproduced in Iranian historiography for different political reasons. Under the anti-Qajar Pahlavi state (1925–79), intellectuals and architectural historians reframed narratives and heritage policies to construct a modern national identity. As Amanat notes, studies emphasized the might of ancient Persian empires while casting the Qajar era as culturally and materially in decline.[29] Architectural historiography, as Mahmodi shows, focused less on historical

[21] Rabbat, "What Is Islamic Architecture Anyway?" 2.
[22] Said, *Orientalism*.
[23] MacKenzie *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts*.
[24] Blair and Bloom, "Mirage of Islamic Art."
[25] Grabar, "Reflections on the Study of Islamic Art," 5.
[26] Flood and Mansfield, "From the Prophet to Postmodernism?" 36.
[27] Fergusson, *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture*, vol. 2, 327–28.
[28] Beevers, *Royal Pavilion*, 13.
[29] Amanat, "Historiography, Pahlavi Period."

inquiry than on crafting a selective vision of national heritage.[30] In this context, the 1930 National Heritage Preservation Act even barred registration of Qajar artifacts and buildings, a restriction that remained until Golestan Palace was recognized as a national heritage site in 1956.

Western orientalists and historians, from Marcel-Auguste Dieulafoy and Herzfeld to Arthur Pope and André Godard,[31] shaped the study of Iranian architectural history in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[32] The late Mohammad-Karim Pirnia (1920–97), however, proposed an alternative narrative that has dominated the field over the last six decades. Rejecting European approaches that explained architectural change primarily through political dynasties, he emphasized the continuity and internal dynamics of Iranian art and architecture, shaped by changes in building practice and technique as a form of cultural expression. Drawing on his restoration experience and close collaborations with traditional master masons, Pirnia translated vernacular architectural knowledge into an academic narrative, producing a historiography that may be understood as a form of ethnographic practice, attentive to building techniques, artisanal knowledge, and craft mastery rather than formal design alone.[33]

Pirnia's influence was primarily driven by his long career as a heritage practitioner and, more importantly, as an educator at the National Organization for the Preservation of Historic Monuments (NOPHM; Sāzmān-e Hefāzat-e Āsār-e Bāstāni) of Iran and the University of Tehran, where he trained generations of architects and scholars.[34] I was among his students in the early 1990s, which informs my reading of his pedagogical and historiographic approach. Many of his works, including *Sabk-shenasi-ye Meʿmari-ye Iran*, which had been reprinted twenty-three times by 2022, became standard textbooks in the field, reflecting the enduring impact of his scholarship.[35]

Pirnia's architectural historiography rests on two interrelated pillars: the "principles" of Iranian architecture and its stylistic classification.[36] Apart from an article contributed by Abdollahzadeh to this roundtable, he and Qayyoomi produced several publications that admirably introduce and critically assess Pirnia's historiography.[37] Although they examine both Pirnia's stylistics and principles, they focus mainly on the latter. My brief critique, by contrast, concentrates on Pirnia's stylistics, highlighting an epistemological tension between his emphasis on the continuity of Iranian architecture's spirit across a volatile history and the exclusion of the Qajar era from its historical evolution.

Pirnia divided Iranian architecture into six stylistic eras: Parti, Parsi, Khorasan, Razi, Azari, and Isfahan. He characterized pre-Islamic architecture through the Parti and Parsi schools, while dividing the Islamic period into four eras. Central to his framework is the claim that all six shared common principles, constituting a continuous architectural tradition. Although continuity had been acknowledged earlier by scholars such as Godard, Pirnia articulated it through the five principles of Iranian architecture. Although rejecting

[30] Mahmodi Asl-e Hamedani and Khademzadeh, "Roshanfekrān-e Irāni va Dogāneh-ye Mīrās-e Mellī va Tārīkh-e Meʿmāri-ye Iran," 119.

[31] In this roundtable, Sina Zarei Hajiabadi's essay specifically examines André Godard's contribution to the architectural history of Iran.

[32] Also see Qayyoomi Bidhendi, "Barresi-ye Enteqādi-ye Chahār Tarikhnameh-ye Meʿmāri-ye Iran," 4–8.

[33] For a contemporary example of this approach (learning from master practitioners to produce academic knowledge), see Marchand, *Minaret Building*, and his more recent work on furniture craftsmanship, which similarly emphasizes apprenticeship, mastery, and tacit knowledge over formal notions of aesthetic form.

[34] Pirnia served as the technical deputy of the National Organization for the Preservation of Historic Monuments.

[35] Pirnia, *Sabk-Shenāsi-ye Meʿmāri-ye Iran*.

[36] For a more detailed discussion, see Abdollahzadeh's essay in this roundtable.

[37] Qayyoomi Bidhendi, "Barrasi-ye Enteqādi-ye Chahār Tarikhnameh-ye Meʿmāri-ye Iran"; Abdollahzadeh and Qayyoomi Bidhendi, *Bām va Boom va Mardom va Bāz-khāni va Naghd Asol-e Pishnahadi-ye Pirnia Baraye Meʿmāri-ye Iran*; Qayyoomi Bidhendi and Abdollahzadeh, "Dāmani Por Gol Ashāb-e Madraseh Rā"; Abdollahzadeh, *Farar az Madreseh*.

approaches that explained architectural change solely through political dynasties, he recognized that shifts in political geography shaped access to human and material resources. For example, he interpreted the use of Lebanese cedar or Egyptian stone-working techniques at Persepolis as consistent with the principle of self-sufficiency (*khod-basandegi*) within the territorial scope of the Achaemenid Empire.[38]

A striking feature of Pirnia's stylistics is the exclusion of the recent past, namely the Qajar era, from his framework. He explicitly refused to recognize Qajar architecture as part of Iranian architectural history, arguing that Western cultural influence during this period undermined the core principles sustaining continuity, with architectural eclecticism exemplifying this disruption. This creates a paradox, given Pirnia's insistence that his knowledge derived from close collaboration with traditional master masons. The craftsmen from whom he acquired field-based knowledge belonged to the late Qajar era, when architectural knowledge was still learned, practiced, preserved, and transmitted through apprenticeship. In effect, Pirnia's understanding of Iranian architecture was substantially shaped by the architectural culture and lived knowledge of Qajar-era master masons: the very period he excluded from his framework. This produces an epistemological paradox, in which lived knowledge is treated as authoritative but Qajar-era architectural culture is rejected, generating an attendant ontological tension between the sources of his knowledge and the historiographically sanctioned categories of the Qajar period.

The principal argument Pirnia used to discredit Qajar architecture was the depth of European influence, which he claimed undermined Iranian cultural authenticity. Although cultural exchange between Iran and Europe was indeed asymmetrical, Iran was never colonized by European powers, and earlier invasions by Greeks, Arabs, and Mongols had far more profound impacts on Iranian society and culture. Pirnia suggests that Iranian architectural culture survived and evolved through these major historical turning points, yet he treats the encounter with European culture as decisive, abruptly ending the historical continuity of Iranian architecture. This shows that the exclusion of Qajar architecture cannot be historically justified, particularly in light of earlier, far-reaching cultural transformations introduced by Islam. In this sense, the problem with Pirnia's narrative operates on two levels: historically, in its selective reading of cultural encounters, and conceptually, in constructing continuity as a principle while disregarding historical evidence.

I contend that Pirnia's rejection of Qajar architecture was neither warranted by his conceptual framework nor justified by historical evidence, but reflected the Pahlavi anti-Qajar narrative, which persisted even after the 1979 revolution. Pahlavi historiography selectively privileged the distant past while marginalizing the Qajar period, thereby reproducing orientalist narratives within a nationalist political agenda. Pirnia, like many scholars of his generation, formulated his historiography within this context, resulting in the systematic exclusion of the Qajar era from the canonized narrative of Iranian architectural continuity and evolution.

Given Pirnia's openness to revising his principles[39] and the growing scholarship reassessing the Qajar period, including the later work of S. Bagher Ayatullah-zadeh Shirazi who sought to foreground the architectural legacy of the Qajar period[40], it is plausible that were Pirnia alive today he might reconsider his stylistics. He might even acknowledge

[38] This is one of the five principles articulated by Pirnia; for further discussion, see Abdollahzadeh's contribution to this roundtable.

[39] As Abdollazadeh (in *Farar az Madreseh*) observes, Pirnia repeatedly revisited and revised his proposed principles of Iranian architecture, indicating a reflexive and open-ended approach to architectural theory.

[40] See Mojtahedzadeh, "Takkalmeh," 40.

an additional era, possibly termed *shiveh-ye* Tehran[41], recognizing the continued evolution of Iranian architecture during the Qajar period. Yet despite gradual shifts in academic discourse, mainstream architectural historiography continues to marginalize Qajar architecture, a tendency rooted in anti-Qajar narratives that have persisted beyond the Pahlavi era. The Qajar period remains politically stigmatized and widely remembered as an era of decline, and its architecture continues to bear this inherited judgement. A critical reappraisal of the Qajar era is therefore necessary to address this historiographical imbalance and to disentangle architectural history from political prejudice.

The study of the Mughal Masjid demonstrates how such a reappraisal can be practiced. As a carefully examined case study, it shows that Qajar architectural culture remained regionally grounded, technically coherent, and capable of innovation, even beyond Iran's territorial borders. By manifesting the hypostyle traditions of the southern Zagros in a diasporic garden mosque, it reveals that the stereotypical image of the Iranian mosque, derived largely from a few central Iranian monuments, has obscured regional diversity. Furthermore, it demonstrates that the dominant discourse of architectural historiography has frequently denied the significance of Qajar architecture within the broader historical landscape of Iranian architecture. Close attention to this mosque illuminates the transregional networks, artisanal knowledge, and lived practices through which architectural continuity was sustained from Shiraz to Mumbai.

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[41] *Shiveh-ye Tehran* (literally "the Tehran style") is proposed here speculatively. Pirnia consistently named architectural styles after their place of formation (such as Khorasan and Isfahan) rather than political dynasties, most notably in his use of *Shiveh-ye Isfahan* instead of "Safavid style." The term *Shiveh-ye Tehran* follows his methodological preference for culturally grounded, nondynastic stylistic classification.

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