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Cultural Policies and Archaeology in Iran: the Italian Archaeological Missions and a Case Study of Persepolis/ Takht-e Jamshīd

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**Cultural Policies and Archaeology in Iran: the Italian
Archaeological Missions and a Case Study of Persepolis/
Takht-e Jamshīd**

A thesis submitted to Leiden University for the Master Degree in
Middle Eastern Studies (Research)

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(s2577178)

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Introduction

In 1971 several newspapers, magazines, radio and television broadcasts all around the world showed a spectacular military parade hosted in the archaeological site of Persepolis and presided by Mohammad Reza Shah himself. The foreign heads of state invited for the occasion were bewildered when the Shah's army entered the stage wearing Achaemenid and Medes military uniforms and carrying wooden boats in the plain of Persepolis. This curious performance, meant to impress the foreign public by revoking the ancient Iranian civilizations' military might, was not the first one presenting pre-Islamic cultural features in the State's public ceremonies. While presiding the inauguration of Tehran University in 1935, Reza Shah solemnly placed a gold foundation plaque in the cornerstone of the University, the first university founded under his rule. This extravagant gesture was inspired by the discovery in 1933 of silver and golden foundations plaques dating back to the times of Darius I (522-486) at the base of the Apadana, one of the main palaces erected in Persepolis. These two historical episodes, carefully described and further analyzed throughout this work, are among the most known representations of the use of archaeological outcomes to pursue a nationalistic political ideology in Iran.

The debate regarding the instrumental uses of archaeology started already in the 1950s and led from the early 1990s onwards to focus attention on the use of archaeology in supporting different forms of state authority all over the world. As publications produced in this decades show, there is a certain agreement among experts about the "natural" predisposition of archaeology to a nationalist orientation, as already explained by Trigger in 1984 in his article "Alternative Archaeologies: Nationalist, Colonialist, Imperialist."¹ The relationship between nationalist cultural policies and the use of archaeology as a political tool to foster the state's ideology has been dealt with in depth in different books, for example Philip L. Kohl and Clare Fawcett's edited book *Nationalism, Politics and the Practice of Archaeology* (1995). In the preliminary considerations made by the authors of this volume it emerges that "there is an almost unavoidable or natural relationship between archaeology and nationalism and that this

¹ Trigger, B. G. "Alternative Archaeologies: Nationalist, Colonialist, Imperialist." *Man (London)* 19, no. 3 (1984): 355-70.

² Kohl, Philip L., and Clare P. Fawcett. *Nationalism, Politics, and the Practice of Archaeology*, 1995, 3

³ Kamyar Abdi, "Nationalism, Politics, and the Development of Archaeology in Iran", *American Journal of Archaeology*, Vol. 105, No. 1 (Jan., 2001): 51; Rana Daroogheh Nokhodchery, "Nationalism, Politics, and the Practice of Archaeology: the Case Study of Iran" (PhD thesis, Durham University), 1.

relationship is not necessarily corrupt or intrinsically suspect.”² The case studies reported in the chapters show that archaeologists at the service of the state have often manipulated archaeological findings to justify the internal or foreign policies of the of their countries. However, the examples mentioned in Kohl and Fawcett’s book deal exclusively with European and East Asian archaeology, not providing the reader with any case study in Middle Eastern countries that support this perspective.

This vacuum was filled by Kamyar Abdi’s article “Nationalism, Politics, and the Development of Archaeology in Iran” (2001) and by Rana Daroogheh-Nokhodcheri’s dissertation “Nationalism, Politics, and the Practice of Archaeology: The Case Study of Iran” (2014). These works further develop the arguments made by Kohl and Fawcett, expanding the body of literature governing the subject of archaeological-political interactions. While Abdi thoroughly explores the relationship between archaeology and nationalism in modern Iran ranging from the 19th century until after the establishment of the Islamic Republic, Nokhodcheri instead aims to analyse the history of Iranian archaeology and the history of the attempts to politicise it from Reza Shah’s rule until Ahmadinejad’s presidency. Their conclusions consolidate Trigger and Kohl and Fawcett’s view over the nationalist orientation of archaeology, asserting that in Iran, depending on the political situation, archaeology was exploited by politicians and cultural elites according to their nationalist agendas, with the aim to validate certain aspects of identity, or vice versa, considered as pseudoscience by populist governments such as during the immediate aftermath of the Islamic Revolution.³

In Iran the political use of archaeology became manifested when Reza Shah revealed his aim to reconstruct a new identity for the nation, an operation we refer to as “nation-building process”: the construction of a national identity through the power of the state which controls a certain country. To this end, Reza Shah financed the American archaeological mission conducted by the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago in Persepolis with the purpose of using the findings of excavations to support and further develop his nationalist ideology. In recent times these excavations have been the subject of an in-depth research for two main reasons: their significant contribution to the

² Kohl, Philip L., and Clare P. Fawcett. *Nationalism, Politics, and the Practice of Archaeology*, 1995, 3

³ Kamyar Abdi, “Nationalism, Politics, and the Development of Archaeology in Iran”, *American Journal of Archaeology*, Vol. 105, No. 1 (Jan., 2001): 51; Rana Daroogheh Nokhodcheri, “Nationalism, Politics, and the Practice of Archaeology: the Case Study of Iran” (PhD thesis, Durham University), 1.

field of archaeology and their tight connection to a clear state policy. Moreover, in the early 2000s experts such as Grigor, Mousavi and Devos devoted significant research to pre-Islamic excavations during the Pahlavi period, analysing both excavations conducted during the 1930s as well as those between the 1960s and the 1970s, enhancing their scientific valence and their relation with the authority.⁴ Although the majority of them rightfully dwells on the political analysis and the historical reconstruction of American excavations in Iran, it is surprising that, even among the given titles, several Italian archaeological missions conducted on pre-Islamic sites in Iran were overlooked. In fact, although Grigor, Mousavi and Nokhodcheri mention the IsMEO/ISMEO campaigns in Iran confirming the interesting archaeological discoveries, it is questionable that nothing has been said on the implications that these excavations had in the Iranian nation-building process, nor on the reasons behind the involvement of Italian archaeological missions in the country.

These Italian archaeological excavations in Iran have been a popular object of research in Italy. They have been regarded with particular attention by different Italian and foreign experts such as Tilia, Callieri and Keddie, who have devoted considerable efforts in documenting the progress and the outcomes of the missions carried out by the IsMEO/ISMEO institute in view of their scientific contribution to the development of the field of Iranian archaeology.⁵ Nevertheless, as a consequence of the present-day favourable relations between the two countries, this scientific interest has also been followed by an increased attention to the cultural and political ties between Iran and Italy. This development has been confirmed in the prefaces to the catalogue published by the ISMEO institute: “Iran and Italy, 60 Years of Collaboration on Cultural Heritage”: the summa of all the Italian excavations pursued between 1959-1979 and 1997-2019. In the preface of the book, the ISMEO President Adriano Valerio Rossi, the

⁴ See: Ali Mousavi “Persepolis in Retrospect: Histories of Discovery and Archaeological Exploration at the Ruins of Ancient Parseh” *Ars Orientalis* Vol. 32 (2002), 209-251; Babaie, Sussan and Grigor, Talinn. *Persian Kingship and Architecture: Strategies of Power in Iran from the Achaemenids to the Pahlavis*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2015; Devos, Bianca. ““History Is Repeated”: The Representation of Persepolis in the Iranian Press of the 1930s.” *Welt Des Islams* 58, no. 3 (2018): 326–56.

⁵ The Encyclopedia Iranica holds in his section “Italian excavations in Iran” interesting articles on this topic written by important Italian experts in this field, such as Pierfrancesco Callieri and Bruno Genito. They summarize and explain the general traits of the Italian missions in Iran from 1959 to the 1980s. In particular, Callieri often places a great degree of importance on the institutional apparatus working on the Italian site, the importance of the IsMEO and the Italian universities involved in the excavations.

General Director of the National Museum of Iran Jebrael Nokandeh and the Italian Ambassador in Iran Giuseppe Perrone made clear that the success and the potential of the cultural relations between Iran and Italy relies indeed on the shared respect for cultural heritage. In particular, it is important to note that both Callieri and Rossi stressed the mediating role of the Italian energetic industry in launching the first projects in the late 1950s. In fact, the presence of the Italian national oil company in Iran in the 1950s and 1960s and its plans in the Middle East is examined by Italian literature, but largely unknown abroad.⁶

Since the Italian archaeological campaigns have been marginally dealt with outside of Italy, the thesis will examine not just the evolution of the relation between the Iranian authority and pre-Islamic heritage in the last century, but also the role played by Italian excavations in pre-Islamic sites in this development. Hence, the research question formulated for this research is “How did the political and cultural policies towards archaeology and pre-Islamic heritage in Iran evolve between the Pahlavi monarchy and the Islamic Republic of Iran, and what was the role of the Italian archaeological missions in this development?”

Hence, the thesis expands the scope of existing literature on the political use of archaeology in Iran, albeit standing in continuity with the works already written on this topic. It will compare the cultural policies implemented by the Pahlavi monarchy and the Islamic Republic, especially in regards to pre-Islamic heritage. It aims to integrate information about the role played by Italian excavations in Iran, discussing the latter’s origin and development and their legacy on current Italian-Iranian bilateral relations. Therefore, the methodology through which this research is conducted relies almost exclusively on the review of the sources regarding cultural policies in Iran and the relation between archaeology and nationalism. Italian sources are utilized to demonstrate the impact of Italian excavations on the perception of pre-Islamic heritage in Iran and their role within the cultural policies implemented during both the Pahlavi times and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Specifically, the archaeological site of

⁶ For example in the article written by Pinella Di Gregorio: “Eni: agente speciale della decolonizzazione” *Meridiana*, No. 83 (2015): 195-214; or in the book written by Rosario Milano: *L’ENI e l’Iran 1962-1970*. Napoli: Giannini Editori, 2014.

Persepolis/Takht-e Jamshīd, that I visited in 2017 with one of the co-directors of the Italian-Iranian joint mission: Alireza Askari Chaverdi, is used as a case study.⁷

To this extent, it was important to collect interviews with Iranian and Italian archaeologists who have been recently working at this site. The reason behind this approach was to obtain the point of view of local and foreign archaeologists who have been working at the same site for the same organization, whilst looking for potential discrepancies in their accounts and perceptions. For this reason, interviews were conducted with the co-directors of the Italian-Iranian Joint Mission in Fars: Alireza Askari Chaverdi from Shiraz University and Pierfrancesco Callieri, from Alma Mater Studiorum-Bologna University. The interview with Callieri was in Italian, while the one with Askari Chaverdi was in English (my knowledge of Farsi was insufficient to produce an interview on Archaeology in this expert's mother tongue). Since the Italian sources were mentioning the good cultural relations between Iran and Italy, the interviews were a reliable instrument in verifying the arguments regarding the quality of cultural relations between Italy and Iran, and aided in clarifying certain dubious statement found in Hodjat and Nokhodcheri's works. The interviews covered an important section of the research, therefore it is possible to safely affirm that the methodological approach I have used is a qualitative method.

The thesis is composed of three chapters. The first two deal with the historical-ideological dimension of the research question, inquiring the Pahlavi and Republican periods, while the third chapter will be centred on the analysis of the history of the excavations and the use of the Persepolis site. In detail, the first chapter will focus on the relation between the Pahlavi State and archaeology, showing the relationship between Pahlavi cultural policies and its link with pre-Islamic archaeology. Iran being the subject of the nation-building process, literature on the history of nationalism in the country treated first. This field has been analyzed by well-known historians, among them Ali Ansari.⁸ The management of pre-Islamic heritage and the relationship with archaeology from the period of the Revolution until the presidency of Ahmadinejad is

⁷ For the transliterations from Persian to English, I have used the IJMES transliteration system for Arabic, Persian and Ottoman Turkish elaborated by Cambridge University.

⁸ For Ansari's analysis of nationalism, please see: Ansari, A.M. *Iranian Nationalism*. In Y. M. Khuwayiri *A Companion to the History of the Middle East*. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005.) pp. 321-335. These forms of nationalism will also be further explained throughout the first and second chapter.

analyzed in the second chapter.⁹ Here, comparisons are made between cultural policies implemented by the Pahlavis and those pursued after the Revolution. With “Cultural policy” I considered the total of the government’s actions towards the arts, the humanities, and the heritage, and the strategies pursued by the government promoting the development, spread, promotion, and use of the arts¹⁰. In these two chapters, particular attention is given to the Italian excavation campaigns in Iran from 1959 onwards, contextualizing them into a wider political and economical scenario and highlighting the political and cultural consequences on the diplomatic relations between the two countries.

The third chapter provides a case study in which the archaeological site of Persepolis/Takht-e Jamshīd is analyzed. In this section, the site is dealt with both historically and ideologically, showing its national and international relevance both during the Pahlavi period and after the Revolution. In particular, four important events in Iranian history are examined involving the archaeological site of Persepolis but also the recent developments in archaeological excavations and their national or international resonance. This comparison points out similarities and differences in the management of the site between the Pahlavi period and the Islamic Republic one.

⁹ The first one who has extensively inquired cultural policies in Iran under the Pahlavi rule and during the Republican period is Mehdi Hodjat, who wrote a dissertation titled “Cultural Heritage in Iran: Policies for an Islamic country.”

¹⁰ Mulcahy, Kevin V. “Cultural Policy: Definitions and Theoretical Approaches.” *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society* 35, no. 4 (2006): 320

Chapter 1: Cultural policies and archaeology in the Pahlavi State

State Ideology under Reza Shah

At the end of the First World War, the Sublime State of Persia ruled by the Qajar dynasty (1789-1925) was a failed state.¹¹ Although with the Anglo-Persian agreement proposed in 1919 the British Empire recognized the integrity and the independence of Persia and the intention to support its economic recovery after WWI, the real intention of the European power was to use its influence to exploit the vast oil fields located in the south of the country.¹² The confusion sought after the failed Constitutional Revolution in 1907 and the new foreign attempts to exploit the resources of the State of Persia created the conditions for the rapid rise to power of Colonel Reza Khan in 1921 and his self-coronation as Reza Shah Pahlavi in 1926.

The policies pursued by Reza Shah to establish a modern country mainly followed the principles of nationalism and Westernization of the costumes, as the West, particularly Europe, was seen as a source of inspiration for Iran to prosper after Qajar's ruinous traditionalism. The adoption of nationalism by Reza Shah was not a single case in the Middle East. As highlighted by many historians, it is possible to draw a comparison between the Pahlavi Empire in the 1930s and the rule of Ataturk in Turkey in the same years.¹³ Although the social and political context in which they acted was different, in order to get rid of European political influence they both established a new laic state based on a nationalist ideology, opposing the past foreign domination of their countries,. Moreover, they both used their ties with the military system to reach this aim, using the army to transform their multi-confessional and multi-cultural countries in nation states "rectifying" the interferences of the clergy in society.¹⁴

¹¹ The history of the Qajar State, its decline and its fall in the first decades of the 20th century, which are not a part of this study, can be fully inquired in the following manuals of modern Iranian history: E. Abrahamian, *"A History of Modern Iran"*, 2008; S. F. Sabahi, *"Storia dell'Iran"*, 2003.

¹² S. Farian Sabahi, *Storia dell'Iran* (Milano, Mondadori, 2006), 63.

¹³ Farian Sabahi, *Storia dell'Iran*, 82.

¹⁴ Sabahi, 90.

The choice of nationalism as the core of the new Iranian state was due to two main reasons, both related to Reza Shah's need to rule a country where the central authority had always been weak everywhere but in the main cities. The Shah needed to unify the traditionally heterogeneous Iranian population through a "one culture-one state" process so that it would have been possible to present to the international community a solid and independent nation.¹⁵ A strong, central power in place of the Qajars' weak monarchy would have provided Iran with the legitimacy required to play a role in the modern international political arena. At the same time, this process would have reconnected the people to what the Shah considered to be the true essence of the Iranian soul, which was an Olympus of ancient mythologies coming from the ancient and glorious Iranian past. The creation of the new Iran passed through both practical actions and social reforms, for example the ethnicization and centralization of the country and the improvement of infrastructures. The sedentarization of nomad tribes and repression of their turmoil were accompanied by the creation of cultural and linguistic institutes fostering the settlement of a common national identity, culture and language.¹⁶

The nationalism implemented by Reza Shah has been defined by contemporary scholars in different ways. However, the main definitions are three: "Secular" (Ansari, 2005), "Historical" (Abdi, 2001), "Ethnic" (Smith, 1984). Ansari defines Reza Shah's nationalistic ideology as "Secular" because the process of nation-building implemented by the Shah promoted the laicism of the State and the construction of a modern Iranian identity rooted on the pre-Islamic Iranian past.¹⁷ Hence, the new regime established a complex relations with Islamic traditions as especially the rural areas were still relying on a tribal division of society where the Shi'a clergy was playing an important role. Abdi calls this form of nationalism "Historical", as it is characterized by an elaborate – although rough – attempt to enhance the history and the culture of ancient Iranian civilizations.¹⁸ As argued by Hodjat, rousing national feelings among the population was the quickest and safest way for Reza Shah to ideally counterbalance the long-lasting series of foreign occupations and military defeats that Iran suffered in the ancient

¹⁵ Rana Daroogheh Nokhodcheri, "Nationalism, Politics, and the Practice of Archaeology: the Case Study of Iran" (PhD thesis, Durham University), 24.

¹⁶ Sabahi, 78.

¹⁷ Ansari, A.M. Iranian Nationalism. In Y. M. Khuwayiri. *A Companion to the History of the Middle East*. 2nd edition. (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd 2008) pp. 320-333.

¹⁸ Kamyar Abdi, "Nationalism, Politics, and the Development of Archaeology in Iran", *American Journal of Archaeology*, Vol. 105, No. 1 (Jan., 2001): 52.

past (culminated with the Arabic conquest in 644 B.C) and in recent times (the Russian and British economical and political domination in the final years of the Qajar dynasty).¹⁹ Finally, the adjective “Ethnic” used by Smith in 1984 applies to Reza Shah’s nationalism because of the emphasis the Shah’s administration put over the pro-Aryan propaganda, developing the idea of the superiority and purity of the old Iranian civilizations in spite of the following conquests.²⁰

Reza Shah attempted to form a common background of prestige, civility and pride for all the Iranian tribes present in the country, linking the past with modernity. To this end, he developed an ideological discourse enhancing the role and the glories of pre-Islamic civilizations, considering them the descendants of Aryans and linking them with contemporary Iranians. This process culminated in 1935 with the request to the International community to refer to the country internationally known as “Persia” with the name used by its inhabitants: Iran. This word was an evolution of the Middle Persian word “Erān” with the meaning of “land of the Aryans”, recalling the birthplace of this mythical people.²¹ This base would have guaranteed the first step for further cultural and political policies to modernize society through the Westernization of the costumes.

The State’s interest in Pre-Islamic heritage during Reza Shah

In a period of great political changes in the Middle East, Reza Shah wanted to create a solid state acting as an independent power in the region, with a modern army in order to defend it from new geopolitical threats such as the British hegemony in Southern Iran or the foundation of the Persian Socialist Soviet Republic in Gilan (backed by the USSR) in 1920.²² Hence, the focus on the pre-Islamic period was meant to demonstrate the

¹⁹ Mehdi Hodjat, “Cultural Heritage in Iran, policies for an Islamic country” (PhD dissertation, University of York, 1995), 176.

²⁰ Nokhodcheri, 25.

²¹ Nokhodcheri, 24.

²² Nokhodcheri, 8; 63.

superiority and the authenticity of pre-Islamic Iranian civilizations and thus, of their proudest heir: the Pahlavi monarchy.²³

Since Reza Shah based the *raison d'être* of its state on pre-Islamic culture and heritage, the study of the past became an essential component of the state's political and cultural discourse. As it will be explained later in the chapter, the figures of both Arthur Upham Pope and Ernst Herzfeld had the most relevant influence in this process. In their view, the pre-Islamic cultural and artistic heritage was a treasure and a resource that the Shah could exploit to enhance his State.²⁴ The success of this operation was also due to Pope and Herzfeld's knowledge in western nationalist theories and Aryanism, of which Reza Shah's was a strenuous supporter and firm believer.

Since the 1930s, this marked political interest in pre-Islamic Iran has deeply influenced the implementation and the spread of the Shah's cultural policies in the country. As the ruler's aim was to revive pre-Islamic culture, Reza Shah's action was conducted in two directions. First, he kept promoting the institution of cultural centres aimed to develop the familiarization with pre-Islamic traits of Iranian identity, a pillar of the Shah's action already in the 1920s. In that period, the Shah had already successfully completed the expansion of the Education system and started employing it to "Iranianize" his people.²⁵ After the foundation of the Supreme Council for Education (*Shurā-ye 'Āli-ye Āmuzesh*) in 1922, Reza Shah founded the Cultural Academy (*Farhangsarā*) in 1935, the Department of Public Guidance, the Geographical Commission and two state-financed newspapers: the *Journal of Tehran* and *Ettelā'āt*.²⁶ At the same time, the Shah financed archaeological researches which could produce material evidences able to support the State ideology. Hence, we can affirm that archaeology was intended by the Shah as a reliable tool in supporting the ideological development of the nation. As Chapter 3 will further analyse, by publishing news regarding important archaeological discoveries through the national newspapers he was financing, the Shah could pursue both ideologically and physically the appropriation of the pre-Islamic past, by showing and

²³Nokhodcheri, 8, 63.

²⁴ Nokhodcheri, 137.

²⁵ By "Iranianize" I mean the process of making the citizens of the multicultural state of Persia adherent to a common identity which in the Shah's vision must have been based on a common culture (pre-Islamic) and on a common language (Farsi).

²⁶ Nokhodcheri, 30.

exhibiting archaeological revenues, framing them into the nationalistic discourse produced by his propaganda. In Iran's case, the development of archaeology at the service of the Pahlavi Crown led to focus the attention on monuments and archaeological sites from the Achaemenid or Sassanian period that could confirm the supposed cultural continuity and ethnic superiority of Iranians.²⁷

Pre-Islamic influence on Pahlavi architecture

As affirmed by Grigor, during the whole course of history, in Iran all the rulers had been used to borrow the past artistic discourse in order to build “an expressive Iranian cultural and political distinctiveness”.²⁸ Derives from this statement that the efforts put by Reza Shah to re-design the country and to give his State a new image were not the result of a cultural and artistic revolution, but the evidence that Reza Shah was working in the same tradition as his predecessors. The mentioned interest in the pre-Islamic period converged into the elaboration of a new artistic and architectural language typical of the institutional buildings erected during the 1930s. In fact, while pre-Islamic symbols were already used during the Qajar period to decorate the court's palaces only for iconographical purposes, the Pahlavi dynasty took it a step further than their predecessors.²⁹ The Pahlavi dynasty eventually succeeded in legitimizing itself as the rightful owner of that iconographical tradition by nationalizing and secularizing the domains of Persian pre-Islamic Kingship.³⁰ They did this both ideologically and artistically by erasing all the ties with the Islamic religion and with Qajar religious and social features that in the Shah's opinion were symbols of decadence. However, Zoroastrian iconography was exempted from this measure as Zoroastrianism was considered a living witness of the pre-Islamic glorious past.³¹

²⁷ Nokhodcheri, 32-33.

²⁸ Sussan Babaie, and. Talinn Grigor, *Persian Kingship and Architecture : Strategies of Power in Iran from the Achaemenids to the Pahlavis* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015), 219; 233.

²⁹ Grigor Talinn, *Building Iran : Modernism, Architecture, and National Heritage Under the Pahlavi Monarchs* (New York: Periscope Publishing, 2009), 220.

³⁰ Babaie, Grigor, *Persian Kingship and Architecture*, 220; 234.

³¹ Kestenberg Amighi Janet, *Zoroastrians of Iran, Conversion, Assimilation, or Persistence*, p. 143.

They translated this process in architecture by adopting a neo-antique monumental style resembling Achaemenid and Sassanian monuments. As analyzed by Babaie and Grigor, there was a transition from the so-called “Qajar Hybridity” to a royal style which, at the pinnacle of Reza Shah’s rule, was exclusively relying on “refined and perfected Achaemenid and Sassanian visual elements”.³² The majority of these monuments could not be realized without the work and the design of the French architect and archaeologist André Godard (1881-1965), who between 1929 and 1934 was the head of the Iranian Archaeological Service. This institution was born as a compensation for the end of the French monopoly in Iran in 1927 and confirmed by the new Law of Antiquities in 1930, an act that will be further explained. Godard during this short period gave birth to the first Iranian archaeological journal: “Heritage of Iran” (*Asār-e Īrān*) and designed the modern structure of the Īrān-e Bastān Museum in Tehran by modelling after the arch of the Sassanian palace of Ctesiphon.³³ Examples of this architectural style are the mausoleum of Ferdowsi in Tus (1934) and many institutional buildings in Tehran, such as the Police Headquarters (1933), the National Bank (1935), the Ministry of Justice (1936) and the *Īrān-e Bastān* Museum (1939).³⁴ These buildings were not just a form of iconic revivalism, but were complex syntheses of Western modernist instances and pre-Islamic royal iconography.³⁵ While they are clearly recalling ornamental motifs from Persepolis, they resemble more the rational architectures developed in Europe under the name of “Monumentalism”, in particular the Italian buildings erected during the Fascism.³⁶ Moreover, the employment of western architects to design the symbols of the Pahlavi power might be seen as evidence of the Pahlavi’s dependence from the West in shaping the new state. As a consequence, it is possible to affirm that the Pahlavi neo-Achaemenid and neo-Sassanian architecture was the fundamental backdrop to convey visual evidences of the pre-Islamic cultural discourse the Pahlavi regime was spreading to the mass. Thanks to the visibility given to archaeological discoveries, concepts produced by the State’s propaganda such as the

³² Babaie, Grigor, 235. With “Qajar Hybridity” Grigor defines the eclectic incorporation of Safavid patrimonial legacy into the Qajar artistic language, creating an ostentatious artistic style. This was meant to revise the ancient artistic imaginary as a symbolic confirmation of Qajar’s monarchical and national worth in a period of decadence for the Iranian monarchy. For a complete overview on this topic, see: Babaie, Grigor, 221-233.

³³ Abdi, “Development of Archaeology”, 59.

³⁴ Photos 1-4 in the Appendix.

³⁵ Babaie-Grigor, 237.

³⁶ See the comparisons made in the Appendix, photos 1-4.

antique purity of the Aryan people, the long-lasting presence of the monarchy and the need to bring the country to its ancient glories became tangible slogans as they were physically supported by the state buildings of Power.

Cultural policies under Reza Shah's rule

The ideological and physical appropriation of the past enhanced by the Shah became necessary for the purposes of nation-building, and archaeology was seen as the only tool able to salvage the historical past.³⁷ As a consequence, the Shah fostered the creation of centres which could help to raise awareness on pre-Islamic past and the importance of archaeological findings.

The first step towards the building of the dense network of cultural institutes typical of the whole Pahlavi period, was actually undertaken before the latter's self coronation (a consolidate practice among the Shahs and Russian Tsars) as Shah in 1926. In fact, in 1922 a group of nationalists established in Tehran the Society for National Heritage (*Anjoman-e Asār-e Mellī*) (SNH), an institution which foundation determined the beginning of the cultural transformation of Iran and the rediscovery of pre-Islamic heritage. This society had three main purposes: keeping track of the national Iranian heritage under the state control, preparing the establishment of a museum and a library in Tehran and finally classifying the remaining libraries and works worth of being considered national heritage.³⁸ However, the SNH did not limit its scope to these aims. In its first stage, the society organized lectures on different aspects of pre-Islamic and Islamic Iran and published booklets on related topics.³⁹ Furthermore, even before 1930 – the year of the implementation of the Law for Antiquities – the society hired European scholars to conduct archaeological research in Iran on its behalf.⁴⁰ Thanks to this law, enacted to improve the management of artworks and archaeological revenues, the monopoly of the excavations in Iran passed from French institutes to the Iranian State. The participation of foreign experts was still welcomed, but regulated. It is in this

³⁷ Nokhodcheri, 30-31.

³⁸ Hodjat, "Cultural Heritage in Iran", 176-177.

³⁹ Abdi, 58.

⁴⁰ Ibidem.

period that, for example, the German archaeologist Ernst Herzfeld, who soon would become one of the most relevant western archaeologists in Iran, between 1923 and 1924 pursued a preliminary survey of the ruins of Persepolis for the SNH and conducted further archaeological surveys in Iran for the same authority in the following 4 years.⁴¹

An eminent scholar who significantly influenced the Shah's approach to pre-Islamic Iran and cultural policies was the American archaeologist and art historian Arthur Upham Pope (1881-1979).⁴² Pope, who had already established in New York the American Institute for Persian Archaeology and Art in 1928, slowly acquired prestige by the Shah's court and together with his wife became advisors and dealers of Iranian art for many museums and private collection. During his talks with the Shah, the scholar argued that for a cultural and artistic revival in Iran the government should have arranged a campaign to promote cultural events about pre-Islamic civilization open to the population, also exploiting the archaeological sites in the country.⁴³

The Shah's top-down imposition of policies to promote knowledge of pre-Islamic heritage within the public, revealed the specific anti-Islamic sentiment typical of the ethnic nationalism employed by Reza Shah. In fact, during his rule, the Shah reintroduced the solar calendar to the expenses of the lunar one and changed the Arabic names of the months with Zoroastrian ones.⁴⁴ Moreover, he did not look favourably at Islamic religious ceremonies such as the *Ta'zieh*, traditionally performed by the people during the *'ashura* period, and marginalized the importance of the Friday common prayers especially in those cities with a strong religious connotation, such as Qom or Mashhad.⁴⁵ Furthermore, for the first time in Iran, under Reza Shah the State could exert its influence on the religious elite as it advocated the right to appoint the teachers in the Faculty of Theology in the University of Tehran and the Friday Imams in the Sepahsalar Mosque.⁴⁶ By enhancing the purity and the authenticity of pre-Islamic heritage as a symbol of national and international prestige, Reza Shah considered the Islamic heritage as it was in antithesis to the modern, laic and westernized future he was

⁴¹ Abdi, 60.

⁴² Ibidem.

⁴³ Nokhodcheri, 137, 195. Grigor, Talinn. Recultivating "Good Taste": The Early Pahlavi Modernists and their Society for National Heritage. *Iranian Studies* 37 (2004), 32.

⁴⁴ Abrahamian, "*Storia dell'Iran*" (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2013), 99.

⁴⁵ Hodjat, "Cultural heritage in Iran", 181; Encyclopedia Iranica, "Emām-e Jom'a".

⁴⁶ Abrahamian "*Storia dell'Iran*", 101.

willing to achieve for the country's progress, following the example of Atatürk in the recently founded Republic of Turkey.

These policies aiming to shake the traditional Iranian costumes came together with others regulating the clothing habits of the people, such as the prohibition of wearing the veil enforced in 1936 or the imposition for men to wear western-styled trousers, jackets and hats. As commented by Abrahamian, all these rules were meant to create sense of belonging to the country, diminishing the role of pre-existent social rules.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, this great shock for Iranians contributed to generate a sentiment of identity loss in a large portion of Iranian society. This, together with the large historical and cultural distance between the pre-Islamic past and the Iranian costumes of those times, although based on both pre-Islamic and Islamic traditions, didn't help the pre-Islamic revival to be completely accepted by the population.⁴⁸ Although Achaemenids and Sassanian civilizations had a relevant role in shaping the Iranian history and culture, many were the Islamic civilizations that, ruling Iran afterwards, influenced Iran's people and culture, enriching them with new traditions. As argued by Hodjat, considering the people's attachment to Islamic religion and traditions that the Shah was willing to curb, these manifested anti-Islamic policies contributed to further detach Iranians from the pre-Islamic cultural heritage rather than attracting to it.⁴⁹ That past was felt too far from their 20th century living habits.

Archaeology under Reza Shah

At the beginning of the 1930s, archaeology was a discipline already present in Iran thanks to the interest of Nādir al-Dīn Shāh, the last Qajar Shah of the Sublime State of Persia (1846-1896). As commented by Abdi, although the interest in archaeological findings was at that time still underdeveloped and undervalued, archaeology became a hobby for the Qajar ruling elite, who welcomed western archaeological expeditions to dig some sites in the country.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, because of the Iranian inexperience in the

⁴⁷ Abrahamian, 99.

⁴⁸ Hodjat, 184-185.

⁴⁹ Ibidem.

⁵⁰ Abdi, 53.

organization of cultural activities due to the Qajars' negligence for the preservation of national heritage, the agreements made between European countries and the Qajar State were often unbalanced. These accords allowed the ultimate transfer of archaeological or artistic revenues to Europe or the establishment of long term loans in favour of European museums.⁵¹ The most relevant example in this regard is represented by the disgraceful French archaeological campaign in Susa between 1884 and 1886, at the end of which the French mission could seize all the revenues and ship them to France thanks to a Qajar Royal Decree signed in 1895 and transformed into the French monopoly of the excavations in Iran by Mozaffar al-Dīn Shāh in 1900.⁵²

Reza Shah's rise to power directly affected the development of archaeology in Iran. Under the ruler's pressure, the Iranian parliament abolished the aforementioned decrees in 1927 and three years later delivered a new Law for the Antiquities. However, this law was copied from the Austrian law for Antiquities and because of the profound social, cultural and economical difference between the two countries, it lacked some ground to be completely applied to Iran.⁵³ Anyways, the law allowed the foreign presence in Iran under a stricter supervision the state.⁵⁴ Following this act, during the 1930s well organized campaigns were launched with the Shah's approval where the ancient Iranian civilizations had established their power. In this period, as argued by Hodjat, archaeological excavations were divided in two categories: excavations in relevant and well-known sites (such as Persepolis), carried out by foreign archaeologists, and commercial excavations, pursued by local volunteers acting with foreign participation.⁵⁵ For this reason, between 1931 and 1939 the diggings in Persepolis and Pasargadae were carried out by the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.⁵⁶

This institute was involved in the excavations in Iran thanks to the influence on the Iranian cultural elite of Pope and the German archaeologist Ernst Herzfeld (1879-1948). The latter's support for the preservation of the national monuments and the role they had in shaping the identity of the country were matching the SNH policies, gaining the

⁵¹ Hodjat, 148-150.

⁵² Abdi, 60.

⁵³ Hodjat, 182.

⁵⁴ Ibidem.

⁵⁵ Hodjat, 184.

⁵⁶ Abdi 59.

Iranian intelligentsia's trust.⁵⁷ Herzfeld's complains towards the excavations carried out by the French missions made the way for the abolition of the French monopoly and the American excavation concessions. At the same time, Pope, interested in expanding the American cultural action to Iran, used his status to grant concessions in Persepolis to American institutes. This resulted in the appointment of Herzfeld's mission thanks to the mediation of and the conspicuous donations of Ada Small Moor under the auspice of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.⁵⁸ As it will be demonstrated and argued in Chapter 3, the excavations in Persepolis were significant in promoting nationalist sentiments in Iran and were heavily supported by Reza Shah. Believing in the cultural power of those Achaemenid ruins, Reza Shah visited Persepolis four times during his reign: in 1922, 1928, 1932 and finally in 1938, often accompanied by Herzfeld.⁵⁹

Herzfeld's work is fundamental to understand the overall importance that foreign experts had in spreading the idea that monuments could have the potentiality to enhance a nation, in this case, the Pahlavi State. In fact, together with Pope's quest for a cultural revival, Herzfeld's nationalist ideas had a important impact in shaping Reza Shah's cultural activity. As mentioned by Nokhodcheri, Herzfeld was familiar with the essence of that nationalism which emphasised the importance of concepts such as "continuity" and "superiority".⁶⁰ He envisioned for the Pahlavi State the necessity to look for material evidence that could support the continuity of a certain pattern of traditions showing the superiority of the Iranian people in comparison to other neighbouring countries. As a consequence, Herzfeld emphasised the importance of preserving national monuments – mainly the Achaemenid and Sassanian ones – and publishing books or articles about the role they had in shaping the identity of the nation.⁶¹ Thus, he may be recognized as the man who introduced the Iranian court to the political potential of monuments.⁶²

⁵⁷ Ali Mousavi, "Persepolis in Retrospect: Histories of Discovery and Archaeological Expedition at the Ruins of Ancient Parse." *Ars Orientalis* 32 (2002), 223.

⁵⁸ Mousavi, "Persepolis in Retrospect", 224.

⁵⁹ Abdi, 59.

⁶⁰ Nokhodcheri 24; 136.

⁶¹ Ibidem

⁶² Nokhodcheri 24; 136.

Apart from the Achaemenid and Sassanian periods, another historical period that was extensively analysed was Prehistory. Although the latter was less relevant for the nation-building process if compared with the Achaemenid and Sassanian historical periods, many excavations were carried out, especially in Tepeh Siyalk, during the whole reign of Reza Shah. This archaeological site, located between Isfahan and Tehran, was extensively explored between 1933 and 1937 by the French archaeologist Roman Ghirshman, who unearthed ceramics from the II millennium B.C. Further analyses on the material taken from this site verified that the oldest settlements in Tepeh Siyalk dated to around 6000–5500 B.C. As commented by Nokhodcheri, within the context of “Ethnic Nationalism” and the enthusiasm for the supposed superiority of the Aryans, the study of Prehistory was considered in any case useful to investigate the roots of the ancestors of contemporary Iranians.⁶³

State ideology under Mohammad Reza Shah

Reza Shah’s rule was abruptly interrupted by the Second World War. Although Iran had maintained neutrality at the beginning of the conflict, the Allied forces in 1941 occupied the country. Reza Shah abdicated in favour of Mohammad Reza Shah, who gained power in September 1941.⁶⁴ Once obtained the throne, the first issue that the new Shah had to deal with was the legitimacy of his rule and the defence of his role of monarch. In an attempt to strengthen his power, Mohammad Reza Shah relied on what Ansari describes as “Dynastic Nationalism” and on a narrative supporting the so-called “Myth of the Saviour”.

Whether Reza Shah’s nationalist aim was to stress the ethnic element in order to highlight the unity of Iran for the creation of a nation-state, Mohammad Reza Shah’s government fostered through the regime propaganda an ideology meant to legitimize the monarchy as the most feasible and appropriate form of government for Iran.⁶⁵ This ideology was a form of nationalism endorsing the necessity of the monarchy, as the

⁶³ Nokhodcheri 84.

⁶⁴ Abdi, 65

⁶⁵ Nokhodcheri, 37.

monarchy was seen by the Shah as an essential component of the Iranian nation.⁶⁶ To this end, an important backdrop for the Shah was the use of the so called “Myth of the Saviour”, invented by the Iranian nationalists at the beginning of the 20th century. This was already used by Reza Shah to justify the presence of an autocrat pursuing policies of national unity and independence from the West.⁶⁷ Hence, Mohammad Reza Shah, after the CIA coup d’état against Mossadeq in 1953, intended the myth of the saviour to promote the monarchy as the only saviour and legitimate form of government for the country.⁶⁸ In fact, to retain his position of saviour of Iranians, the Shah claimed direct lineage with the ancient Persian empires by employing visual elements of the Achaemenid and Sassanian’s artistic tradition.⁶⁹ As written by the Shah himself in the book *Toward the Great Civilisation*:

*In Iranian culture, the Iranian monarchy means the political and geographical unity of Iran in addition to the special national identity and all those unchangeable values which this national identity has brought forth. For this reason no fundamental change is possible in this country unless it is in tune with the fundamental principles of the monarchical system.*⁷⁰

Hence, in order to defend and legitimize the monarchy, it was necessary first to set the scene to re-create a dynastic discourse in Iran. This is the reason why the Shah, although more interested to adapt the country to Western instances, once again turned to the pre-Islamic cultural and artistic heritage already exploited for political purposes by his father. Following his father’s legacy and example, the Mohammad Reza Shah distanced the Pahlavi Crown from religious institutions by curbing the clergy’s power and by refusing the traditional duty of a Shah to defend Shari’a and Islam, typical traits of the Iranian kingship during the Islamic period.⁷¹ He legitimized his power by presenting himself as the latest king in a long line of great Iranian kings tracing back to the ancient Achaemenid and Sassanian reigns.⁷²

However, although the Pahlavi Shahs were searching the source of legitimacy for their rule in the pre-Islamic past, Mohammad Reza Shah kept the path towards the

⁶⁶ Nokhodcheri, 37.

⁶⁷ Ansari, “Iranian Nationalism” 325.

⁶⁸ Nokhodcheri 143.

⁶⁹ Ibidem.

⁷⁰ Nokhodcheri, 66.

⁷¹ Abdi, 67

⁷² Ibidem.

Westernization of the country pushing Iran in a forced stages route in order to meet the western standards of living as quick as possible.⁷³ This was a process which took place too rapidly and which was undermined by the lack of both adequate infrastructure supporting the social transformation and by an extreme distance between the Iranian culture of the mid 20th century with the European models the Shah was inspired by.

Mohammad Reza Shah's cultural policies

Mohammad Reza Shah realized that in order to maintain his position among the people he needed to amend those measures introduced by his father which were clashing with those Islamic beliefs and costumes deeply rooted in the people's identity.⁷⁴ Hence, Mohammad Reza Shah began to annul some of the most extreme policies delivered by the Ministry of Culture during Reza Shah's period, for example by putting aside some of the new and artificially "purified" words created by the *Farhangestān-e Īrān* or by rebuilding the old and ruined religious monuments which were demolished during Reza Shah's period. In this regard, Mehdi Hodjat mentions in his dissertation the rebuilding of an Īmāmzadeh – the tomb-sanctuary built for the Imam's descendants – on the basis of a project by Andrè Godard as part of these efforts in those years. The Īmāmzadeh under consideration is the Īmāmzadeh Yaḥyā, but Hodjat is the only source mentioning it.⁷⁵ Finally, Mohammad Reza Shah also reduced the importance of Reza Shah's architecture, making an end to the "Achaemenizing-styled" architecture of 1930s and 1940s.⁷⁶

Although as we have seen Mohammad Reza Shah kept the line of his father towards Islamic traditionalism and Islamic traditions, for the entire period of his reign he pursued policies which opposed the power of the clergy but never eradicated it from society. Indeed, because of the aggressive policies of Reza Shah regarding the modern and laic lifestyle he wanted people to keep in public, the Shah was not welcomed by pious or conservative people who were relying on the clergy's eminency. On the practical level, the cultural policies endorsed by the Shah and by his government had the

⁷³ Sabahi, 155.

⁷⁴ Hodjat, 186.

⁷⁵ Ibidem.

⁷⁶ Hodjat, 189.

main aim to disseminate a kind of culture helpful to fight both religious antagonism and communist supporters, who were disliked both by the monarchy and by the monarchy's Western supporters (mainly the USA).⁷⁷ That's the reason why, especially during the 1960s and the 1970s, the Ministry of Art and Culture disseminated modern Western culture through the cinemas in the country, theatres and music, as further analyzed in Chapter 3.⁷⁸

Generally speaking, Mohammad Reza Shah's governments promoted the establishment of a dense net of museums following the example of the *Īrān-e Bastān* museum thanks to the efforts made by the Society of National Heritage (SNH) in promoting and preserving historical monuments. However, the Ministry of Culture had also the direct control of newspapers, journals and books, meaning that it had also the power to guide and steer the cultural discourse regarding historic remains and traditions in the direction that better satisfied the Shah's self-celebrative ambitions. An interesting example which can confirm this last statement can be represented by the Society of the Land of Iran (*Anjoman-e Īrānvij*), which between 1944 and 1968 published *Īrān Kudeh*: a series of 18 books and pamphlets on culture, history and languages of ancient Iran. In these books, the authors conveyed an extreme nationalist discourse in which they exaggeratedly distorted Iranian history with the aim to confirm Iranian's intellectual superiority over Arabs and Turks and to demonstrate the great cultural contribution Iran gave to the world.⁷⁹

Clearly, the interest on pre-Islamic heritage contributed to its maintenance and to continue its use for propagandistic purposes. Since 1944, the year of the reopening of the SNH, the ancient historical buildings scattered in the country became instruments to show the necessity of the monarchy in Iran. In fact, the idea the Shah wanted to convey was that only through the monarchy it was possible for Iranians to reach the power shown by the architectural and artistic masterpieces still admirable during the Pahlavi rule. Sassanian and Achaemenid ruins kept the role given them by Reza Shah, proving the perceived authority of the monarchy.⁸⁰ This is the reason why the Ministry of Culture during Mohammad Reza Shah's rule took advantage of the particular attention

⁷⁷ Hodjat 200

⁷⁸ Ibidem.

⁷⁹ Abdi, 64.

⁸⁰ Hodjat, 189; 200.

reserved to these monuments and used them as an appropriate setting for the regime's cultural festivals and exhibitions.⁸¹ An example of this use can be depicted by the "Week of Arts and Culture", held every year in occasion of the Shah's birthday (the 26th of October) between 26th and 30th October, when western-styled shows and exhibitions had to represent Iran cultural life.⁸²

Although we have already mentioned the conceptual background at the base of the propagandistic actions carried out by the Shah and his Ministry of Culture, it is necessary to elaborate further on their implications in the Iranian collective imagination. Using Hodjat's words, the Shah's exploitation of heritage led those monuments to "lose the power of transmitting social traditions and their intrinsic values to the present generation and being assigned an altered function".⁸³ As it will be further analysed in Chapter 3, we can affirm that, in the early convoluted phases of the 1979 Revolution, the labelling of the ancient Iranian heritage as "monarchical" was a direct reaction to the monarchical appropriation and distortion of the history of the ancient relics. This is the reason why at the end of the Pahlavi regime this widespread misconception and misinterpretation of their history among the revolutionary audience put some of the most known pre-Islamic monuments in peril.

Archaeology under Mohammed Reza Shah (1945-1960)

During both Reza Shah and Mohammad Reza Shah's rule, archaeology was seen as an important tool useful to shape the image of the state and arise the status of the Pahlavi monarchy. In particular, under Mohammad Reza Shah the techniques used to carry out archaeological researches in Iran were improved and the teaching of this discipline was spread throughout the academic institutions in the country. Consequently, it is possible to affirm that the developments in the techniques and in the practice of archaeology dating back to this period were undoubtedly useful to lay the foundations of contemporary Iranian archaeological research. We can notice that the accession to the

⁸¹ Hodjat, 202.

⁸² Ibidem.

⁸³ Hodjat, 202.

throne of Mohammad Reza Shah in 1941 determined a shift in the historical period under archaeological and cultural investigation by the Iranian state. In fact, from the beginning of his rule, the Shah allowed the consolidation and the restoration of all the historical building in the country needing urgent interventions, regardless of their origin and style intervening on the Islamic ones as well.⁸⁴ This growing interest in the totality of Iranian heritage and, especially, also in the Islamic heritage, is an example of the aforementioned careful cultural approach that the Shah had during the major part of his reign towards the Islamic elements rooted in Iranian identity.

During the early period of Mohammad Reza Shah's rule, it is possible to assist at the progressive resume of those archaeological activities started by foreign archaeologists who had to leave the country at the outbreak of the Second World War. After 1945 and in a period of 10 years, many of those archaeologists returned to Iran, for example, Roman Ghirshman, who in 1946 came back to Susa, Louis Vanden Berghe, who between 1951 and 1953 extensively surveyed the Fars province or Donald McCown, who between 1951 and 1962 who excavated in Tall-e Basir.⁸⁵ However, although the presence of western scholars and experts was still welcomed by the Ministry of Culture, a major attention in this period was put in training local archaeologists. A great contribution in this development was realized by the University of Tehran, where, after 1954 and in concomitance with the allowance of new commercial excavations, were offered new courses in archaeology.⁸⁶ As a consequence, we can observe already in the 1950s an increased presence of Iranian archaeologists in planning important projects, as the involvement of the Iranian Archaeological Service in the excavation in Pasargadae and Persepolis demonstrate.⁸⁷ The newly formed Iranian experts could finally begin to undertake roles of responsibility in a discipline dominated until that moment by western scholars.⁸⁸

Overall, it is still possible to say that in this period the field of archaeological research reflected political and propagandistic proposes. The Mohammad Reza Shah was still pursuing his father's ethnic nationalist idea and in search of the mythical origin of the Aryan people. As a consequence, during the 1940s and the 1950s, archaeological

⁸⁴ Hodjat, 188-189.

⁸⁵ Abdi, 65.

⁸⁶ Hodjat, 188-189.

⁸⁷ Abdi, 65.

⁸⁸ Nokhodcheri, 94.

research was still keeping the line taken before the Second World War by investigating Iranian prehistory.⁸⁹ In this regard the research carried out by the Iranian Prehistorical Project under the direction of R.J. Braidwood in 1959-1960 and the one carried out by McAdams in 1960-1961 are still considered at the beginning of the modern Iranian archaeology.⁹⁰ In the same period, however, a consistent contribution in the development of a different way to intend archaeology was brought in Iran by Italian archaeological expeditions that had also a fundamental role in exploring a growing number of Iranian archaeological sites.

The role of Italian Excavations during the Pahlavi period

As written by Adriano Valerio Rossi, current president of the ISMEO Institute (as the IsMEO was called after its re-foundation in 2014), the IsMEO (*Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente* - Italian Institute for the Middle and Far East) was the author of the intensification of the cultural ties with Iran following the decision to carry out a cultural project aiming to recreate and rediscover the concept of “Eurasia”, a single, great continent built on the base of shared cultural roots.⁹¹ It is in this perspective that must be placed the excavations pursued by Tucci in 1957 in Afghanistan and then in Shahr-e Sukhteh (Sistan, Iran) between the 1960s and the 1970s.⁹² Moreover, the attention on the archaeological features of Central Asia and Iran and the promotion of Iranian Studies by several institutions based in Rome demonstrate the good level of awareness and knowledge of the cultural and artistic features of those lands, as the archaeological and art exhibitions held in Rome in 1956 and in Milan in 1962 can confirm.⁹³

⁸⁹ Nokhodcheri, 94.

⁹⁰ Abdi, 65.

⁹¹ Rossi, A. V. “L’Iran e la ricerca italiana di IsMEO/IsIAO/ISMEO”. *V> Seminar Publications Series 02/2019 (2019)*: 2.

⁹² For further information on the excavations in Shahr-e Sukhte, see: Tosi, M; Mariani, L. La topografia di Shahr-i Sokhta: tra osservazioni di superficie e scavo: 5-6. In “Iran and Italy: 60 Years of Collaboration on Cultural Heritage” (2019) ed. by Callieri, P; Nokandeh J; Rossi, A; Seyyed Sajjadi S. M.

⁹³ Piemontese, A; Keddie, N. R. "Italian Scholarship on Iran (An Outline, 1557-1987)." *Iranian Studies* 20, no. 2/4 (1987): 109.

Since the late 1950s, thanks to the research carried out by the IsMEO and its president Giuseppe Tucci, Italy brought its experience and his technology to Iran to conduct the first Italian archaeological campaign. As Prof. Rossi clearly stated during his introductory speech to the presentation of the 60th anniversary of Italian-Iranian collaborations, the factors which led to these cultural collaborations were both cultural and economical. In fact, the first Italian mission in Eastern Iran guided by Umberto Scerrato in 1959 was allowed and welcomed by the Iranian authorities thanks to the Italian cultural interest in Iran, derived from the Italian cultural sensibility towards the ancient civilizations that interacted with the Classical civilizations of Greece and Rome. An important role in this cooperation was played by the influence of Enrico Mattei and ENI (Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi- National Hydrocarbons Board) in Iran during the same period.

The sad and disgraceful history of previous European expeditions in Iran was a considerable issue that Italy had to overcome in order to proceed to explore the Iranian soil. As commented by both Callieri and Askari, the brutal cultural exploitation carried out during the last years of the Qajar period and in the early Pahlavi period by British and French excavations was still vividly present in the Iranian memory.⁹⁴ According to both Callieri and Askari's interviews and to Nokhodcheri and Hodjat's dissertations, those archaeological missions damaged the cultural heritage instead of protecting it and deprived Iran of many precious artefacts and other archaeological findings.

The mediation played by ENI and its president Enrico Mattei allowed Italians to have a direct contact with Iranian authorities. In fact, by reading the IsMEO and ENI documentation, it emerges that the notoriousness of Enrico Mattei and his oil strategy in the Middle East regarding partnerships with different Middle Eastern countries were fundamental to present Italy as a modern and fraternal country that, contrary to other European powers, was not aiming to exploit Iran.⁹⁵ As Callieri also affirmed, the Iranian government accorded to Italians the possibility to pursue their excavations because both

⁹⁴ See Appendix 3, 106.

⁹⁵ The AGIP-NIOC deal was an unprecedented agreement, since for the first time the producer country (Iran) was involved in the management of its oil resources. This is the result of the so-called "*Dottrina Mattei*" (Mattei's formula), an agreement which was establishing that the producer country was getting the 75% of the whole profits (50% royalty payments plus 25% revenues), while ENI only the 25% of the revenues. This formula was the only one able to break the monopoly of the Anglo-American oil companies called "The Seven Sister" in the Middle East. See also Appendix 3, 107-108.

the IsMEO and the Italian energy industry were acting to promote cultural and economic development of Iran to the detriment of oil multinational companies (most of them American or British) which had always exploited Iranian energetic resources.⁹⁶ Questioned about the importance of the Italian archaeological and energetic interest in Iran, Pierfrancesco Callieri stated:

(...) so, Enrico Mattei was the one who opened the doors of Iran to Italy. The next point that distinguish Italian from the others (Europeans) is that, if you look at the amount of interventions made by the IsMEO or by other Italian Institutes in Iran, also Universities, well half of them are restorations. We are the only one who were and still are caring not just about the excavations and taking home important findings, but about the conservation and restoration of those findings and monuments. Persepolis was dug by the USA, not by Italians, Italy arrived later, to restore it. So yes, we Italians are the only ones that have a restoration "background" and an approach, a more egalitarian approach towards this country as well as towards the other Western Asian countries, much more into the respect of the local dimension. In the end, probably, we just feel ourselves much similar to them than other Europeans... than British (for example).⁹⁷

Following the agreements carried out in 1957 between the AGIP (an ENI subsidiary) and the NIOC, in 1959 the Sistan region was explored by a mission from the Italconsult Group carrying out geo-mineral prospecting and projects of economic development in the area (Plan Organization of Iran, 1959).⁹⁸ In the same period, the IsMEO could undertake the first archaeological campaign in the region.⁹⁹ In light of this information, it is possible to state that the joint presence of both ENI and Italconsult in Iran at the beginning of the 1960's and their support in developing the potentiality of the country was fundamental for Iranians to trust the Italian diplomatic work and to appoint Italian teams for archaeological missions in the country.

The main innovation brought in Iran by the Italian missions was the focus on conservation and restoration of the monuments present in the archaeological sites. In the 1960s the Institute for Conservation and Restoration (*Istituto per la Conservazione ed il Restauro*) started restoration projects in Iran as well as in Afghanistan, some of them

⁹⁶ For further information on this regard, see the interview with Dr Callieri and the article by Bucarelli, M. "At the origin of the energy policy of ENI in Iran: Enrico Mattei and the negotiations for oil deals of 1957" *Nuova Rivista Storica*, vol. 94. (2010): 465-499.

⁹⁷ Interview Callieri, Appendix 3, 108.

⁹⁸ Piemontese, A; Keddie, N. R. "Italian Scholarship on Iran (An Outline, 1557-1987)." *Iranian Studies* 20, no. 2/4 (1987): 116.

⁹⁹ *Ibidem*.

still active at the present day.¹⁰⁰ As reported by both Askari Chaverdi and Callieri, European excavations in Iran were mostly carried out with obsolete methodology and outdated technology, with the only aim to extract as much material as possible from the site to expose it in Europe. On the contrary, Italians had developed advanced restoration techniques, bringing them to Iran to conduct research with their contemporary high-end technology.¹⁰¹ The structural consolidation works undertaken by Italian missions in Iran between 1964-1979 involved both archaeological sites as Persepolis, but also palaces and mosques currently accessible as the ones in Esfahan.¹⁰²

Archaeology under Mohammad Reza Shah (1960-1979)

The years 1960s and 1970s witnessed an incredible growth in archaeological activities in Iran, so that, according to Abdi, it is possible to describe this period as the “explosive period” of the Iranian archaeology.¹⁰³ During the 1960s the conservation of historical monuments acquired an increased importance for the Pahlavi State. This process led to the promulgation by the Society of Archaeological Research of the first document regarding technical conservation methods in Iran in 1963 and the establishment of the Organization for the Conservation of Ancient Iranian Monuments (OCAIM) in 1965.¹⁰⁴ Although the attention on cultural heritage was still following political and propagandistic purposes, it is also true that, especially in the 1960s and the 1970s, archaeology could partially free itself from the nationalist biases typical of the Reza Shah’s rule. This was a success due to different factors, but in particular thanks to the presence of local and foreign experts from Western countries, educated abroad and in Iran, who developed a professional discipline and enhanced the attention on all the

¹⁰⁰ Centro ricerche archeologiche e scavi di Torino per il Medio Oriente e l'Asia: <https://www.centroscavitorino.it/il-centro-scavi/lo-staff/>.

¹⁰¹ Callieri interview, Appendix 3, 107-108.

¹⁰² For a detailed explanation of the conservation and restoration actions in Esfahan, see the articles by Galdieri, E; Genito, B. In “Iran and Italy: 60 Years of Collaboration on Cultural Heritage” ed. by Callieri, P; Nokandeh J; Rossi, A; Seyyed Sajjadi S. M. pag. 23-29, Teheran: IsMEO – RICHT, 2019.

¹⁰³ Abdi, 66.

¹⁰⁴ Hodjat, 196; 198.

values conveyed by the Iranian cultural heritage.¹⁰⁵ Finally, another boost in the archaeological research was given by the Ministry's purpose to encourage the popular participation in excavations, allowing amateurs who wanted to play a role in the excavations to pay the expenses and being directed in the task by professional archaeologists.¹⁰⁶

In this period, the Shah increasingly centralized the power in his figure and began to increasingly rely on the necessity of the Monarchy in the country. In attempt to foster an idea of nationalism by evoking pre-Islamic Iranian glories, the State financed excavations in Pasargadae, Bishapūr and Persepolis.¹⁰⁷ The reason behind this choice was that they were the capitals of great ancient Iranian empires and because of their historical relevance and their artistic beauty, these sites were regarded of a particular attention in the Shah's propaganda.

The IsMEO works in the Friday Mosque of Isfahan and in the Oljaytu Mausoleum in Soltaniyeh demonstrate the state's commitment to preserve Islamic heritage, contrarily to the position expressed by Hodjat in his dissertation.¹⁰⁸ The foundation of the Centre for Archaeological Research within the Archaeological Service of Iran in 1972 thanks to the director of the archaeological activities Firuz Bagherzadeh (1930-2021) is another event that witnesses the importance of the Islamic heritage also during Mohammad Reza Shah's rule. This organization supported the creation of an annual meeting of archaeologists in Esfahan, and proceeded to enlist the main square of Isfahan (*Meydān-e Naqsh-e Jahān*) in the World Heritage list.¹⁰⁹

The figure of Firuz Bagherzadeh is important to understand the improvements in the organization of archaeological researches in the last decade of Mohammad Reza Shah's rule. As commented by Callieri, although in fact the consistent use of pre-Islamic sites and monuments was necessary for political and propagandistic purposes, it is undeniable that there was a serious effort by Bagherzadeh to overall improve the field. This important Iranian archaeologist, who has also been the first President of the

¹⁰⁵ Abdi, 65; Hodjat 199.

¹⁰⁶ Hodjat 195.

¹⁰⁷ Abdi, 66-67.

¹⁰⁸ Callieri, P; Nokandeh J; Rossi, A; Seyyed Sajjadi S. M. "Iran and Italy: 60 Years of Collaboration on Cultural Heritage", 23-32; 37-38.

¹⁰⁹ Abdi 66.

UNESCO, had well organized the Iranian cultural heritage, building the core of what is nowadays the pattern of current joint archaeological researches in Iran.¹¹⁰ Consulted on this topic, Callieri affirmed that

*during Bagherzadeh's time there was officially the insert of the Iranian presence in foreign archaeological missions in Iran. Those weren't already joint projects, but there were also Iranian archaeologists there and he did it to let the young Iranian archaeologists able to learn the innovative techniques coming from abroad using these foreign missions.*¹¹¹

Moreover, among the relevant actions carried out by Bagherzadeh during his activity stick out the abolishment of the law on the division of archaeological finds resulting from the surveys and excavations of joint Iranian and foreign delegations, the establishment of a laboratory for the restoration of archaeological revenues and, as briefly stated above, the registration of Meydān-e Naqsh-e Jahān, Chogha Zanbil and Persepolis/Takht-e Jamshīd in the World Heritage List.¹¹² The quality and the generosity demonstrated by his efforts were also recently recognized by the current Iranian authorities, who, as commented by Callieri, have completely rehabilitated his works despite have been a high ranked personality during the Shah's period "by publishing a volume of studies on him and even sending official condolences messages to the family".¹¹³

Conclusions

The Pahlavi State based its *raison d'être* on the pre-Islamic culture and heritage, and the Shah's interest in the latter has deeply influenced the development and the spread of cultural activities in Iran. One of the areas affected the most by the Pahlavi Shahs' cultural policies was archaeology. The Shahs financed the archaeological research – acquired from western scholars only in the last decades of the Qajar rule – in order to produce material evidence able to support the State ideology. Moreover, they fostered

¹¹⁰ Callieri Interview, Appendix 3, 110-111.

¹¹¹ Callieri interview, Appendix 3, 111.

¹¹² ["Top Iranian archaeologist, Firouz Bagherzadeh, dies at 90"](#). *Tehran Times*. 6 February 2021.

¹¹³ Callieri interview, Appendix 3, 111.

the creation of cultural – yet propagandistic – centres to spread pre-Islamic culture in the country and indoctrinate the mass. As it will be discussed later, it is important to point out that during this period, especially during Mohammad Reza Shah's rule, there was a continuous quest for collaborations with foreign partners made by cultural Iranian institutions. This collaboration demonstrated to be fundamental for the overall development of archaeological techniques and, consequently, for the improvement of the quality of Iranian archaeological research.

During Reza Shah's rule there was an institutionalization of pre-Islamic culture as part of the nationalist discourse aimed to enhance the supposed superiority and continuity of the Iranian people to defend the country against Western interests. For this reason, as suggested by Western scholars such as Pope or Herzfeld, familiar with the concept of nationalism, the Shah needed to find a scientific discipline which could back his ideology and his use of pre-Islamic culture and heritage. Archaeology became then the perfect tool to explore the pre-Islamic history and culture of Iran and re-actualize it in the modern Iranian society. Moreover, the importance of archaeology during the nation-building process started by Reza Shah was outlined by the influence that archaeological sites explored between 1926-1941 had in shaping not just the ideological propaganda of the State but even the architecture of the buildings of the power. In light of the ethnic nationalism pursued by the Shah, the use of pre-Islamic cultural features and the attention on archaeological rests during Reza Shah's era was meant to highlight the only part of the complex history and culture of Iran chosen to play the role of the real and rediscovered identity of the country.

Contrary to his father's rule, Mohammad Reza Shah's use of pre-Islamic heritage and culture was meant to support more the monarchical discourse than the revival of the pre-Islamic roots of the Iranian identity. Besides the explicit references to the greatness of ancient kings, the major evidence of this trend is indeed represented by the will to amend those policies considered too aggressive towards the Iranian beliefs, preserving and rebuilding monuments coming from other than the Achaemenid or Sassanian eras or by undertaking the restoration of Islamic monuments. However, despite his objective slightly differed from his father's one, Mohammad Reza Shah kept Reza Shah's methods to spread his idea of kingship and state, but relying as well on western-originated tools such as cinemas and art festivals, as it will be further analyzed in Chapter 4. During the whole period of Mohammad Reza Shah, archaeology was a

discipline which experienced a steady and progressive improvement, either as subject of study in academia, or as reliable tool to create and spread knowledge and awareness on Iran. In fact, under the second Pahlavi ruler, archaeological excavations in the country increased and it was experienced the introduction of newly-formed Iranian experts in a field dominated until that moment by western archaeologists.

However, we should not forget that the presence of western archaeologists was fundamental as it improved the teaching of the discipline in academia and the execution of excavations. This chapter demonstrated the importance of the Italian archaeological mission in developing a friendly relation with Iran thanks, especially, to the mediation of the Italian energy industry. Moreover, the Italian archaeological expeditions helped to carry out research using innovative technologies and to develop the teaching of archaeology in Iran and modernize the methods used by the researchers in archaeological campaigns. The figure of Firuz Bagherzadeh can be considered an excellent example of the competence in those years to create an organization that, regardless of the ideology in power, was able to take care of the entire Iranian cultural heritage and improving the scientific dimension of the excavations.

A last remark should be made about the whole Pahlavi period. In light of what has been argued above the Pahlavi Dynasty solved an apparently irreconcilable dilemma: how to prove to be a modern and westernized country while constantly referring to a 2500 years old culture? The attention to the pre-Islamic culture was meant as a concrete and ideological reaction from the entire sequence of conquests Iran suffered after the Islamic conquest and as ideological defence also from the Western interests that controlled Iran in the pre-modern times. Hence, it was opposing, at least logically, the run towards western styled lifestyle and modernity started by Reza Shah.

However, this oxymoron was overcome by spreading those stories and legends regarding the pre-Islamic civilizations that enhanced the magnificence and the equality of the rule of the ancient kings, fostering the myth of a progressive period for Iran. This is the reason why, especially during Mohammad Reza Shah's rule, it was possible to transpose in the modern society the antique grandeur and the of pre-Islamic civilizations as they were matching the real identity of Iranians and the monarchy's commitment to progress and prosperity.

Chapter 2: Role of culture and Archaeology after the Islamic Revolution

As briefly mentioned in the first chapter, in the latest '70s the breach between Iranians' demands and the Shah's rule was completed. The collapse of the Pahlavi monarchy following the outcomes of the Revolution in 1979 transformed the political structure of the country and implied a reshaping of society. The internal victory of Khomeini's pan-Islamic ideology within the Revolution contributed to uniform the entire revolutionary movement as an Islamic phenomenon and paved the way for the creation of the Islamic Republic of Iran. This affirmation implies that, because of the incompatibility between Islam and monarchy stated in Khomeini's political and religious thought, Iran would have soon undertaken a series of cultural policies aiming to divert the country from what Imam claimed being a "void nationalism" and a "reactionary manifestation of tyranny and injustice".¹¹⁴ As a consequence, until Khomeini's death in 1989, the state implemented a cultural reform to discredit the monarchy and Islamize all institutions.¹¹⁵ In fact, the main idea developed during the years of the challenge against the Shah and during the first years of the Revolution was to refuse for the coming years all the cultural features that were imposed until that moment by the Shah's Ministry of Culture. However, the cultural policies towards heritage and archaeology introduced already a decade after the establishment of the Islamic Republic and after the death of Khomeini did not support completely this political direction.

This chapter is indeed meant to illustrate how, after the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Iranian government has dealt with the pre-Islamic Iranian heritage, articulating a new ideological discourse. Moreover, it will illustrate the evolution of the perception of the national heritage during the course of the years, showing the differences in the government's approach with pre-Islamic heritage after the victory of the Revolution. Finally, it will also clarify the use and the conception of the discipline of archaeology in Iran from 1979 onwards to establish a comparison with the Pahlavi actions described in the previous chapter. As the Pahlavi period has often been regarded by Khomeini as the most disgraceful moment for the Iranian nation, it follows also that

¹¹⁴ Nokhodcheri, 43.

¹¹⁵ Grigor, *Building Iran*, 208.

the relation with archaeology had possibly undergo changes after the Revolution. This inquiry is useful to understand how and if it was implied in the building and in the maintenance of the new Islamic State.

State ideology after the Islamic Revolution in 1979

The decades of the 70's marked the end of the Pahlavi Dynasty and of the Pahlavi Empire. Following the significant oil revenues, the authorities increased public consumption. However, while the corrupted ruling elite of the regime kept increasing its benefits and power, the majority of the people saw no improvements in their living conditions. At the same time, the reforms made in 1963 demonstrated once again the Shah's will to control the religious institutions in the country, limiting their secular power acquired through the centuries and deleting their source of income.¹¹⁶ The economical and political crisis between 1975 and 1978 and the developed corruption in the ganglia of the State motivated the frustration of all the Iranian citizens, who had exceptional expectations from the grandiose promises made by the Shah's government. This frustration paved the way for the final act in 1979, when Imam Ruhollah Khomeini, the strongest opponent to Mohammad Reza Shah, returned to Iran from his exile in Paris and the Revolution acquired its Islamic ideological dimension.¹¹⁷ Although, in fact, the Revolution against the Shah was a fluid and hectic movement in which all the parties merged in, from the Tudeh to the clergy, the public visibility, the popular support and the financial strength of the Islamic front headed by Khomeini are unquestionable. After having purged the Revolution from all the non-Islamic components, the 31st March 1980, the Islamic Republic of Iran was proclaimed from the ashes of the Pahlavi Empire.

Khomeini's speeches during his exile in Iraq and in Paris were characterized by an extreme anti-imperialistic and anti-monarchic tone. During his public appearances and in his recorded messages, he harshly criticized the monarchy and the hereditary succession claiming that both were "wrong and invalid".¹¹⁸ Moreover, he even blamed on the Pahlavi monarchy, which besides being an "agent of the West", was also guilty

¹¹⁶ Sabahi, 156.

¹¹⁷ Ibidem.

¹¹⁸ Khumayni, Ruhallah; Algar, Hamid. *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*. Mizan Press, Berkley: London 1985, p. 31.

of having established a form of “void” nationalism which was not shared with the population, who was feeling itself closer to the “recent Islamic culture than to the glories and the illusions of the ancient Persian Empires”.¹¹⁹ Hence, concepts that until that moment were regarded as vital for the State, such as the nationalism based on the ancient Iranian civilization, had to be replaced with another ideology.

The ideological void created by the end of the Pahlavi Nationalism was filled by a populist discourse that was supporting the defence of the “*mostazaf’īn*” (oppressed) against tyranny and imperialism. This discourse was legitimized on the base of the Shi’ite religion, fundamental trait of Iranian history and supposed root of the authentic Iranian identity. Since the Islamic Ideology Khomeini was promoting was founded on the uprising of the “oppressed”, on the condemn of Western Imperialism and on the unification of the whole Muslim community around the world, the social catalyst that contributed to the creation of an Islamic State in Iran was the emphasis on the Islamic identity and the solidarity with those who all around the world had been oppressed by any foreign power. The association of the Iranian identity with Shi’ism was not an invention of the latest decades, but a concept already introduced during the sixteenth century, when Shi’ism became the state religion under the Safavids.¹²⁰

In order to fully understand how an Islamic ideology could substitute nationalism as the core of the state, it is fundamental to look at the concept of “Religious Nationalism” elaborated by Ansari. Following Ansari’s reflection, it is possible to state that in creating the Islamic State, the concept of Nationalism was substituted by a religious and political idea in which certain elements of both nationalism and Islam merged together thanks to the closeness of certain concepts to the Shi’ite rhetoric.¹²¹ For example, the concept of resistance against Evil and Injustice (traditionally represented by the usurpation of the caliphate by Yazid and the following Martyrdom of Husayn in Kerbala) led intellectuals such as Āl-e Ahmad or Shari’ati (the major inspirers of Khomeini’s political thought) to see in the Shi’ism the resistance against Imperialism and forced Westernization, so in the Shi’ism the real Iranian identity to return to and to defend.¹²² In his analysis, Ansari argued that this association persisted through the

¹¹⁹ Nokhodcheri, 43.

¹²⁰ Nokhodcheri, 66.

¹²¹ Ibidem.

¹²² Nokhodcheri,44.

centuries because of the absence of a national historiography besides the example of Ferdowsi's *Shahname*, while the Shi'ite traditions remained steady in the Iranian society.¹²³ This examples demonstrates that the Islamic Revolution and later the Islamic Republic, easily succeeded in the years following the Revolution in emphasizing the Islamic traits of the Iranian identity and society by dragging concepts familiar to Iranian nationalism, such as the fight for independence and resistance against foreign powers, into an Islamic discourse.

Although at the beginning of the Islamic Republic the one above mentioned was the main state ideology, at the end of the Iran Iraq war, the Iranian authorities during the so-called "Period of Reconstruction" became more cautious to advocate a complete Islamic identity. Already during the Iran-Iraq war, in fact, the Iranian authorities had realized that just resorting to an Islamic ideology was not sufficient to mobilize all Iranians, but only those Shi'a traditions that were intertwining Shi'a sacred history with pre-Islamic characters or events were an efficient mean to that end.¹²⁴ As Fozi affirms, the reformist period of Khatami and the populist era of Ahmadinejad highlighted once again the importance of pre-Islamic roots in modern Iran, affecting the Iranian perception of both pre-Islamic past and Iranian identity.¹²⁵ As the chapter will better analyze, especially during the presidency of Ahmadinejad it has been possible to see a revival of that pre-Islamic nationalist grandeur typical of the Pahlavi times.

Cultural policies implemented until the Iran-Iraq War

At the end of the Pahlavi State, the revolutionary committee identified in the existing system of cultural centres and institutions an obstacle to the complete Islamization of the Iranian society. In fact, the SNH, of the Ministry of Tourism and Information of the Society for the Conservation of National Monuments were providing cultural sustainment and cultural propagandistic tools to the Pahlavi State.¹²⁶ Moreover, journals founded during Reza Shah's rule such as the *Journal of Tehran* and the *Īrān-e Bastān*

¹²³ Ansari, 328; Nokhodcheri, 44.

¹²⁴ Navid Fozi, "Neo-Iranian Nationalism: Pre-Islamic Grandeur and Shi'i Eschatology in President Mahmud Ahmadinejad's Rhetoric" *The Middle East Journal*, Volume 70, Number 2, (Spring 2016): 239.

¹²⁵ Navid Fozi, "Neo Iranian Nationalism", 248.

¹²⁶ Nokhodcheri, 29.

were also promoting general awareness to the public.¹²⁷ Hence, to start the purification of the whole sector from what was perceived as anti-Islamic contents, the revolutionary government partially dismantled the Ministry of Culture, albeit maintaining those bodies useful for the administrative and legislative needs of the renewed cultural sector.¹²⁸ That's the reason why in 1982 some sections of the Ministry of Culture and some of the Ministry of Higher Education related to research activities were merged together into a single ministry.¹²⁹ At the same time, those that were excluded from this adjustment became part of the Ministry for Islamic Guidance.¹³⁰ We can interpret this decision as it follows: on the one hand, the addition of the Cultural Heritage Department to the Ministry in charge of Research and Higher Education reflected the will to retrain the cultural departments. On the other hand, the integration of sections from the Ministry of Tourism and Information – operating as one of the pillars of propaganda during the Shah's rule – under the Ministry for Islamic Guidance reflected the increasing attention to and promotion of Islamic values and features in society and in the national culture.

The reorganization of the Ministry of Culture produced a reevaluation of Iranian culture, marginalizing the pre-Islamic period in the national cultural discourse and enhancing the Islamic character of the nation.¹³¹ However, looking more closely at this process, it appears that the reshaping of the ministry has been rough and disorganized, and in both the short and medium term it caused more harm than good. In fact, on the practical level, from 1979 to 1982 the action of the government was directed not only against royal monuments, but also pre-Islamic ones, which instead of being recalled as a source of national pride, were regarded as a symbol of the monarchical tyranny imposed on the masses.¹³² It should not be surprising to read that, in those chaotic months, it was reported that the revolutionary judge appointed by Khomeini to oversee the cultural policies on heritage identified the mausoleums of Ferdowsi, Saadi and Hafez and Persepolis as un-Islamic.¹³³ However, as mentioned by Grigor, although it was witnessed the will of a few individuals to destroy pre-Islamic monuments, no one

¹²⁷ Nokhodcheri, 29.

¹²⁸ Hodjat, 221.

¹²⁹ Ibidem.

¹³⁰ Hodjat, 221.

¹³¹ Abdi, 70.

¹³² Ibidem.

¹³³ Grigor, *Building Iran*, 206.

among the leaders of the Revolution deliberately called for a complete destruction of the Iranian heritage.¹³⁴ As evidence of this, Khomeini himself prohibited vandalism towards historical sites in the country.¹³⁵ Nevertheless, there were cases where buildings erected during the Pahlavi period and symbolizing the power of the monarchy were heavily damaged. An example of such a reaction can be seen in the vandalization of the tent city in Persepolis, seen as a symbol of royal corruption and gluttony in 1979, during the turmoil following the affirmation of the Revolution in the country.¹³⁶ In this occasion, the tent city erected in Persepolis in 1971 for the Celebrations of the 2500th Anniversary of the Iranian Monarchy to host foreign delegations was attacked and heavily damaged by the people who were called to cancel the symbols of the hated Pahlavi power. Additionally, the provisional revolutionary government proceeded to stop those cultural and educational activities at the base of the Pahlavi cultural propaganda. In particular, as it will be developed later in the chapter, the revolutionary government closed the Department of Archaeology of Teheran University and halted the foreign archaeological activities.¹³⁷ These measures did not only damage the academic formative offer cutting the collaboration with foreign experts, but also targeted, though momentarily, the early generation of Iranian archaeologists who were training in the field. In any case, it is worth mentioning that the revolutionary government also delivered a strict policy against illegal diggings and the import-export of artistic artefacts in order to stop the prolific cultural smuggling activity in Iran.¹³⁸

Many factors accounted for this period of archaeological negligence, among the others, the precarious political and social situation of the country after the fall of the Pahlavi State and the will to complete in the shortest possible time the elimination of any trace of the Pahlavi monarchy from the history of the country. This last point is of great significance, since, as affirmed by Grigor, Khomeini himself during the earliest uprisings blamed the Pahlavi Shahs to have polluted Iranian culture in order to undermine Islam. Hence, he called to eradicate every trace of the Pahlavi monarchy.¹³⁹ Furthermore, although formally all the activities causing damage to historical heritage

¹³⁴ Grigor, *Building Iran*, 206.

¹³⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹³⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹³⁷ Hodjat, 217.

¹³⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹³⁹ Grigor, *Building Iran*, 204.

were sanctioned, many archaeological sites, monuments or historical buildings experienced further harms. This was due in particular to the unfamiliarity with the abovementioned decrees concerning the preservation of national heritage that the personnel appointed by the provisional government to oversee national sites was called to enforce.¹⁴⁰ Moreover, as it will be discussed later, we should not forget the huge impact that military actions carried out against the Iranian territory during the Iran-Iraq War had on historical buildings.¹⁴¹

The complex institutional reorganization of the Ministry of Culture reflected both the need to demonstrate a clear break with the previous state and to divert the focus from non-Islamic to Islamic culture, art and heritage. However, the measures implemented to realize this new Islamic cultural design were in some part resembling those undertaken by the Pahlavi state. The Shahs misused anthropologic theories such as Aryanism to support the superiority of Iranians or utilized pre-Islamic cultural elements to legitimize the Pahlavi monarchy and downturn the Qajar period. Likewise, in the first years after the Revolution, the new Islamic state introduced a new Islamic sensibility over heritage meant to reduce the overall significance of pre-Islamic monuments in favour of Islamic masterpieces. Moreover, the the Islamic Republic as well as the Pahlavi State formally wanted to demonstrate the value of sites of national interest by displaying them and creating the conditions for the public to visit them.¹⁴² In light of these elements, it is possible to affirm that, although the educational purposes of heritage and cultural activities changed according to the needs of the Revolution, the same methodology used by the Shahs in highlighting only certain parts of the Iranian cultural heritage for political purposes was still used after the establishment of the Islamic Republic until the years 1990s.

¹⁴⁰ Hodjat, 218-219.

¹⁴¹ Ibidem

¹⁴² Abdi, 70.

Implications of the Iran-Iraq War on cultural heritage

As previously stated, the revolutionary government marginalized pre-Islamic culture as an ideological reaction to the Pahlavi ideology. However, for the reasons previously explained, the modalities through which this marginalization was carried out by the new Iranian authorities recalled a methodological imitation of the actions undertaken by the Pahlavi Shahs during the 1930s to reject the importance of Qajar art and enhance exclusively pre-Islamic artistic features.¹⁴³ As a consequence, both historical and contemporary royal monuments were seen and read by the masses galvanized by the Revolution as symbols of excess and class oppression.¹⁴⁴ Archaeology then, a discipline which was for the first time organized and developed in Iran under Pahlavi rule, was misunderstood and interpreted by the majority of the revolutionaries as a pseudoscience at the service of the glorification of the Pahlavi dynasty.¹⁴⁵ Although, as it has been explained in the previous chapter, this discipline was introduced in Iran in the last years of the Qajar rule, the Pahlavis were definitely those who implemented the archaeological research in the process of nation-building.

The Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) has been a tragedy for two culturally rich countries of the Middle East. In particular, the Iranian nation had paid a heavy price for the war in terms of both human lives and socio-cultural development. As it is possible to imagine, all non-necessary cultural activities, such as expositions, festivals and even some minor archaeological campaigns were sensibly reduced or suspended for the whole war period, while those indispensable proceeded intermittently, such as partial but urgent restorations.¹⁴⁶ Moreover, during this period Iranian historical buildings, palaces, archaeological sites and museums often were jeopardized by the Iraqi night strikes on Iranian cities. In fact, because of their particular configuration and their relative neutrality due to their civil purposes (as they were places of culture and not considered of strategic military importance, so excluded by the war rules of engagement), many of these places were chosen as a war hospitals, ammunition storages (as the case of the Archaeological Museum of Susa) or even as locations for anti-aircraft system (as the

¹⁴³ Grigor, *Building Iran*, 204-205

¹⁴⁴ Grigor, 206.

¹⁴⁵ Abdi, 70.

¹⁴⁶ Nokhodcheri, 46; Hodjat, 217-218.

case of Chogha Zanbil in Khuzestan).¹⁴⁷ As commented by Pierfrancesco Callieri during his accorded interview with the author:

*This was a tough conflict which has destroyed the nation and has diverted the attention from those non urgent matters. This has negatively affected the archaeological research, as there has been a setback of all western archaeological expeditions in the country. In the West this setback due to the war is often forgotten.*¹⁴⁸

Unfortunately, despite several warnings received by Iraq from the UNESCO not to further damage any cultural site, many archaeological sites, historical buildings and museums were heavily damaged by Iraqi bombs.¹⁴⁹ For instance, some of the most damaged monuments because of war actions were the historical city of Qasr-e Shirin and the Achaemenid sites of Hegbatan and Susa, located in the hinterland of war areas. In particular, the archaeological museum of Susa, built in 1966 to expose the archaeological treasures of the site was completely destroyed.¹⁵⁰

In spite of the tumultuous years of the Islamic Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War, archaeological research in Iran never completely halted. Moreover, already during the war period, the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran carried out another reorganization of the cultural departments. In particular, it proceeded to unify some offices and centres, some of them founded during the Pahlavi period, for example, the Centre for Archaeological Research, the Centre for Traditional Crafts, the Centre and Museum of Ethnography, the Office for Historical Remains, the Iran Bastan Museum, the Office for Protection of the Cultural Heritage of the Provinces, the Office of the Museums, the Office of Historical Structures, the Office of Palaces, the National Centre for Protection of Iranian Antiquities, and the Office of the Golestan Palace Endowments.¹⁵¹ This led to the creation in 1985 of the Iranian Cultural Heritage Organization – *Sāzeman-e Mirās-e Farhangi-ye Sanāi'-e Dast-i va Gardashigari* (ICHO), with the purpose of recovery, preservation and re-introduction in a new

¹⁴⁷ Hodjat, 221.

¹⁴⁸ Callieri interview, Appendix 3, 103-104.

¹⁴⁹ “Draft resolution submitted by the Chairman of Commission V: appeal to Iran and Iraq” and “Appeal to Iran and Iraq submitted by the president of the General Conference” at: <https://digital.archives.unesco.org/en/collection/governingdocuments/?mode=gallery&view=horizontal&q=iran&rows=1&page=1>

¹⁵⁰ Nokhodcheri, 157-158.

¹⁵¹ Abdi, 71.

historiographical discourse Archaeological and historical remains.¹⁵² It would be possible to argue that, through this reorganization, the government wanted to create a single organization suited for the new Islamic jurisdiction, but also to put under a stricter control all these centres and centralize all the decision-making processes in a single institution. In 1987, also the Iranian Centre for Archaeological Research (ICAR) was incorporated in the Research Department of the newly created ICHO. The constitution and the full efficiency of this new organization were ratified on the 22nd of April 1988 by the Iranian parliament and consequently determined the beginning of a new era for both cultural activities and archaeology in Iran.¹⁵³ Following the end of the Iran-Iraq War, the number of archaeological activities in Iran increased, and the 1990s witnessed a considerable reinvigoration of archaeological research in the country.¹⁵⁴

Cultural policies and Archaeology after the Iran-Iraq War

From the end of the hostilities against Iraq henceforth, the Government's attention towards heritage sensibly increased. It is possible to note this increased interest in the country's cultural background by looking at the policies delivered by both the Iranian government and parliament. First of all, it is important to stress the fact that the Iranian government's change of approach towards cultural heritage and archaeology was one of the directions impressed by Rafsanjani's presidency (1989-1997) during the period nowadays recognized as the "Era of Reconstruction" to improve Iranians' social and economical conditions. While the cultural program that the Cultural Revolutionary Committee (CRC) implemented until Khomeini's death in 1989 was meant to discredit the monarchy and Islamize Iranian institutions and culture, the presidency of Rafsanjani co-opted Iran's cultural heritage in the socio-political mainstream.¹⁵⁵ This choice was due to the need to complement the comprehensive economical and political reconstruction of the country with a cultural rebirth, allowing all the historical components of Iran to have a role in the history of the new Islamic nation. Hence, in the

¹⁵² Abdi, 71.

¹⁵³ Ibidem..

¹⁵⁴ Ali Mousavi, "Massoud Azarnoush (1945-2008)", *Iranica Antiqua*, Vol.45 (2010), 2.

¹⁵⁵ Grigor, 208; Nokhodcheri, 48.

1990s the times were ready to allow elements until that moment excluded from the national discourse to help building the State in times of peace. The need to recover from the war trauma passed also through a renewed care for society and for all those social components which were not considered priorities for the Iranian nation during the war years.

On the practical level, this new political and cultural line was marked by the approval of the Cultural Principles of the Islamic Republic (CPIR) in 1992. The latter became the new guidelines for culture, education and research, substituting the ones given until that moment by the CRC. Within Rafsanjani's liberal and pragmatic path of reforms, the aim of these guidelines was essentially to push towards the creation of a more socio-culturally tolerant Iran.¹⁵⁶ Hence, some of the cultural projects envisioned by the CPIR implied the fight against cultural stagnation and pseudo religiousness, confronting superstitions and criticizing the socio-cultural tendencies of the conservative right as harmful to the social growth of the country.¹⁵⁷ In regard to this point, on the base of Rafsanjani's slogans such as "Islam is the religion of forgiveness and leniency and not hostility or intolerance" it was explicitly mentioned the disdain towards a form of religiosity aiming to use Shari'a to fight modernity and encouraging demagoguery.¹⁵⁸ In the wake of this important step, the totality of the cultural sector slowly resumed its activities. In 1990, after a break of eleven years, the Institute of Archaeology, founded by Negahban in 1959, had already restarted some of its tasks and in 1992 all the activities of the Archaeological Department of Teheran University were restored.¹⁵⁹

This liberal discourse developed by Rafsanjani was followed and deepened by the one pursued by the following President of the Islamic Republic of Iran: Mohammed Khatami. As explained in the first chapter, both Rafsanjani and Khatami's discourse on culture was rooted on a new conception of nationalism that was going beyond Khomeini's pan-Islamic theory. Using a combination of Shi'a traditions and Sunna quotes in order to Islamize pre-Islamic Iranian identity, Rafsanjani was able to mobilize forces to rebuild the country after the War, while Khatami succeeded to drag support for

¹⁵⁶ Nokhodchery, 59; 157; Moslem, "*Factional Politics in post-Khomeini Iran*", (New York, Syracuse University press, 2002), 167-168.

¹⁵⁷ Moslem, "*Factional Politics*", 169.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵⁹ Abdi, 71.

his foreign policies and for the ideation of his nuclear program.¹⁶⁰ Khatami in particular considered at the base of the Iranian identity both “*Iraniyyat*” (pre-Islamic culture) and “*Islamiyyat*” (Islamic culture), both important in the same way, creating an Islamic-Iranian identity based on the acknowledgment of the pre-Islamic Iranian roots legitimized by the mediation of Islamic Shi’a traditions.¹⁶¹ Moreover, during the years of his presidency (1997-2005), he contributed to improve the relation between Iran and the rest of the Western countries thanks to the cultural discourse known as the “Dialogue among Civilizations”.¹⁶²

This cultural development, headed by Khatami’s government to oppose Huntington’s theory of “Clash of Civilizations”, was fundamental to improve the relations between Iran and Western countries and to mend that cultural and political distance with the rest of the world carved by the Revolution and the socio-political events related to it. According to Khatami, several factors played a role in his notion of dialogue, among them, active engagement in listening the other, positive cooperation to reciprocate tolerance and equality among the two or more dialoguing sides.¹⁶³ The concept of “equality” is crucial to understand Khatami’s idea of “Dialogue among Civilizations” both under a cultural and political lens. Equality represents the anti-imperialist nature of this cultural movement as it was aiming to shift the East from an object of study to a real participant in anthropological discourses, but represents as well the need that Iran had to be considered equal to the others in the International Community as precondition to dialogue.¹⁶⁴

This cultural movement brought important innovations also in the Iranian educational sector. As commented by Fozi, from this moment on, images of pre-Islamic symbols and monuments started to be depicted in textbooks when showing Iranian Muslim families, even bringing back some of the ancient Zoroastrian symbols depicted in Iranian archaeological sites.¹⁶⁵ Moreover, As the activities of museums advanced and led to the opening of an increased number of foundations and museums, in the 2000s an

¹⁶⁰ Fozi, 238.

¹⁶¹ Holliday, “Khatami’s Islamist-Iranian Discourse of National Identity: A Discourse of Resistance.”, 4.

¹⁶² For more in-depth information on this topic, see: <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/dialogue-among-civilizations-contexts-and-perspectives> .

¹⁶³ Holliday, “Khatami’s Islamist-Iranian Discourse”, 8.

¹⁶⁴ Holliday, 8; 10.

¹⁶⁵ Fozi, 238.

increased number of joint projects determined the return of Western experts in Iran. Lastly, the ultimate relevant example of the importance of culture for Khatami's governments is represented by the transformation of the ICHO into the Iranian Cultural Heritage and Tourism (ICHTO) carried out in 2004. The ICHO was combined with the *Organisation of Iran Touring and Tourism* and the newly established organization was put under the direct control of the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran.¹⁶⁶

As previously mentioned, archaeology was one of the disciplines that more than others benefitted both Rafsanjani and Khatami's reforms. In fact, since the early '90s the discipline was progressively rehabilitated in educational institutes and consequently, cultural organizations as the ICHO could organize new archaeological missions. In 1995 the Abhar branch of the Azadi University of Teheran resumed its activities, while the Institute of Archaeology – that had already resumed some activities in 1990 – became again fully operational in 1999. In the same year, the Tarbiat Modarres University of Teheran offered the first PhD position in Archaeology.¹⁶⁷ An important step towards the public rehabilitation of archaeology was made in April 1997, when the ICHO was transformed into a research centre, and the new director appointed by the government, the reformist Seyyed Mohammad Beheshti, welcomed favourably the return of American, German, French and Italian cultural experts, opening the way for new collaborations with foreign institutes and International teams of archaeologists.¹⁶⁸ In an interview held with the journal *Science* in 2003, Beheshti affirmed:

*We are quite aware that Iran is an important place archaeologically. Therefore it is our duty to provide facilities and possibilities for such work. We have to become part of the larger international system of archaeology; otherwise we will be left behind. So it is good to have this cooperation, but we have our own terms and standards. If there is to be scientific cooperation, it should be real cooperation. That means 50-50.*¹⁶⁹

This statement is particularly important as it offers the chance to argue that between the end of the '90s and the beginning of the 2000s, the Islamic Republic of Iran was fully aware of the importance of the role of culture, especially the pre-Islamic in creating a positive and renovated image of the country.

¹⁶⁶ Nokhodcheri, 50.

¹⁶⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁶⁸ Nokhodcheri, 51; Abdi, 72.

¹⁶⁹ Seyyed M. Beheshti, "Bringing Cultural Heritage Out of the Shadows" interview by Lawler Andrew, *Science*, Vol. 302 (7 November 2003): 975.

Among the relevant archaeologists who came back to Iran in the 1990s should be mentioned Massoud Azarnoush (1945-2008), who had a pivotal role in the re-organization of the archaeological activities in Iran and in the coordination of local and foreign archaeological teams. In 1995 Azarnoush returned to Iran to take up a teaching position at the University of Tehran. In 2000, he was invited by Mohammad Beheshti, the director of the ICHO, to join the Research Department of the organization. Thanks to his charisma and determination he was able to re-organize the research administration by re-establishing the ICAR in 2002. His six-year mandate in the ICAR witnessed remarkable progress and development in different fields of archaeological research in Iran.¹⁷⁰ However, the modalities under which the new expeditions could pursue their activity in the Iranian territory substantially differed from the ones that were implemented during the Shah's years. As mentioned in the previous chapter, in fact, during the Pahlavi period, the majority of the equips working in important archaeological sites were headed by American or European experts. On the contrary, as commented by Dr Alireza Askari Chaverdi, the co-director of the Iranian-Italian joint mission in Fars:

After the Iranian Revolution, especially during the time of Director Massoud Azarnoush, there were established different agreements. He tried to put exactly the Iranians and the foreign team in equal parts, with two supervisors. He also extended this shape to missions from other countries, then he conducted excavations according to the scientific method, trying to improve the quality of Iranian teams.¹⁷¹

In light also of the previous considerations regarding the rhetoric of Dialogue among Civilizations, it is not surprising to see that when describing the composition and the work of Italian joint missions in Iran both Askari Chaverdi and Callieri refers to equality in their interviews.¹⁷²

The records of Italian archaeological missions in Iran give us another evidence of this brilliant moment for archaeological excavations. After a long and difficult recovery from the war trauma, the first mission supported by IsMEO could take place again in 1997. The Italian mission returned to the archaeological site where Italians started excavations in Iran in 1959: Shahr-e Sukhte, an interesting urban settlement from the Bronze Age in Eastern Iran. Between 1997-2019 this mission under the direction of

¹⁷⁰ Mousavi, "Mahmoud Azarnoush", 3.

¹⁷¹ Interview Askari, 97-98.

¹⁷² See Appendix 3, pages 98, 108.

Seyyed Mohammad S. Sajjadi employed botanical, anthropological and archaeological studies, combining the ICAR, the RICHT and the IsMEO.¹⁷³ Since 1997, Italian projects multiplied and from the 2000s they allowed an increasing presence of students from different Italian Universities (for example, Bologna, Torino and Padua Universities) in fieldworks scattered all around the country.¹⁷⁴ Excellent examples of this important contribution and collaboration between Italy and Iran are represented by the excavations in Hamadan between 2004-2005, or the by the Joint Italian-Iranian Archaeological Mission in Fars under the direction of Dr Pierfrancesco Callieri and Dr Alireza Askari Chaverdi.

Ahmadinejad's cultural extremism.

The election of Mahmud Ahmadinejad in 2005 as president of the Islamic Republic of Iran halted the post-war reformist phase in the attempt to return to the origin of the Revolution. He aimed to clear Iranian society from any kind of Western value imported during Rafsanjani and Khatami's governments, achieving only a profound international isolation dangerous for the country.¹⁷⁵ However, although politically speaking Ahmadinejad's years are still considered as a period of stagnation and recession, from a cultural point of view they are of particular interest.

In 2005, at the beginning of his presidency, Ahmadinejad's political and cultural plan aimed to rediscover the true spirit of the Iranian Revolution. For this reason, he promoted Islamic ideology through various plans, undertaking a series of conservative policies.¹⁷⁶ The first areas involved in this radical transformation were, as commented by Borjjan, the spheres of art, culture and education. In particular, the president and his conservative government exponentially increased the budget allocated to religious schools and Islamic institutions that backed the president's positions and started the

¹⁷³ Callieri, P; Nokandeh J; Rossi, A; Seyyed Sajjadi S. M. . *Iran and Italy, 60 Years of Collaboration on Cultural Heritage*, (Teheran: IsMEO – RICHT, 2019), 41.

¹⁷⁴ Callieri, P; Nokandeh J; Rossi, A; Seyyed Sajjadi S. M. . *Iran and Italy*, 41-63.

¹⁷⁵ Maryam, Borjjan. "Returning to Revolutionary Roots (2005–Present)." In *English in Post-Revolutionary Iran: From Indigenization to Internationalization*, (Multilingual Matters / Channel View Publications, 2013):136.

¹⁷⁶ Borjjan, "Returning to the roots", 139.

purification of nation's education sector.¹⁷⁷ As a consequence of this development, many professors and heads of important department or institutions were removed in order to appoint personalities whose taught was matching the attempts to revive the principles that moved the Cultural Revolution of the early 1980s.¹⁷⁸ Hence, it is conceivable to state that during the presidency of Ahmadinejad the government control on culture was very strict, and many restrictions were put on the publication and registration of books and films which were not meeting the original moral standards conveyed and approved by the Islamic revolutionary front at the beginning of the Revolution.

The situation dramatically changed after the contested election of 2009, when Ahmadinejad was appointed for a second presidential term, but the relationship with the clergy rapidly worsened. In order to establish a personal power and divert the public consensus from the Supreme Leader Khamenei towards him, Ahmadinejad produced an ideological discourse criticizing the religious presence in the parliament as well as the foreign presence in the country, elaborating on the political and cultural independence of Iran.¹⁷⁹ Ahmadinejad brought again back in the political field nationalist sentiments, different also from those advocated by the Shah and different from the religious nationalism promoted during the early stages of the Revolution.¹⁸⁰ His ideology synthesized the outcomes of the renovated visibility that pre-Islamic concepts and monuments experienced after the war. According to Fozi, Ahmadinejad did not merely mediate the pre-Islamic Iranian roots with Islam, on the contrary, he explicitly acknowledged and honoured them. His nationalist rhetoric attempted to employ both the memories of the pre-Islamic times as well as Shi'a eschatology in order to depict Iran as a "civilizer power" and arise the image of the country as it was embodying human values and since the ancient times.¹⁸¹ In brief, he tried to create an Iranian nationalist discourse by condensing the pre-Islamic and Shi'a traditions with the nationalist and pan-Islamic tendencies that Iran has experienced since the beginning of the 20th century.

¹⁷⁷ Borjian, 139.

¹⁷⁸ Borjian, 139; 158.

¹⁷⁹ Fozi, 228.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸¹ Fozi, 245-248.

It is possible to briefly condense this process with Fozi's words: "he tried to Islamize the Past and Persianize the Present".¹⁸²

In light of this, the care for archaeology and for pre-Islamic heritage was fundamental to pursue President Ahmadinejad's idea of Iranian history and society. As we will better see in the third chapter, Ahmadinejad publicly enhanced in several occasions the importance of pre-Islamic artefacts and monuments, even mythologizing the ancient kings. For instance, in 2010 he exposed in Tehran and publicly celebrated the clay cylinder from the 6th century B.C known as "Cyrus' Cylinder", already used by Mohammad Reza Shah as the symbol for the 2500th Anniversary of the Monarchy. This object has carved on his surface an Akkadian inscription that celebrates Cyrus's kingship, his respect for all the religious and political traditions of Babylon and the reforms he was willing to implement in his kingdom.¹⁸³

During his speech, Ahmadinejad explicitly regarded it as one of the first charters of rights ever edited and lauded the Cyrus' Cylinder as a cultural heritage for the entire world and for all human civilizations since "it embodies human values". On this occasion, he publicly contradicted the mainstream thought and the scepticism towards those eras typical of the clergy and Supreme Leader Khamenei, who regarded those periods as periods of ignorance and tyrannical oppression.¹⁸⁴

Lastly, on the practical level, the Catalogue published by ISMEO and RICHT in 2019 for the 60th anniversary of Iranian-Italian archaeological collaboration shows that indeed many were the expeditions and the surveys carried out in this period to explore pre-Islamic or ancient Iranian sites.¹⁸⁵ It is interesting to note that the excavations undertaken during the whole period of Ahmadinejad's presidency were not focused only on Sassanian or Achaemenid sites. On the contrary, they were inquiring also the late ancient period – for example, the Elam civilization – or even the previous periods, as the Calcolithic.

¹⁸² Fozi, 231.

¹⁸³ See: https://web.archive.org/web/20120321184218/http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database/search_object_details.aspx?objectid=327188&partid=1.

¹⁸⁴ Fozi, 240.

¹⁸⁵ For a detailed description of all the Italian missions undertaken under Ahmadinejad's period see: Callieri, P; Nokandeh J; Rossi, A; Seyyed Sajjadi S. M. *Iran and Italy*, 43; 51-55; 65-69; 73-77; 87; 95.

Conclusions

As it is possible to note from the account provided, the development of archaeology from the establishment of the Islamic Republic until Ahmadinejad's presidency has not been linear. In fact, it followed Iranian internal politics and has alternated periods of development with periods of regression. Thus, inquiring each portion of the Republican history is useful to understand the motivations behind shifts of the ideology in power and comprehend how these changes reflected in the relationship with cultural policies and with archaeological excavations.

It has been widely documented that, for what regards cultural policies implemented during the Islamic Republic, in the first decade of the Islamic rule in Iran, there was a lack of the necessary conditions for a complete cultural development. This situation was due to the war and to the intransigent political stances taken by the revolutionary movement, in open contrast with the cultural and archaeological experiences coming from the Pahlavi rule. However, it is demonstrated that the subsequent revival of pre-Islamic cultural elements was a consequence of the impairment of Khomeini's pan-Islamic doctrine alone to inspire the Iranian people. In fact, it is remarkable that already during the war we can assist to the use of pre-Islamic features in the early Islamic political culture, matching a progressive Shiitization and Persianization of the war.¹⁸⁶

By analysing the after-war period, we can conclude that both Rafsanjani and Khatami's governments revived the pre-Islamic heritage and re-introduced archaeology in the academic practice using the same approach of the Pahlavi Shahs, but with a slightly different purpose. As in the 1930s Reza Shah realized that the construction of the modern Iranian state had to be supported by cultural rebirth in the eyes of the whole world, at the end of the 20th century the Islamic Republic of Iran was again aware of the potential of the entire Iranian culture to reacquire an international prestige after such a tremendous war. In fact, I argue that the archaeological and cultural activities undertaken by the Islamic governments during the 1990s and the 2000s were of similar nature as the ones of the Pahlavis, whose archaeological and cultural efforts aimed at

¹⁸⁶ To better understand this point, I suggest the reading of the following article: Darling, Linda T. "The Vicegerent of God, from Him We Expect Rain": The Incorporation of the Pre-Islamic State in Early Islamic Political Culture." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 134, no. 3 (2014): 407–29.

rediscovering Iran's rich cultural past were meant to demonstrate to both the international and national audience that the country was ready to (re)claim the prominent position they believed it deserved because of its cultural background. However, although I argue that their ends were the same, there is an important difference between these two situations. The Pahlavi used pre-Islamic heritage as a tool to detach Iran from its Islamic political and cultural costumes, helping the start of that modernization path seen by Reza Shah as a good treatment against the previous centuries. On the contrary, Rafsanjani and Khatami legitimized pre-Islamic heritage through the development of the cultural discourse called "Dialogue about Civilizations" in order to revitalise the domestic dialogue with the West and improve the image of the country depicting it in a way it could be respected internationally. The emphasis on the double nature of Iranian identity (Iranian and Islamic) together with the reflection on the dialogue as possible only between equal parts bring to think, as Holliday did, that on par of Reza Shah, also Khatami had created an Islamic-Iranian identity in relation to external others.¹⁸⁷

Ahmadinejad, aiming to return to the original message conveyed the Islamic front during the Revolution (*Esteqlāl, Āzādi, Jomhuri-ye Eslāmi* – Independence, Freedom, Islamic Republic) attempted to draw a direct line between the pre-Islamic grandeur and Islamic social values thanks to the rehabilitation of pre-Islamic cultural features made by his predecessors. Using Fozi's words, Ahmadinejad "used Iranian history to "Iranianize" universal ideals" creating the conditions to envision in the Islamic Republic the heir of the pre-Islamic golden past.¹⁸⁸ This is enough to state, once again, that although Islam has a considerable role in the Iranian identity, all the attempts made to make Iranian identity only an Islamic identity were, and probably will be, meant to fail.

The relationship between the Islamic Republic and archaeology has not been stable for the entirety of the Republican period. This was due to an alternation of phases of political progressivism, such as the presidencies of Rafsanjani and Khatami, with periods of political regression, such as the complicate early years after the Revolution. Nevertheless, generally speaking we can easily recognize the tendency to a progressive openness in archaeology, witnessed by the passage from the absolute refuse of this discipline to its acceptance and development in terms of education and research. As

¹⁸⁷ Holliday, 13.

¹⁸⁸ Fozi, 248.

demonstrated in this chapter, we find a clear prejudice against archaeology and against the historical period that this discipline had investigated until then only in the early years after the Shah's fall. In fact, the closure of all the archaeological institutes and University archaeological departments in the country mentioned by Hodjat, Nokhodcheri and Abdi cannot but lead to think in this direction, although Prof. Callieri slightly disagree with this view. In the interview held with him, he in fact admitted:

*“Well, now, in my opinion there has never been a negative prejudice from the Islamic republic executive class against archaeology, probably it is only possible to affirm that there were singular positions against certain forms of archaeology.”*¹⁸⁹

Lastly, the years following the war show that the archaeological projects launched together with foreign experts and foreign archaeological Institutes supported the revival of features from the Iranian cultural background which were neglected during the years of the war. On the practical level, they contributed as well to improve archaeological techniques and studies in Iranian universities, helping the formation of local experts and workers, contributing to reach that cultural independence wished by all Iranian governments. During Ahmadinejad's presidency we assist to the perpetuation of the archaeological campaigns already started during Khatami's years and their extension to new sites of interest. Ahmadinejad envisioned in pre-Islamic heritage in its rediscovery through archaeology a way to strengthen its ideology, especially after the break with the clergy at the beginning of its second mandate.

¹⁸⁹ Interview Callieri, Appendix 3, 104.

Chapter 3: Persepolis as a case study

The archeological site of Persepolis

The archaeological site of Persepolis displays the rests of the ancient ceremonial capital of the Achaemenid Empire (550-330 BC). The site is located in the centre of the Fars region, precisely in the plain of Marvdasht, just 60 km northeast of the modern city of Shiraz and comprehends an area of 12 hectares.¹⁹⁰ The foundation of this ceremonial citadel called *Parseh* started under Darius I in 518 BC and was overall finished under the reign of Xerxes, who became king in 486 BC.¹⁹¹ This complex was built on an artificial terrace and was meant to host the king and his court and the feasts and audiences offered by the king to dignitaries within or outside the kingdom.¹⁹² Although the site is nowadays internationally known with the Greek toponym of Persepolis, in Iran other names have been used to identify it: *Sad Sotūn* (the Hundred Columns) and *Takht-e Jamshīd* (Throne of Jamshid).¹⁹³ *Sad Sotūn* is a term used by Iranian people who after the fall of the Achaemenid Empire could not read the cuneiform scriptures and referred to the site by mentioning the high number of columns supporting the roof of the main chamber of the Apadana.¹⁹⁴ The inscriptions of Shapur II in the Palace of Darius proves that Sassanians were aware of the name *Sad Sotūn* and were making use of it.¹⁹⁵ After the Islamic conquest of Iran in 656 AC this term was changed into *Chehel Menār* (the Forty Minarets) but soon was replaced by the term *Takht-e Jamshīd*, which remains the one used by contemporary Iranians. As reported by Mousavi, this name had a longer story as it was conceptualized during Darius' period and in the past was often interchanged with *Sad Sotūn*.¹⁹⁶ The citadel was metaphorically intended as a "throne" for a king already by Darius, but it is during the following eras that the ruins of *Parseh*

¹⁹⁰ Flavia, Marimpietri. "Quei Persiani dalla barba blu". *Archeo – Attualità dal passato* a. XXXV n. 428 (Ottobre 2020): 98.

¹⁹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁹² Alireza, Shapur Shahbazi. *Guida ragionata di Persepoli* (Tehran: Safiran, 2012), 9.

¹⁹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁹⁴ Shapur Shahbazi. *Guida ragionata di Persepoli*, 10.

¹⁹⁵ Mousavi, 213.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibidem*.

were linked to the mythological King Jamshīd, reason why they adopted the name of “Throne of Jamshīd”.¹⁹⁷

Since its construction, started with Darius I but lasted for at least hundred years, the ceremonial city of Parseh had different construction phases. Overall it is possible to state that the citadel had the shape of a palatine complex: a location exclusively reserved to the king and its court, and thus enjoying a special status and prestige. The complex presents a sequence of palaces and halls gradually built by the Achaemenid kings until the last additions made by Artaxerxes III (358-338 BC). The site is composed by four main palaces: the great palace known as Apadana built by Darius and finished by his son Xerxes, a smaller palace erected by Darius called Tachara, the Hadish palace erected by Xerxes and finally the Palace of the 100 Columns started by Xerxes and completed by Artaxerxes I (464-424 BC).¹⁹⁸ Aside of the remnants of the above mentioned palaces, the site displays also some of the monumental gateways to access the palaces of power: the Gate of all Nations with its incomplete avenue of the processions and the Tripylon: a fairly small palace at the centre of the complex (and for this reason called also “Central Palace”) which is linked by means of three doorways (from here the name “tri”-“pylon”) and several passages to various other minor buildings.¹⁹⁹

The earliest Westerners who visited the site undertook the journey from Europe to Iran during the Enlightenment époque to acquire knowledge about the region. The first European who identified the ruins of the site known by the locals as Takht-e Jamshīd with what in the West was known as Persepolis was the Spanish diplomat and traveller Garcia de Silva Figueroa in 1618.²⁰⁰ However, an more complete overview of the site and a sample of the cuneiform writing found on the site was given by the nobleman and diplomat from Rome Pietro Della Valle in 1621. The first pictures of the site were taken shortly after Della Valle’s visit. In 1677, the French Jean-Baptiste Tavernier and the Dutch Philip Angel, who in their memories disliked the look of the site. Nevertheless, the Dutchman, a painter who arrived through an Embassy of the Dutch West Indian

¹⁹⁷ Mousavi, 213.

¹⁹⁸ Shahbazi, *Guida ragionata di Persepoli*, 197, Please see map in Appendix for the complete view of the site.

¹⁹⁹ Shahbazi, 37.

²⁰⁰ Rana Daroogheh-Nokhodcheri, “Nationalism, Politics, and the Practice of Archaeology: The Case Study of Iran” (PhD thesis, Durham University), 123.

Company to teach Shāh ‘Abbās II the art of drawing, produced the first draw of Persepolis.²⁰¹

Other pictures of the site were taken in the late 19th century by another Italian: the Neapolitan infantry officer Luigi Pesce (1828-1864). In 1850 Pesce took the earliest photographs of Pasargadae, Persepolis and Naqsh-e Rostam and presented the resulting photographic album to the Qajar Shah Nāṣir al-Dīn in 1858.²⁰² Thanks to this precious work, in the following years the Shah, who had a passion for photography and archaeology, decided to invest part of his fortune in excavations in which also some young members of his family actively participated.²⁰³ This is the case of the Persian Prince Mo’tamad al-Dawla Farhād Mīrzā, who in 1877 started hiring local workers and European archaeologists to dig some areas of Persepolis to find “ancient objects”.²⁰⁴ Only at the end of the 19th century a more conscious approach towards the rests located in the area under excavation and the artefacts collected by archaeologists contributed to shape more the following excavations. Starting from 20th century, the scientific methods adopted to conduct archaeological research in Iran were more looking for data collection and preservation than treasure hunting. It interesting to see that the photographs taken by Pesce and by Friedrich Carl Andreas and Friedrich Stolze became the base on which the first scientific excavations in the twentieth century were undertaken.²⁰⁵

The choice of Persepolis

As described in the second chapter, one of the most important features of Reza Shah’s rule was the emphasis on pre-Islamic artistic and historical remains, reason why the site of Persepolis naturally acquired a noteworthy – almost sacred – importance. During the 1920s but especially in the 1930s, the members of the Society of National Heritage (SNH) operated a strong manipulation of the cultural value of the Achaemenid Empire

²⁰¹ Mousavi, 215.

²⁰² Mousavi, 217.

²⁰³ Mousavi, 218.

²⁰⁴ Mousavi, 220.

²⁰⁵ Nokhodcheri, 123; Mousavi, 220.

and its glories by developing a rhetoric aimed to enhance the supposed superiority of the Achaemenids, their architecture and symbols. These people were imagined by the Iranian elite to be the heir of those ancient ancestors identified in the myth of the Aryan people, concept raised from the 19th century by European scholars who shifted the use of Aryan from a linguistic discourse into an anthropological and then political one.²⁰⁶ As a consequence of the ethnic nationalist discourse used by the Shah to shape the identity of the new country, Persepolis served to the purposes of becoming the perfect stage where to set the rebirth of the Iranian nation.

As commented by Shahbazi, the choice of Persepolis was motivated by the presence in the site of multiple artistic and constructive techniques resulting from the employment of specialized workers coming from the different territories controlled by the Achaemenid Empire. Hence, it was the perfect example of a progressed civilization that was able to rule and administer a huge empire as well as keeping intact the particularities of the submitted people.²⁰⁷ As a consequence, the ancient citadel and its palaces were thought to be not just the first capital of this glorious Iranian Empire, but even the symbol of civilization and human and artistic tolerance.²⁰⁸

Questioned about this point by the Italian archaeological journal *Archeo*, the Iranian archaeologist Alireza Askari Chaverdi confirmed that Persepolis represents the convergence in a single monument of all the ancient traditions of the territories controlled by the Achaemenid Empire, so that it can be considered as the synthesis of all the artistic traditions of the ancient Middle East.²⁰⁹ Moreover, Askari Chaverdi further affirmed:

*(...) Persino oggi gli Iranian si riconoscono in Persepoli. Attualmente, infatti, in Iran vivono differenti gruppi etnici, ma tutti riconoscono un'unità nazionale condivisa, rappresentata da Persepoli. Questo sito rappresenta la centralità e l'unitarietà della cultura di un paese, come l'Iran, molto vasto e con più gruppi etnici, (...) Perciò Persepoli è importantissima per il popolo Iraniano che visita il sito archeologico di Persepoli come luogo mitico e sacro per l'Iran.*²¹⁰

²⁰⁶ Ebrahimi, 450.

²⁰⁷ Shahbazi, 7-8.

²⁰⁸ Nokhodcheri, "Nationalism, Politics and Archaeology", 134-135.

²⁰⁹ Marimpietri. "Quei Persiani dalla barba blu", 104.

²¹⁰ Ibidem.

“(…) even today the Iranians identify them in Persepolis. In fact, currently different ethnic groups are living in Iran, but all them recognize a shared national unity represented by Persepolis. This site represents the centrality and the unity of the culture of a vast and multiethnic country such as Iran, (…) thus Persepolis is very important for the Iranian people, who visits the archaeological site of Persepolis as a sacred and mythical Iranian Monument.”

The conclusion that we can draw from this affirmation is that even for local researches Persepolis remains extremely important for Iranians and that still nowadays it retains the spiritual role that, as we will see in the next section, Reza Shah and the Society for National Heritage (SNH) envisioned and tailored for it within the ideology of the Pahlavi State during the 1930s.

The impact of Persepolis in the 1930s

Given the fundamental importance of the Archaeological site of Persepolis/Takht-e Jamshīd, Reza Shah and the SNH acted to improve the image of the site, to increase its accessibility and to deepen the study of its ruins. Hence, we can affirm that the long series of archaeological campaigns on the ruin of the ancient Persepolis had the duty to express all the potentiality of the site and transform it in Iran’s modern “altar of the Fatherland”. As already demonstrated in Chapter 2, one of the most evident outcomes of these efforts was the development of an institutional architecture inspired by the ruins of Persepolis. The national monument subsequently became the new artistic and architectural model for the country and the mirage of that worshipped golden age the Shah had the sacred duty to revive. An evidence of the great fascination that the nationalist Pahlavi ruling class had for the revenues from Persepolis can be represented by the ceremony on the occasion of the laying of the first cornerstone of the University of Tehran in 1935. On this occasion, the Shah laid a marble box with a gold plaque as cornerstone of the University in the manner of the four gold and silver plaques found at the base of the foundation deposit of the Apadana in 1933.²¹¹ By acting in this manner, the Shah revived (or created) a supposed tradition meant to establish a link between the Achaemenid cultural legacy and the Pahlavi architecture. It would not be surprising if in the Shah’s imagination this act would have metaphorically linked the cultural and

²¹¹ Nokhodcheri, 33.

human values personified by Persepolis with the formative and cultural function of the University as educational institution.

As explained in the second chapter, between 1931 and 1939 the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute under the direction of Ernst Herzfeld conducted the first scientific excavations of the site recovering extraordinary findings. Overall, Herzfeld's action had three aims: excavate the main palatial complexes, reconstruct one of the palaces to house the expedition and re-open the ancient subterranean drainage system to protect the site from the damages of atmospheric agents.²¹² These actions became immediately object of an important press coverage, as Herzfeld was convinced of the need to involve and inform as many people as possible about the uncovering process.

As indicated by Devos: "Articles on Persepolis increasingly disseminated typical themes of the official propaganda (e.g. praise of Iran's ancient grandeur, Iran's renewal under Reza Shah, and the country's modernization and progress), attesting to the press' role as an instrument of Pahlavi propaganda."²¹³ The most evident case of the interest of the State press in Persepolis are represented by the articles written in the newspaper *Ettelā'āt*, founded in Tehran in 1926 a few months after Reza Shah's coronation. Given the absence of a proper propaganda office – the foundation of the Organization for Public Enlightenment (*Sāzmān-e Parvāresh-e Afkār*) and the Institute for Propaganda (*Sāzmān-e Tablighāt*) would take place in 1939 – this newspaper, strongly bound to the Shah's regime, had a pivotal role in conveying to the middle class audience the state's nationalist ideology.²¹⁴ The main reason why the Iranian middle class was the main target of the Shah's propaganda stands is that since the establishment of the Second Parliament (1909-1911) and the subsequent social reforms, the class of state employee such as provincial elites, journalists, but also educated non aristocratic young people became a fundamental part for the functioning of the state.²¹⁵ Hence, it was of fundamental importance to inculcate them nationalist feelings such as the love for their

²¹² Mousavi, 226.

²¹³ Bianca, Devos. "“History Is Repeated”: The Representation of Persepolis in the Iranian Press of the 1930s." *Welt Des Islams* 58, no. 3 (2018): 330.

²¹⁴ Devos. "“History Is Repeated”, 331.

²¹⁵ H.E. Chehabi, "The Rise of the Middle Class in Iran before the Second World War" In *The Global Bourgeoisie The Rise of the Middle Classes in the Age of Empire* ed. by Christof Dejung, David Motadel and Jürgen Osterhammel (2019), 49.

homeland, their heritage and their ancient history through the press, intellectuals and the modern French-styled educational system.²¹⁶

The commercial interests of an increasingly “massified” press, consequent of the rise of the cities’ population, were matching the Shah’s needs to highlight Persepolis. As a consequence, all the activities related to the site were used by the newspaper *Ettelā’āt* to attract a major audience and at the same time to favour the court by enhancing the great discoveries made by the archaeologists.²¹⁷ For this reason, besides describing the excavations, the journal also covered the majority of the official events held by the Shah and its court in Persepolis during his government, among the others, the Shah’s four visits at the site and the discovery of the golden and silver foundation plaques in 1933.

On the pages of *Ettelā’āt*, archaeological activities were perceived as a positive means to raise awareness over Iran’s past and to increase the benefits coming from tourist and cultural activities. It is remarkable that, although foreign scholars such as Herzfeld or Krefter played a relevant role in organizing the research in Persepolis and attract foreign attention on the excavations, in these articles the role of these scholars was considered marginal in comparison to the efforts produced by Iranians.²¹⁸ This witnessed the progressive removal of important personalities as the nationalist ideology of Reza Shah acquired a greater role in the management of cultural activities, and consequently, the need to review accords signed in the first years of Reza Shah’s rule. In Herzfeld’s case, in the face of mounting problems with the Oriental Institute in Chicago in matter of division of the findings, he had to resign from his role.²¹⁹ However, the information regarding the archaeological excavations in Persepolis and the details provided to the audience became increasingly refined during this decade. It is possible to assume that, by giving extremely detailed – often exaggeratedly detailed – information about the ruins and the new discoveries, the newspaper was trying to amplify the echoes of the ancient legends and engaging more with the audience’s feelings. Thanks to the study conducted by Bianca Devos on this topic, it is possible to affirm that during the 1930s there was an evolution of the use of archaeology for propagandistic purposes and that

²¹⁶ Chehabi 2019, “The Rise of the Middle Class in Iran”, 60.

²¹⁷ Devos, 330.

²¹⁸ Devos, 332-335;

²¹⁹ Mousavi, 231; Nokhodcheri, 137.

the relevance of Persepolis for the state ideology changed as the excavations in the whole country progressed.²²⁰

The Shiraz Festival of Arts

After the abdication of Reza Shah in 1941 and the coronation of his son Mohammad Reza Shah as Shahanshah of Iran, Persepolis kept having a fundamental role in the State propaganda. The two major events that saw Persepolis as the main protagonist of the Iranian cultural life during the years of Mohammed Reza Shah were the Shiraz Festival of Arts and the ceremonies on the occasion of the 2500th Anniversary of the Iranian Monarchy. The first was a famous artistic festival hold in the capital of Fars between 1967 and 1977, while the second was an impressive three-days event hold in 1971 meant to celebrate the greatness, the modernity and the cultural progress of the monarchical institution in Iran. Both the events had the aim to claim Iran's place among the world's nations (especially the Western ones), but this art festival in particular had the moral purpose to get Iranians acquainted with the western artistic taste by displaying the latest western artistic avant-gardes. Essentially, it was imagined as a civilizing meeting meant to establish a cultural link between the West and Iran.²²¹

After the foundation of the National Iranian Radio and Television in 1966 an increased attention was given to the country's cultural life. The Empress Consort Shahbanu Farah Dībā, who is still nowadays involved in promoting cultural events, suggested the creation of a Festival of Arts in Iran, through which Iranians could extend their cultural horizons.²²² The following year Farah Dībā patronized the first edition of the Shiraz-Persepolis Festival of Arts (*Jashn-e Honar-e Shirāz-Takht-e Jamshīd*). The choice to host this event in Shiraz and to held some shows in the archaeological frame of Persepolis was taken considering the architectural richness of the Fars province. The idea was that in this province there were buildings and ruins that for more than 2500 years had been a sort of open museum of the Iranian architecture and that could reveal

²²⁰ For a complete overview of the topic, please read the article: Bianca, Devos. ““History Is Repeated”: The Representation of Persepolis in the Iranian Press of the 1930s.” *Welt Des Islams* 58, no. 3 (2018): 326–56.

²²¹ H.E. Chehabi, “The Shiraz Festival and its Place in Iran's Revolutionary Mythology” In *The Age of Aryamer: Late Pahlavi Iran and Its Global Entanglements* ed. by Roham Alvandi (2018),196.

²²² Chehabi 2018, “The Shiraz Festival”, 169.

to foreign artists the eternal essence of the country.²²³ This festival was imagined to be a stage where to perform both music and art typical of Iran and the Middle East as well as the latest western tendencies in matters of theatre, music and art. Although these promises of mutual respect and tolerance would make thinking of a brilliant success, this Festival was harshly criticized both domestically and internationally and ended up as a complete failure. The main domestic critique regarded the elitism of the event, consequence of the progressive detachment of Mohammed Reza Shah's court from daily life in Iran. While the economic problems of the country were merely targeted by the Shah's White Revolution reforms, many Iranians did not appreciate the Shah's consort investments in a show that common people could not fully comprehend. As mentioned by Houchang Chehabi, people in Shiraz, back at those days only a provincial town in comparison with Tehran, perceived the Festival as a cultural inappropriate extravaganza, as they were lacking the knowledge and the cultural tools to understand it.²²⁴ Moreover, the clergy and its supporters saw in those strange shows in Persepolis and Shiraz a menace for the Islamic moral (especially after the staging of the shocking Hungarian drama "*Pig, Child, Fire*") and a token of the regime's disdain for Islam and its submission to the West.²²⁵ Nevertheless, criticism was raised as well by the West as the Shiraz Festival of Arts was seen as an attempt of the country whitewashing to mask the increased censorship and repression of opposition groups.²²⁶ To conclude, it is possible to assume that through the festival, the Shah attempted to find another means to pursue the utopian cultural fraternization of Iran with the West. The effect was the opposite. By misreading the people's sensibility and underestimating the distance between the Iranian middle class cultural and artistic tastes with the European morality and the expression of Europe's cultural vanguards, the Shah's cultural entourage accelerated the clash with the Western world, felt too far from Iranian identity and too decadent for the local morality.

²²³ Chehabi 2018, 170.

²²⁴ Chehabi 2018, 168.

²²⁵ Chehabi 2018, 168. According to the author, this drama directed by Hálász negatively impressed the audience as, besides the violence of the play, it displayed unveiled feminine intimate parts on camera during a raping scene.

²²⁶ "Censorship" in Encyclopedia Iranica.

The 2500th Anniversary of the Monarchy

The celebrations held in Iran on the occasion of the 2500th Anniversary of the Iranian Monarchy represent the peak of the Pahlavi's exaggerated opulence. Even nowadays in popular imagination, both in Iran and Europe, it is regarded as one of the most fabulous events undertaken to show the wellness of the ruling elite and its country. As previously discussed, the role of this Anniversary had more an importance for the foreign than the inner politics. The main aim of this event was to prove the world that a Middle Eastern country such as Iran had the right and the duty to have a prestigious place in the international political arena among the other nations, especially nation-states.²²⁷ The motivation behind this thought was the conviction that being a part of the group of the modern nation-states could take place since it was already done by the elite of the Ancient civilizations, hence, the government stood in its right to regain that role again.²²⁸

The first attempt to plan a celebration that could enhance the Pahlavi dynasty and draw a line between the ancient glories of pre-Islamic Persia and the modern Iranian nation was made in 1958 by Shoja'eddin Shafā, the leading member of the Imperial Court.²²⁹ Seeing the grandeur of the project, Shafā established in the same year the *Shurhā-ye Markazi-ye Jashnā-ye Shahānshahī-ye Īrān*: an organizing council dependent from the Imperial court and deputed to supervise the preparation of the celebrations.²³⁰ Although the organization of these events was already underway and the ceremonies were meant to take place in 1962, the Imperial Court postponed them to 1971. The reasons for this delay must be traced in the lack of both financial resources able to sustain the costs for the long series of events and adequate infrastructures allowing the easy movement of the court and foreign heads of state who were invited in Iran for this special occasion.²³¹ Postponing the celebrations to 1971 meant also that increasing revenues from the oil market could support even greater events and that additional historical and social

²²⁷ Talinn Grigor, "They have not changed in 2500 years". In *Unmasking Ideology in Imperial and Colonial Archaeology: Vocabulary, Symbols, and Legacy*. Ed by Effros, Bonnie ; Lai, Guolong (eScholarship: University of California, 2018), 121.

²²⁸ Ibidem.

²²⁹ Robert Steele, "The Pahlavi National Library Project: Education and Modernization in Late Pahlavi Iran". *Iranian Studies*, 52:1-2 (2019): 92.

²³⁰ Ibidem.

²³¹ Nokhodcheri, 146.

studies on Achaemenid and Sassanian civilizations could better present the Shah's dynastical narrative.²³² During the 1960s, in anticipation to the celebrations, the *Shurhā-ye Markazi-ye Jashnā-ye Shahānshahi-ye Irān* was assisted by the Imperial Cultural Committee (*Shurā-ye Farhangī-ye Irān*) in organizing cultural activities regarding Iranian culture outside of Iran that could coincide with the moment of the celebrations in 1971.²³³ It is for this reason that in 1966 the *Komisiyon-e Motāle'āt-e Tārīkhī-ye Jashnā-ye Shāhanshāhī-ye Irān* (Historical Committee of the Imperial Celebrations) was established, directly depending from the Imperial Cultural Committee.²³⁴

The final plan for the Celebrations for the 2500 Anniversary of the Iranian Monarchy foresaw a three-day event composed by ceremonies which would have been located in three different locations: Pasargadae, Persepolis and finally Tehran.²³⁵ The first day (12 October 1971) was dedicated to the opening speech made by Mohammad Reza Shah in front of Cyrus' Tomb in Pasargadae and followed by a banquet in Persepolis. The latter became the stage for the second day of celebrations. In this day the heads of states were accompanied for a tour around the ruins of the site and attended a military parade that held the site as its background. After the final banquet in Persepolis, the whole Pahlavi Court and its hosts moved back to Tehran, where, on the last day of celebrations, the Shah inaugurated the *Shahyād Āryāmehr Monument* (nowadays *Āzādi Tower*) that became the house of the Cyrus' Cylinder loaned from the British Museum.

The choice to hold the majority of the events in Persepolis or in its immediate proximities was made after a series of political and scenic considerations. As explained before, the emphasis put on this site during the whole Pahlavi period led to consider the ruins of Parseh as the cultural and ideological centre of Pahlavi monarchy. The site was explored by archaeological campaigns and, following the touristic success that was experiencing thanks to the efforts of the government, it was made accessible for an increasing number of purposes and as stage of different events, for instance, the aforementioned Shiraz Festival of Arts. However, before the celebrations could take place in this site, both Persepolis and Pasargadae underwent various architectural and

²³² Ibidem.

²³³ On the base of the official figures, Steele affirms that in 1971 were organized only outside Iran 143 art exhibitions, 323 seminars and other academic congresses, 37 artistic events and were published more than 130 books on matters regarding Iranian history and culture.

²³⁴ Steele, "The Pahlavi National Library Project", 92.

²³⁵ Nokhodcheri, 149.

technical adjustments. The latter were meant to make both the sites accessible to the hosts and to the militaries performing the parade on the forefront of Persepolis. As pointed out by Grigor, these works were also meant to give the sites a “modern look” that could introduce them to modernity without deeding the value of their antique aura.²³⁶ The best example of these amendments was the request made by the Iranian authorities to the Italian archaeological mission in Persepolis directed by Giuseppe Tilia to conduct further excavations to allow the installation of flood-lights and the Philips acoustic system inside the archaeological site.²³⁷

By 1971 Persepolis was meant to welcome more than 6000 men in the second day of celebrations and host five major official events: Mohammad Reza Shah’s celebrative speeches on the 15th of October, two dinner banquets, a firework show and a light-acoustic spectacle. In addition to these appointments, the archaeological site was chosen by the Shah to host also the “Tent City”: an agglomerate of luxury-furnished tents meant to host the Shah’s international guests and the sixty-nine heads of state, allowing them to bivouac just outside the ruins of Persepolis. This experience, strongly encouraged by the Shah, was meant to create as sensation that the Iranian Court was convinced the foreign dignitaries wanted to feel in their stay in the country.²³⁸ Although with this move the Shah believed to look modern and western as well as profoundly tied to his roots, as commented by Grigor, “he created a grotesque show resembling Western stereotypes instead of establishing a new Iran in a Western manner”.²³⁹ This last affirmation allows to transpose the “Self-Orientalization” process described by Zia-Ebrahimi in approaching the implication of Reza Shah’s ideology also during the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah.²⁴⁰ I argue that Mohammad Reza Shah, likewise his father did 40 years before him, refused to engage in a serious reflection aiming to counter some of the Orientalists’ prejudices towards Iran. Reza Shah tried as much as he could to “dislocate” Iran from the Middle Eastern context into Europe using the Aryan discourse to link Iranians to Europeans through an elusive and supposed common ancestor. Likewise, Mohammad Reza Shah, still dulled by the Aryan propaganda used before the

²³⁶ Grigor, “They have not changed in 2500 years”, 133.

²³⁷ Ibidem.

²³⁸ Grigor, 135.

²³⁹ Grigor, 136

²⁴⁰ Reza Zia-Ebrahimi “Self-Orientalization and Dislocation: The Uses and Abuses of the “Aryan” Discourse in Iran” *Iranian Studies*, Vol.44, no.4 (2011): 445-472.

Second World War, did not realized the obsolescence of that model and realized a three-days show on the base of wrong cultural clichés. The Shiraz film festival and the Anniversary of 1971 were used to ease the inferiority complex that the “Light of Aryans”, as Mohammad Reza Shah titled himself after 1965, and his nationalist Pahlavi elite had towards the West, implicitly recognizing as real the supposed western superiority on Iran.²⁴¹

Persepolis after the Islamic Revolution

As we have seen in the previous chapter when discussing the development of the discipline of Archaeology and the continuation of archaeological campaigns in the region, Persepolis retained its cultural significance even after the victory of the Revolution in 1979. At the beginning of the Revolution, Persepolis was considered as the expression of Pahlavi monarchical and elitist exuberance, resulting a very unpopular location among the revolutionary masses.²⁴² However, despite verbal attempts made by the revolutionary zeal of some clerics (among the others, Ayatollah Khalkhali) who were calling to tear down the site to its fundamentals, Persepolis resisted the ideological and political change of 1979.²⁴³

From the 1990s onwards, Rafsanjani and Khatami’s governments softened their approach to pre-Islamic heritage. During his visit to this site on the 20th of April 1992, Rafsanjani expressed his pride in admiring the relics of the ancient Achaemenid palace:

*...Visiting the incredible remains at Persepolis provokes considerable national pride in every individual. By seeing these remains, our people will discover their own capabilities and the cultural background of their country, and will believe that they will recover their historical role in the future to uphold upon this talent and foundation, the blazing torch of Islam to light the path of other nations.*²⁴⁴

²⁴¹ Mohammad Reza Shah’s full title after 1965 was: “His Imperial and Royal Highness Aryamehr Shahanshah of Iran Mohammad Reza Shah”

²⁴² Nokhodcheri, 153.

²⁴³ Nokhodcheri, 156

²⁴⁴ Kamyar Abdi, 72.

This speech is of fundamental importance as it demonstrates that, after the War, the government was appeasing the state institutions with the pre-Islamic heritage as it considered the Islamic ideals of the Revolution and their outcomes another chapter of the Iranian history and Iranian identity. As we can read, Rafsanjani did so by entangling the historical consciousness of Iranians within an Islamic discourse and picking up Persepolis as the best background where to convey this conciliating message.²⁴⁵ This approach was followed and further developed by Rafsanjani's successor, the reformist Khatami, with the so-called "Dialogue among Civilizations", through which he eased the relations with the West and allowed an increased research in the country's cultural past.²⁴⁶ The cultural idea that Khatami's administration wanted to convey was to look at the whole Iranian history as a single discourse, without creating moral distinctions or pursuing old prejudices towards different historical periods. This is the reason why, aside of initiatives aiming to support the creation and the growth of associations caring the historical pre-Islamic heritage, Khatami's administration promoted cultural initiatives which could represent the entirety of the Iranian cultural heritage. Two interesting examples of this development were the creation of the Pars-e Pasargad Research Institute (*Bonyad-e Pajoheshi-e Pars-e Pasargad*) in 2002 and the organization of the international exhibition "7000 years of Iranian Art", which started in Wien in 2000.²⁴⁷ The former institute became the leading designated body in Iran for conducting Achaemenid research and the management and protection of archaeological sites from this period, including Persepolis.²⁴⁸ At the same time, the exhibition had a positive impact on reintroducing Islamic Iranian culture and art to the world, so that the director of Iran's National Museum, Mohammadreza Kargar, decided that the exhibition entitled "7,000 Years of Iranian Art" would have toured Italy, Germany, Belgium, Sweden, Spain, U.S. and Mexico.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁵ Abdi, 72.

²⁴⁶ Nokhodcheri, 160.

²⁴⁷ Nokhodcheri, 211.

²⁴⁸ Nokhodcheri, 161.

²⁴⁹ <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/64339/7-000-Years-of-Iranian-Art-Exhibition-to-Be-Held-in-7-Countries>

Persepolis under Ahmadinejad's rule

While on the one hand Ahmadinejad firmly opposed the major openness to the West and delivered policies exalting the Islamic spirit of the Iranian Republic, on the other hand he did not abandon the reconciliation path with the pre-Islamic legacy of the country. Pre-Islamic art was again under the spotlight all around the world during the first years of Ahmadinejad's presidency and different international exhibitions with the aim to highlight the pre-Islamic period were held abroad. Among others, it is possible to remember the joint exhibition held by the British and the Louvre Museums "*Forgotten Persian Empire*" in 2005, the exhibition "*Glory of Persia*" held in Japan in 2007 and lastly the exhibition "*The Sassanid Persians, Splendors of a Forgotten Empire*" organized in France with the contribution of several French museums (among others the Louvre and the Cernouschi Museums) in 2006.²⁵⁰ Finally, in 2010 Tehran welcomed the opening ceremony dedicated to the exhibition of the Cyrus' cylinder, with the participation of the highest State personalities and chaired by President Mahmud Ahmadinejad.²⁵¹ This ceremony officialised the beginning of a four-month exposition of the cylinder in the Azadi Tower, once known as the *Shahyād Āryāmeh̄r Monument*, dedicated to the Mohammad Reza Shah, considered under the Pahlavi monarchy the spiritual heir of Cyrus.²⁵²

As mentioned in the previous chapter, after his contested re-election in 2009, Ahmadinejad strayed his political discourse from a strenuous defence of Islam into an attempt to Islamicize the pre-1979 nationalist discourse and to nationalize universal messages of independence and prosperity shared by both the clergy and the laic society.²⁵³ In this context, Persepolis was already brought into the domestic Iranian political arena in 2007, when Ahmadinejad visited the site and, striking a pose for the cameras with the site at his background, stated: "Islam is victorious" (*Eslām pirūz ast*).²⁵⁴ Persepolis was again used in Ahmadinejad's political narrative in 2010, one year after the Persian celebration of *Nowruz* (the New Year's eve celebrated on the night between the 20th and the 21st of March) was listed in the UNESCO List of Intangible

²⁵⁰ Nokhodcheri, 163

²⁵¹ Ibidem.

²⁵² Fozi, 227.

²⁵³ Fozi, 248

²⁵⁴ Nokhodcheri 163.

Cultural Heritage of Humanity.²⁵⁵ To celebrate this important achievement for Iran's culture, Ahmadinejad proposed to hold a Nowruz celebration in the archaeological park of Persepolis. The references to the celebrations for the 2500 Anniversary of the monarchy were so clear that the Supreme Leader Khamenei and the clergy launched a harsh protest against this proposal accusing the President to keep a political line that was betraying the principles of the Revolution and warned not to follow a path towards apostasy because of his populist and nationalist rhetoric.²⁵⁶

The site of Persepolis offered an important base for the continuation and the further development of cultural and archaeological exchanges between Iran and a number of western countries, among them, Italy, France and Germany.²⁵⁷

Cultural and political relations between Iran and Italy after the Iran-Iraq War

The persistence of friendly political relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Italian Republic helped to maintain a close cultural collaboration between the two countries and to turn Italy as one of the most trustable partners for Iran. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the year 1997 sealed the beginning of new Italian missions in the country that continued under Khatami's presidency. The election as President of Ahmadinejad in 2005 did not affect the cultural and archaeological collaboration between Iran and Italy. This happened because, beside the fact that these projects were already foreseen by the previous administrations, the positive relations with Italian government significantly helped the continuation of these projects despite the financial difficulties experienced during Ahmadinejad's period.²⁵⁸ However, it would be possible to argue that, besides this reason, there is a deeper explanation regarding the choice to maintain the archaeological collaborations with Italy. As mentioned above, Ahmadinejad's administration made extensive use of pre-Islamic or Islamic monuments in order to highlight the new Shi'a-nationalistic political discourse. Hence, projects

²⁵⁵ Nokhodcheri, 163.

²⁵⁶ Fozi, 242-243.

²⁵⁷ Nokhodcheri, 52; 159.

²⁵⁸ Nokhodcheri, 160.

aimed to restore important Iranian monuments, such as the Italian ones, perfectly fit the frame of this political moment.

Although Nokhodcheri mentioned a “lack of progresses and scientific techniques” in the development of archaeological activities in Iran under Ahmadinejad, the Italian excavations in Fars represent an pivotal moment for the spread of new digging and conservative techniques and for a better comprehension of the region.²⁵⁹ The Joint Iranian-Italian Archaeological Missions in Fars (composed by elements of the ICAR, Bologna University, the ISMEO and Shiraz University) undertook in 2005-2006 a new excavation campaign in Tang-e Bolaghi under the co-direction of Pierfrancesco Callieri and Alireza Askari Chaverdi.²⁶⁰ As described in the Catalogue published on the 60th Anniversary of the beginning of joint collaboration between Italy and Iran, this project was meant to take place within the frame of the “Sivand Dam Archaeological Rescue Project”, started in 2004 by the Scientific foundation Parse-Pasargadae (directed by M.H. Talebian) and the Iranian Centre for the Archaeological Research (directed by M. Azarnoush) to document the archaeological revenues from a huge valley southwards Pasargadae meant to be submerged by an artificial water reservoir.²⁶¹ The Joint Mission was explicitly invited to participate to the inquiry on settlements from the post-Achaemenid period. Moreover, In the following year this Joint mission further explored through stratigraphic surveys the sequence of ceramic findings from the British mission directed by David Stronach in Tall-e Takht in Pasargadae between 1961-1963.²⁶²

The first Italian archaeological mission in Persepolis after the victory of the Islamic Revolution was undertaken between 2008 and 2010 once again by the proven Iranian Italian Joint Archaeological Mission in Fars under the direction of Alireza Askari

²⁵⁹ Nokhodcheri, 162.

²⁶⁰ For a more detailed overview on the Italian archaeological missions in Fars during Ahmadinejad’s presidency, see pagg. 65, 67, 69, 71 of the Catalogue *Iran and Italy: 60 Years of Collaboration on Cultural Heritage*, ed. by Callieri, P; Nokandeh J; Rossi, A; Seyyed Sajjadi S. M. (pre-print version, 2019).

²⁶¹ Alireza Askari Chaverdi, Pierfrancesco Callieri, “Missione Archeologica Congiunta Irano-Italiana in Fars (ICAR-Università di Bologna-ISMEO-Shiraz University): 2005-2006, scavi a Tang-e Bolaghi, co-direttori A. Askari Chaverdi, P. Callieri” In *Iran and Italy: 60 Years of Collaboration on Cultural Heritage*, ed. by Callieri, P; Nokandeh J; Rossi, A; Seyyed Sajjadi S. M. (pre-print version, 2019), 65.

²⁶² Alireza Askari-Chaverdi, Pierfrancesco Callieri “Missione Archeologica Congiunta Irano-Italiana in Fars (ICAR-Università di Bologna-ISMEO-Shiraz University): 2006-2007, scavi a Tall-e Takht, Pasargadae, co-direttori A. Askari-Chaverdi, P. Callieri” In *Iran and Italy: 60 Years of Collaboration on Cultural Heritage*, ed. by Callieri, P; Nokandeh J; Rossi, A; Seyyed Sajjadi S. M. (pre-print version, 2019), 67.

Chaverdi and Pierfrancesco Callieri.²⁶³ This conservation project, called “From Palace to Town” (*Az Kākh tā Shahr*), was composed by surveys and excavations projects. Through this project, the Joint Mission shifted the focus on the settled areas of the archaeological site but retained the focus on the monuments located on the terrace and their conservation problems.²⁶⁴ The project “From Palace to Town” has another interesting particularity. Whether all the previous projects meant to conserve the rests of Persepolis or further excavate certain areas of the site were focused on the “palace”, this was the first project which aimed to verify the existence of a city of common people, mainly serving in or for the Achaemenid court, just in the surroundings of the ancient court site.²⁶⁵ Nokhodcheri expresses a further consideration on this point. Focusing on the search for a settlement was not just a scientific decision, but enclosed also a precise political will. The discovery of a settlement for common people in Persepolis became a scientific success that reflected the political narrative of an Islamic State interested in fulfilling the Islamic ideals of the Revolution by serving the oppressed underclass of society.²⁶⁶

As reported in the interview with Askari Chaverdi, the project “From Palace to Town” was of fundamental importance to deepen the archaeological knowledge of the area surrounding Persepolis. In the interview had with the author in April 2021, the Iranian archaeologist affirmed that:

...we started the geo-physic system in the area of Parseh and 100 hectares we tried to understand what was this, and we have published in the book “Persepolis West” the outcomes of this inquiry. And then you know the situation of Parseh. After thirteen years of joint activities around and in terrace of Persepolis we now have introduced a new view, really here these (ruins) are the Parseh city and we need to protect it is not just

²⁶³ Alireza Askari-Chaverdi, Pierfrancesco Callieri, “Missione Archeologica Congiunta Irano-Italiana in Fars (ICAR-Università di Bologna-ISMEO-Shiraz University): 2008-2010, progetto di ricognizioni, scavi, conservazione “Dal Palazzo alla Città” a Persepolis, co-direttori A. Askari Chaverdi, P. Callieri” In *Iran and Italy: 60 Years of Collaboration on Cultural Heritage*, ed. by Callieri, P; Nokandeh J; Rossi, A; Seyyed Sajjadi S. M. (pre-print version, 2019), 69.

²⁶⁴ Ibidem.

²⁶⁵ Nokhodcheri, 161.

²⁶⁶ Nokhodcheri, 162-163.

*Persepolis terrace and area (around). The result of these joint activities was very useful to protect the site.*²⁶⁷

Finally, from 2011 to 2018 the Iranian Italian Archaeological Mission in Fars further pursued the activities of the “From Palace to Town” project. Eight campaigns based on stratigraphic surveys brought to light 3.5 km westwards of the Terrace of Persepolis an extraordinary monument: an exact copy of the southern section of the Ishtar Gate of Babylonia.²⁶⁸ This revenue was just different for bigger dimensions and slight constructive details, but proved the existence of a real urban settlement in the area of Parseh in the proto-Achaemenid period.²⁶⁹

Developments in recent years

In the previous section were briefly explained and described the aim and the findings of the project “From Palace to Town”, which crossed the change of administration in 2014. Under Rouhani’s presidency many Italian-Iranian joint cultural project were renovated and cultural ties strengthened in the wake of the expected signature of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the agreement regulating the Iranian nuclear program. On the 13th March 2015 the Italian former Prime Minister Matteo Renzi welcomed in Rome former President Rouhani, resulting the signature of the Executive Collaboration Program for the years 2015-2018.²⁷⁰

In 2019, under the new administration, the project “From Firuzabad to the Persian Gulf”, which involved archaeological conservative surveys in the Central and Southern Fars province, was launched by the Iranian-Italian Archaeological Mission in Fars.²⁷¹

²⁶⁷ Interview Askari, Appendix 3, 102.

²⁶⁸ Alireza Askari-Chaverdi, “Missione Archeologica Congiunta Irano-Italiana in Fars (ICAR-Università di Bologna-ISMEO-Shiraz University): 2011-2018, scavi a Tol-e Ajori, co-direttori A. Askari Chaverdi, P. Callieri” In *Iran and Italy: 60 Years of Collaboration on Cultural Heritage*, ed. by Callieri, P; Nokandeh J; Rossi, A; Seyyed Sajjadi S. M. (pre-print version, 2019), 71.

²⁶⁹ Ibidem.

²⁷⁰ See Appendix 2, 93-95.

²⁷¹ Alireza Askari-Chaverdi, Pierfrancesco Callieri, “Missione Archeologica Congiunta Irano-Italiana in Fars (ICAR-Università di Bologna-ISMEO-Shiraz University): 2019, indagini archeologiche e conservative nel Fars centro-meridionale, progetto “Da Firuzabad al Golfo Persico”, co-direttori A. Askari Chaverdi, P. Callieri” In *Iran and Italy: 60 Years of Collaboration on Cultural Heritage*, ed. by Callieri, P; Nokandeh J; Rossi, A; Seyyed Sajjadi S. M. (pre-print version, 2019), 81.

This programme, led again by Alireza Askari Chaverdi and Pierfrancesco Callieri, was dedicated to the study of human development dynamics in Southern Fars province, between the Firuzabad plateau and the Persian Gulf coast. The focus was put on the relationship between the inhabitants of this area and the territorial politics and communication routes during different periods taken into account by archaeologists.²⁷²

Although in recent years the focus on archaeology involved new areas and topics, as the aforementioned example can demonstrate, in 2019 the archaeological site of Persepolis was still the object of further archaeological studies and conservative restoration. In this year a collaboration among the no-profit organization “Restauratori senza frontiere-Italia” (Restorers without Borders-Italy), the Research Centre for Conservation of Cultural Properties (RCCCR) and the Persepolis World Heritage Site was successfully established.²⁷³ The project “Persepolis International Monuments Conservation Project” (PIMCP), directed by H. Fadaei, P. Pastorello and R. Ralunani, was based on a preliminary survey held in 2018 and started its activities in Spring 2019. The aim of the project was to undertake conservative restorations of significant parts of the Eastern Gate of the Trypilon and the Southern facade of the Tachara, both located on the Terrace of Persepolis. Works accounted for 300.000€ and were financed by the Swiss Law Foundation based in Genève, the “Foundation Evergète”.²⁷⁴ As affirmed in a recent interview with the founder Bertrand du Vignaud, the foundation is actively committed in supporting restoration projects all around Europe. It decided to invest in the PIMCP because of the validity of the project because of a previous successful collaboration with Paolo Pastorello, president of “Restauratori senza frontiere-Italia” (RSF) and co-director of the PIMCP project, in the restoration of the frescos of Galleria dei Carracci in Palazzo Farnese in Rome between 2013 and 2015.²⁷⁵ The launch of this project regarding the archaeological park of Persepolis is of fundamental importance, as this

²⁷² Ibidem.

²⁷³ Hamid Fadaei, Paolo Pastorello, “Collaborazione dell’associazione “Restauratori senza Frontiere - Italia” con il Research Centre for Conservation of Cultural Properties (RCCCR) e il Persepolis World Heritage Site, con sponsorizzazione della Fondation Evergète, Ginevra: 2019, attività di studio e conservazione a Persepolis, direttori H. Fadaei, P. Pastorello, R. Rahmani” In *Iran and Italy: 60 Years of Collaboration on Cultural Heritage*, ed. by Callieri, P; Nokandeh J; Rossi, A; Seyyed Sajjadi S. M. (pre-print version, 2019), 101.

²⁷⁴ Marimpietri, “Quei Persiani dalla barba blu”, 87-89.

²⁷⁵ Marimpietri, 108.

has been de facto the first ever conservation project in Iran granted by the Iranian authorities to a foreign private organization since 1979.²⁷⁶

Interviewed by the journal in 2020, Pastorello explained that this project is based on a common agreement signed by both the head of RSF and the Persepolis archaeological site supervisory institutions: the Research Centre for Conservation and Restoration of Cultural Relics and the direction of Persepolis World Heritage Site UNESCO, under the aegis of the Research Institute of Cultural Heritage and Tourism.²⁷⁷ He affirmed that “It’s a virtuous collaboration between an Iranian State Institute and an International private organization working on cultural heritage.”²⁷⁸ In the brief interview published in the journal *Archeo* inside the volume of October 2020, Pastorello re-affirms as primary targets of this mission, the conservation of the monuments and the share of scientific knowledge and information in the field of restoration through cultural and educational exchanges among Italy and other different nations.²⁷⁹

As demonstrated by the previous interview, the archaeological activities conducted in Iran by independent organizations, such as the RSF-Italy, or by institutional exchanges, such as the Iranian-Italian Archaeological Mission in Fars, have been extensively covered by Italian archaeological journals and on-line magazines. However, in Italy this media coverage does not limit itself just to the group of insiders, but has been trying to reach as many people as possible. An example of this attitude can be represented by the local Italian newspaper *Il Resto del Carlino*, distributed along the Adriatic coast and in Bologna region. In occasion of the official announcement regarding the discovery of the Ishtar gate in Tol-e Ajori, this newspaper dedicated an entire page to explain the importance of this discovery and demonstrate the prosperity of bilateral relations between Iran and Italy.²⁸⁰ Similarly, in Iran the newspaper *Tehran Times* has highlighted the same points in several of his on-line articles during the entire 2021,

²⁷⁶ Marimpietri, 86.

²⁷⁷ To read the complete interview, please see: Marimpietri. “Quei Persiani dalla barba blu”, 86-96; 103-105; 109.

²⁷⁸ Marimpietri, 86.

²⁷⁹ Marimpietri, 89.

²⁸⁰ This newspaper does not dispose of an on-line archive, as a consequence the only source available to prove the existence of this article is a screenshot of the Instagram page of the Italian School in Tehran “Pietro Della Valle”:
<https://www.instagram.com/p/CN7rg4fAQgn/>.

giving a detailed update about the collaboration with Italian institutes at the beginning of November 2021.²⁸¹

Since 2020 it is possible to note an increased attention towards the archaeological collaborations between Italy and Iran (especially those involving the site of Persepolis) also in the official press of the Italian Embassy in the Islamic Republic of Iran.²⁸² The official Instagram page of the Embassy and of the Italian School in Tehran “Pietro Della Valle” have often posted contents regarding the Italian archaeological activities in Iran and their outcomes.²⁸³ For example, the visit to Persepolis made by the Italian Ambassador in Iran, H.E. Giuseppe Perrone, together with Alireza Askari Chaverdi and some members of the troupe that worked in the site on the 8th of December 2021 has been extensively covered both by the Instagram page of the Embassy and by the *Tehran Times*.²⁸⁴

In a moment rich in international challenges and pandemic needs such as the one faced nowadays by the world in general – but by Iran in particular – cultural collaboration between Iran and Italy becomes also a way to prove the strength of the political ties between the two countries. The economic exchanges between the two countries flourished after the signature of the JCPOA. Italy in 2017 was the first European economic partner for Iran, but unfortunately, they rapidly contracted as a consequence of the U.S. withdrawal from the aforementioned agreement in 2018.²⁸⁵ This has been a shame as the Italian government in 2014 was one among the few nations which was planning to intensify trade and diplomatic exchange with Iran to improve both national and European cooperation with the Iranian State in matters such as global security and climate changes.²⁸⁶ The efforts put in the cultural sector by the Italian Embassy in Iran are witnessed not just by the stress on archaeological missions but also by the launch of projects regarding cinema, architecture, cuisine and by investing on higher formation

²⁸¹ <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/454428/Journey-to-the-past-a-glimpse-of-Tehran-Rome-projects-in-archaeology>.

²⁸² <https://www.instagram.com/p/CX8mvG1tmIC/>.

²⁸³ <https://www.instagram.com/p/CN7rg4fAQgn/>.

²⁸⁴ <https://www.instagram.com/p/CXOUf8INLBp/>.

²⁸⁵ https://www.agi.it/rubriche/asia/iran-iran_ripresa_interscambio_roma_torna_primo_partner_ue-1804274/news/2017-05-23/

²⁸⁶ These are the outcomes of the important meeting hosted in Rome by the former Italian PM Matteo Renzi and the former President of the Iranian Republic of Iran Hasan Rouhani in 2015.

for Iranians in Italy.²⁸⁷ For example, an interesting initiative hosted by the Italian Embassy in Iran was the project “Domus Eyes on Iran”, a series of 10 documentaries produced by the Italian embassy in Iran aiming to explain the architectural creations made in Iran by Iranian and Italian architects and designers from 1950 onwards.²⁸⁸ The launch of this editorial initiative was hosted in preview in November at Villa Namāzi, an example of modern architecture realized in Tehran between the 1950s and the 1960s by the Italian architect Giò Ponti. Even on this occasion the Italian Ambassador expressed his pride in admiring the exemplarity of this villa as witness of the collaboration and the friendship between the two countries and reiterated the importance they have in maintaining great bilateral relations.²⁸⁹

Conclusions

This chapter has illustrated how the archaeological site of Persepolis has been entangled since the beginning of the 20th century with the political life of Iran as it was widely employed in the political narrative by both the Pahlavi Shahs and the Islamic Republic. However, looking at the Pahlavi period, there is an important difference that distinguished the two Shah’s approaches to the site. During the reign of Reza Shah Persepolis was considered the best example of the Achaemenid civilization and, as a consequence, the supposed aesthetic and cultural model through which shape the country and its inhabitants. On the contrary, under the rule of Mohammad Reza Shah, the focus shifted from the ethnic-nationalist discourse of Reza Shah to the dynastic nationalism of Mohammad Reza Shah, from the Iranian people to the Iranian monarchy. The site of Persepolis was employed to demonstrate that Iran could access the network of the nation-states thanks to the centrality, the appeal and the cultural richness of the

²⁸⁷ For more information on the activities organized by the Italian Embassy in Iran, please see the Institutional website of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the webpage of the Italian Embassy in Iran: https://ambteheran.esteri.it/ambasciata_teheran/it/.

²⁸⁸ For a detailed description of the event and the purposes of the collaboration between the Domus review and the Italian Embassy in Iran, see the digital monograph offered by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs: https://www.esteri.it/it/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/retediplomatica/2021/11/monografia-su-domus-eyes-on-iran-dellambasciata-a-teheran/

²⁸⁹ https://www.esteri.it/it/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/retediplomatica/2021/11/monografia-su-domus-eyes-on-iran-dellambasciata-a-teheran/

Iranian institution of the monarchy (the Pahlavi monarchy in this case) which was following the ideals and the example given by the Achaemenid palatial complex. Despite the above mentioned difference, it is interesting to note that the concept of “Self-Orientalization and Dislocation” can describe both the Reza Shah and the Mohammad Reza Shah’s periods. During Reza Shah the emphasis on the Aryan discourse was used to dislodge Iran from its Middle Eastern background and force it into a Western one.²⁹⁰ Likewise, Mohammad Reza Shah tried to dislodge the Iranian country from its position of Middle Eastern country by resembling the western countries in artistic patronage, military might and by adopting a series of social reforms based on the western depiction of the country.

After the fall of the Pahlavi dynasty and the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Persepolis retained its allure and its cultural significance. Despite the end of the State nationalist discourse produced by the Islamic Revolution in 1979, during Rafsanjani and Khatami’s government Persepolis was chosen as the stage where to mend the relation with the pre-Islamic past in the new Islamic State thanks to the identity value that was still having. After the end of the Iran-Iraq War in 1989 and the new rise of Nationalist sentiments, Iran was making efforts to play a greater role in the Persian Gulf region and beyond. In this new geo-political context, the enhancement of the archaeological site of Persepolis as symbol of the dialogue between different cultures was used by the governments to stimulate cultural and educational collaborations between Iran and other western countries. The perfect example of these cultural and educative contacts are the several projects conducted by Italian institutes in Iran from the 1990s onwards, representing a solid example of joint and respectful collaboration. This process favoured a cultural distension that had positive repercussions also on the political sphere until the terrorist attacks of the 11 September 2001 and the following regional destabilisation.

With the rise to power of Ahmadinejad in 2005 and the formulation of a populist discourse that was rephrasing and mixing Shi’a traditions with ethnic and dynastic nationalism ideas, Persepolis reappeared in the political arena but maintaining a marked cultural value. However, this cultural value can be read also through a political lens. The cultural collaborations held with Italy and with other European partners

²⁹⁰ Ebrahimi, 468.

demonstrate that the state's interest in investing in its culture can be used as a tool to show the world the civil progress of the country.

Due to the instability of the JCPOA pact and the Covid-19 pandemic and the consequent difficulties to establish a deeper economic and political cooperation, cultural projects are an important mean to maintain relations between Iran and its old European partners. For example, it is through cultural policies that Italy and Iran have all these years maintained close and trustful cultural but also developed some political collaborations. Finally, the recent developments in the cultural sector may suggest that, whether the trend of the current cultural collaboration will continue as it is nowadays, and no serious obstacle would undermine these ties, a more solid political collaboration could grow between the two countries.

Conclusions

The aim of this research was to understand how the different administrations have dealt with pre-Islamic cultural and artistic heritage. It did so by inquiring the evolution of cultural policies towards archaeology and pre-Islamic heritage before and after the Islamic Revolution of 1979, highlighting the role played in this long process by the Italian archaeological missions.

All the Iranian administrations, with the exception of those in the period 1979-1989, have used pre-Islamic heritage in the national rhetoric. The Pahlavi dynasty institutionalized it to set down a new backdrop for the revival of Iran. The I.R.I, after the harsh closure given by the Islamic Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War to this cultural period, has restored dignity to pre-Islamic heritage, finally reconciling the nation with its pre-Islamic past in the 1990s. This happened by recognizing pre-Islamic heritage as a fundamental part of the Iranian identity and demonstrating to the world the cultural tolerance towards foreign or domestic non-Islamic cultural elements. In this process, the discipline of archaeology and the archaeological activities have been used constantly by the cultural apparatus in order to help the government's narration. During the Pahlavi times archaeological campaigns were meant to provide concrete evidences of pre-Islamic past to spread through propaganda, while from the 1990s onwards to improve the knowledge on Iranian past as part of those comprehensive efforts to establish a dialogue between Iran and the West.

The cultural policies implemented by the Pahlavi State and by the Islamic Republic of Iran are an excellent tool to measure and understand not just the ideological distance between the Pahlavi State and the I.R.I, but also to spot the ideological differences between the Pahlavi Shahs and among the Presidents of the Islamic Republic. The comparison of the cultural policies pursued by the Pahlavi Shahs and after the Islamic Revolution has given way to affirm that in the most of the cases they largely responded to nationalistic purposes, leading to affirm that nationalism has played a primary role in forming the ideology of the modern Iranian State from 1926 onwards. Overall, during Pahlavi times nationalism was the core of the state ideology, while after the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, nationalist elements re-emerged in the State discourse only during the second half of the 1990s and became increasingly explicit with Ahmadinejad's presidency. As we have seen in the first chapter, cultural

policies implemented during the Pahlavi rules confirm the multiple similarities in the cultural action of the Shahs, but highlight also some relevant differences in their political thought. While it is possible to frame the Shahs' cultural and political action under the constructs of "Invented Traditions" and "Self-Orientalization and Dislocation", elaborated respectively by Hobsbawm and Zia-Ebrahimi, the ends towards which they aimed were different.

After the independence of Iran was at risk in the early 1920s, Reza Shah implemented an ethnic and secular nationalism to defend the country from foreign interests, aiming at the same time to reach the power and prosperity experienced by European countries by modernizing and laicizing the country. Reza Shah institutionalized the ancient pre-Islamic culture, especially the Achaemenid and Sassanian periods, as part of a nationalist discourse enhancing a supposed superiority of the Iranian people and dismiss as obsolete and backward the Islamic costumes. This pre-Islamic discourse was supported by explicit references to the western theory of the Aryan Myth (particularly emphasized in Iran by Herzfeld and Pope) in an attempt to create a mythical past and prestigious shared traditions ready to become the roots of a renovated, laic and progressive Iranian society. Some of the examples of this attitude are the influences on institutional architecture of the 1930s and the stress on the importance of Ferdowsi's Shahname, as it enhanced the pre-Islamic heroic characters and their values.

In contrast to his father, Mohammad Reza Shah looked at pre-Islamic heritage as a means to support the legitimacy of the monarchy. The references to the greatness of the Achaemenid and Sassanian empires and their glorious history were proposed as evidence of the great moral, cultural and political achievements reached in the past by Iranian civilizations under the rule of great dynasties. Hence, by looking at the ruins of the monuments erected in those glorious times, Iranians should have envisioned the prosperity that Iran was supposedly ready to achieve under the rule of Mohammad Reza Shah. The stress Mohammad Reza Shah put on his kingship was due to his idea of the proper role of the king in Iran, a "father" for the entire country and its people. This concept was largely spread in the country and abroad thanks to the several interviews that the king had with foreign journalists and thanks to the publication of his book *Towards a Great Civilization*.²⁹¹ Moreover, festivals and national events such as the

²⁹¹ *You Westerners simply don't understand the philosophy behind my power. The Iranians think of their sovereign as a father. What you call 'my celebration' was to them the celebration of Iran's father. The monarchy is the cement of*

those organized for the 2500th Anniversary of the Iranian Monarchy, meant to highlight the cultural, political and dynastical aspects of Mohammad Reza Shah legitimate rule, remain still nowadays the most unforgettable demonstration of power of the Pahlavi dynasty.

The Islamic Revolution of 1979 and the following years of instability culminated during the Iran-Iraq War posed a serious threat to the whole Iranian artistic heritage and to the pre-Islamic one in particular. As we have seen, Pahlavi nationalism was replaced by Khomeini's pan-Islamism, which de facto deprived pre-Islamic monuments of the social and institutional role given them by the authority. Moreover, many were the monuments that were used for the purposes of the conflict and were heavily damaged between 1980 and 1988. During the 1990s many cultural efforts were made to rediscover Iran's rich cultural heritage. These were meant not just to valorise the Iranian identity after such a terrible conflict and restore damaged artefacts, but also to show the International community that Iran was aware of the importance of culture for the recovery of the nation, depicting the country in a way that could be respected internationally. Through these actions of cultural diplomacy, Rafsanjani and Khatami's governments believed in the possibility to diminish tensions with the International community and carry out more easily major politics helpful for Iran's progress and stability. Following the election of Ahmadinejad, the use of pre-Islamic heritage in the cultural discourse became more manifest as the new president proceeded to create a discourse drawing links between the pre-Islamic grandeur and the Islamic Republic. As reported in the conclusions of the second chapter, he created the conditions to see in the Islamic Republic of Iran the heir of the pre-Islamic golden past.

Another point that this thesis makes clear is that, among the cultural policies undertaken by the Iranian State, archaeological excavations have been used in the nation-building process during the Pahlavi rule, but also, as the recent developments have shown, under the Islamic Republic of Iran. During Reza Shah's rule, Pope and Herzfeld envisioned in archaeology a reliable tool which could help rediscovering the traces of pre-Islamic civilizations and actualize their legacy in the new State. Likewise, under the Rule of Mohammad Reza Shah the study of this discipline increased and improved thanks to the

our unity. In celebrating our twenty-five hundredth anniversary, all I was doing was celebrating the anniversary of my country, of which I am the father. Now, if to you, a father is inevitably a dictator, that is your problem, not mine. Quoted in: Gérard de Villiers (1975), *The Imperial Shah: An Informal Biography*, page 284

collaboration with foreign cultural institutes. The best example given to this extent is the collaboration with the IsMEO, the Italian Oriental Institute which launched several archaeological and restoration missions in Iran between 1959 and 1979. The presence of Italian archaeologists in Iran was fundamental to improve the teaching of the discipline in the academia and the execution of the excavations. Indeed, the IsMEO missions were explicitly aiming to help local researchers to carry out research using innovative technologies and modernize the excavation methods. Moreover, as we have seen in the second chapter, in the last decade of Pahlavi rule a particular attention was put in the cultural sector to improve the care of the entire Iranian cultural heritage, giving proper importance to different historical periods and their artistic legacy. Hence, the efforts made by Firuz Bagherzadeh can be considered an excellent example of the capability in those years to create an organization that was able to improve scientific excavations in Iran and valorising the entire Iranian cultural heritage, not just limiting the emphasis on the pre-Islamic period.

Immediately after the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the relation between the State and pre-Islamic heritage became very different from the Pahlavi times. This happened mainly for two important reasons: the shift from the Pahlavi rule to the Islamic Republic, so the political commitment to create a clear cut with the past political and cultural directions, and the Iran-Iraq war, which affected the country for almost 10 years. The focus on the first three years after the Revolution confirmed that in those hectic years pre-Islamic heritage and archaeology were both seen as something deeply intertwined with the previous State system and hence disregarded by the earliest revolutionary governments. The interviews with Pierfrancesco Callieri confirmed that, because of the war and the urgent political and military needs the State had to deal with for its survival, during the 1980s there could not be enough space for a structured cultural dialogue and archaeological development. The situation changed after the end of the war, when both pre-Islamic heritage and archaeology saw a passage from a complete negligence and hostility by the new rule to a progressive acceptance and development. After the economical and political difficulties due to the war period, the discipline was reintegrated in academic programmes and new collaborations were launched with foreign countries and institutes. Italian archaeological institutes such as IsMEO/ISMEO and universities such as University of Bologna had a striking importance in continuing joint archaeological missions in Iran and leading to widen the scope of current collaborations between Italy and Iran. As seen in the second and in the

third chapter, since the first energetic collaborations between the ENI and the NIOC, Iran and Italy had always retained positive relations, which went beyond the government change in 1979, promoting constant and fruitful cultural collaboration. The interviews had with Pierfrancesco Callieri and Alireza Askari Chaverdi confirmed that this human and cultural legacy still nowadays makes Italy one of the most important Western partners for Iran despite the current international political conditions which prevent the establishment of a well-structured bilateral cooperation (especially economical cooperation).

The last conclusion regards the site of Persepolis/Takht-e Jamshid. This thesis has demonstrated how this archaeological site has been since the establishment of the Pahlavi rule the best cared-for national monument in Iran, benefitting an extreme attention by both the Pahlavi State and the Islamic Republic of Iran. The approaches and the political use of the site during the last century perfectly reflected the political exigencies of the central power in determined historical periods. While for Reza Shah Persepolis exemplified a moral and aesthetic model through which shape the country, for Mohammad Reza Shah the site was the demonstration of the prosperity reached by ancient monarchies and the example that his State had to follow to let the country prosper and the Pahlavi monarchy survive. These two different visions were exemplified in the thesis by analysing some pivotal moment of each Shah's rule. Reza Shah tried through the use of State controlled press to inculcate pride and admiration for the past civilizations to the Iranian people by displaying the latest archaeological progresses in the site and by visiting Persepolis together with his cultural collaborators. Similarly, but very differently from Reza Shah's approach, the shows and festivals held in Persepolis by Mohammad Reza Shah reflected the Shah's willingness to see in Persepolis' ruins not only the ideological, but also the material centre of the Iranian monarchy and hence, the honorary centre of the Iranian nation.

Given the great importance that this site had for Iranians, Persepolis was again at the centre of the cultural attention in Iran after the Iran-Iraq War. In occasion of the introduction of the cultural plan known as "Dialogue among Civilizations", meant to reconcile Iran with the West and vice versa, Persepolis was chosen as a symbol of coexistence of both the Islamic and pre-Islamic sides of the Iranian identity as a direct consequence of Khatami's political and religious thought. Moreover, Persepolis was chosen also as a symbol of tolerance among different cultures because of the presence

of the various artistic traditions, coming from the multiple populations ruled by the Achaemenid Empire, that merged into its construction. Moreover, the rich archaeological treasure of Persepolis became object of international scientific collaborations in Iran that continues even nowadays. A clear example of these international collaborations is represented in recent times by the fruitful collaboration between the Iranian University of Shiraz and the Italian University of Bologna, which have established strong ties and long term agreements further confirmed through a bilateral executive cultural collaboration program signed in 2015 by the Iranian and Italian governments in Rome.

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Appendix 1: Pictures

Figure 1: Police Headquarters in Tehran

©https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Central-police-office-of-Pahlavi-Tehran-Source-wwwTrekearthcom_fig22_289127978



The columns clearly resembles those of the Gateway of All the Nations in Persepolis. Moreover, the frieze at the base of the building is a clear reference to the frieze at the base of the Apadana.



Figure 2: The Museum of National Heritage

©<https://www.iranroute.com/sights/43/national-museum-of-iran>

©<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/01/iraq-baghdad-taq-kasra-ctesiphon.html>



The design of the Museum Iran-e Bastan takes inspiration from the vault at the entrance of Ctesiphon palace.

Picture 3: Courthouse of Tehran

©https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Courthouse_of_Tehran#/media/File:Ministerstvo_spravedlnosti_v_Teher%C3%A1nu.jpg

©https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palazzo_della_Libert%C3%A0#/media/File:0palazzo_della_Libert%C3%A0.jpg



The Courthouse of Tehran can be used as an example of the influence that the architectural current of Monumentalism, used between the 1920s and the 1930s especially by the Italian Fascism, had on Pahlavi architecture. Here a comparison with the House of Freedom in Bergamo, Italy.

Picture 4: the National Bank of Iran

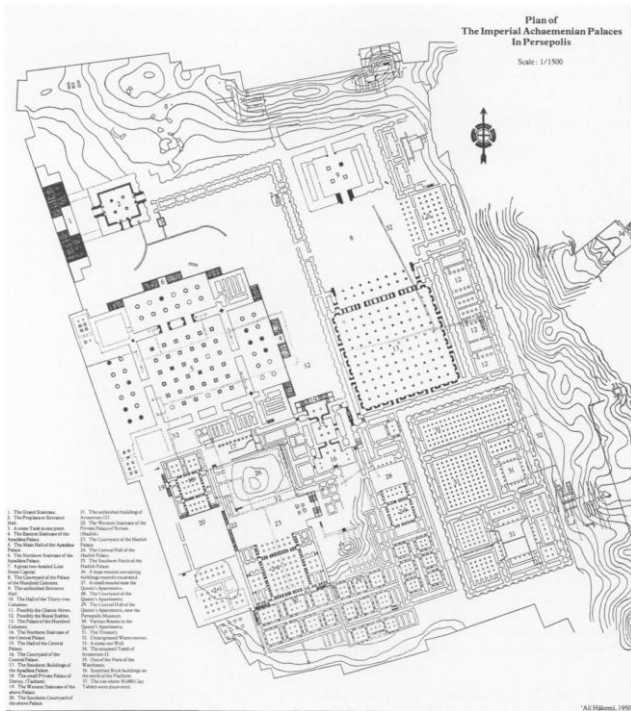
© https://stringfixer.com/nl/Bank_Melli_Iran

©<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/ap-art-history/ancient-mediterranean-ap/ancient-near-east-a/a/persepolis>



Volutes with expressively imitating those of the Chamber of the 100 Columns in Persepolis were applied to the columns sustaining the roof of the National Bank of Iran.

Map of Persepolis



Map of Persepolis

©Ali Hashemi 1950.

Appendix 2: Executive program for collaboration in the field of culture, Education, Higher Education and Research between the Italian Republic and the Islamic Republic of Iran (13th March 2015)

**PROGRAMMA ESECUTIVO DI COLLABORAZIONE
NELL'AMBITO DELLA CULTURA, DELL'ISTRUZIONE,
DELL'ALTA FORMAZIONE E DELLA RICERCA
TRA LA REPUBBLICA ITALIANA
E
LA REPUBBLICA ISLAMICA DELL'IRAN
PER GLI ANNI 2015 - 2018 (1394 - 1397)**

Il governo della Repubblica Italiana e il governo della Repubblica Islamica dell'Iran (di seguito indicati come "le Parti"), tenuto conto dell'interesse a un ulteriore rafforzamento dei legami di amicizia fra i due popoli e a un maggior consolidamento e sviluppo della loro collaborazione nell'ambito della cultura, della scienza e dell'istruzione sulla base dell'Accordo Culturale stipulato il 29 novembre 1958 (8 Azar 1337), concordano quanto segue per gli anni 2015-2018 (1394 - 1397).

I. CULTURA E ARTE

1. Nel periodo di validità del presente programma le Parti continueranno ad attivarsi **in ambito culturale** mediante:

- lo scambio di informazioni, esperienze, pubblicazioni ed altro materiale illustrativo, quali foto e diapositive, film, microfilm, audiovisivi e DVD;
- lo scambio di delegazioni, composte da autorità ed esperti degli affari culturali, per visitare e conoscere i centri e le attività culturali e artistiche dei due Paesi;
- la partecipazione di rappresentanti della cultura e dell'arte dei due Paesi in importanti Festival, seminari, conferenze o altri eventi culturali ed artistici che si svolgono nei rispettivi Paesi;
- lo svolgimento di Settimane della Cultura nei rispettivi Paesi e l'organizzazione di mostre, spettacoli ed altre iniziative culturali specifiche di alto livello.

Le iniziative di cui sopra saranno definite, caso per caso, per le vie Diplomatiche e attraverso la consultazione con le Istituzioni competenti.

2. In Particolare, nel settore delle arti visive, le Parti favoriranno:

dei due differenti Paesi (per l'Italia: Direzione Generale per le Biblioteche, gli Istituti Culturali e il Diritto d'Autore) al fine di apprendere e confrontare le differenti normative e/o regolamentazioni e predisporre reciproche forme di tutela sia per le pubblicazioni a stampa che per quelle in formato elettronico.

11. Nel settore dell'archeologia e della conservazione del patrimonio culturale, le Parti favoriranno:

- la collaborazione attraverso attività di ricerca, restauro, e di lotta al traffico illecito di beni culturali, anche sulla base di esperienze pregresse ed iniziative già in atto;
- lo scambio di informazioni e l'organizzazione di mostre, conferenze e seminari su temi di mutuo interesse nel settore;
- lo scambio di visite di esperti nei siti archeologici dei due Paesi;
- la realizzazione di pubblicazioni bilingui relative agli studi e/o ai restauri congiunti effettuati nelle zone archeologiche dei due Paesi;
- la collaborazione tra le istituzioni museali, le Università e gli Istituti di Ricerca dei due Paesi.
- lo sviluppo di rapporti di collaborazione tra il Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale "Giuseppe Tucci" di Roma, l'ISMEO-Associazione per gli Studi del Mediterraneo e l'Oriente, e il Research Institute for Cultural Heritage and Tourism (RICHT), ivi inclusa la ricognizione archeologica.

In quest'ambito, le Parti guardano con favore alla realizzazione di una mostra di alto livello sulle attività italiane di ricerca archeologica e lo sviluppo dei rapporti di collaborazione tra il Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale "Giuseppe Tucci" di Roma e il Museo Nazionale dell'Iran. Auspicano inoltre la presentazione in Iran della Rassegna Internazionale del Cinema Archeologico, organizzata dal Museo Civico di Rovereto.

12. In particolare, nel settore della ricerca archeologica, le due Parti auspicano il proseguimento dell'attività delle missioni archeologiche italiane operanti in Iran ed il completamento delle iniziative avviate nel settore del restauro. A tal fine si continuerà a favorire la collaborazione tra il Ministero italiano dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali e del Turismo e l'Iranian Cultural Heritage Handicraft and Tourism Organization (ICHHTO), nonché gli accordi delle singole Università e degli enti di ricerca italiani con il Dipartimento di Archeologia del RICHT. A questo proposito, le Parti prendono atto

13. Nell'ambito di una maggiore collaborazione tra le istituzioni museali dei due Paesi, le due Parti favoriranno:

- l'esposizione di collezioni e l'organizzazione congiunta di seminari tematici, al fine di promuovere la conoscenza della storia e della cultura di entrambi i Paesi;
- il prestito di oggetti d'arte a fine espositivo, nel rispetto delle legislazioni in vigore nei due Paesi;
- la realizzazione di attività di ricerca comuni nonché le collaborazioni nel campo della museologia, della museografia e della catalogazione.

A questo proposito si segnalano le seguenti iniziative di studio di materiali del Museo Nazionale dell'Iran:

- Collezioni di sigilli e impronte di epoca storica, dal periodo elamita a quello sasanide (Sapienza-Università di Roma/ Museo Nazionale dell'Iran);
- Iscrizioni elamite ed antico-persiane (Università di Napoli "L'Orientale" / Museo Nazionale dell'Iran);
- Iscrizioni urartee (CNR/ Museo Nazionale dell'Iran).

14. Le Parti prendono atto con soddisfazione degli accordi e memorandum d'intesa in corso nel settore della conservazione e del restauro e auspicano scambi di esperti nel restauro di:

- materiali di pietra, terracotta e carta,
- pitture a olio e opere su carta

e concorderanno le modalità di tale collaborazione.

In questo quadro il RICHT si dichiara disponibile a firmare un accordo con l'Università di Bari volto alla realizzazione di un progetto congiunto per la documentazione ed il restauro di manufatti storici, nonché all'organizzazione di corsi di formazione specifici nei due Paesi.

15. Al fine di prevenire l'importazione, l'esportazione e la circolazione illegale di opere d'arte, documenti, beni culturali e altri reperti che possiedono valore storico, le Parti sosterranno la stretta collaborazione tra l'Iranian Cultural Heritage Handicraft and Tourism Organization (ICHHTO) e il Ministero italiano dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali e del Turismo.

16. Inoltre, le Parti si impegnano a collaborare per valorizzare e

Appendix 3: Interviews

NOTE: The explanatory notes of the interviews taken with Dr Askari Chaverdi and Prof Callieri are the result of a very short and informal meeting held with Prof. Callieri on the 9th of June 2021. In this occasion, I did not transcribed the entire conversation, but I have just extended the notes about the interviews with the answers given by Prof Callieri. Unfortunately, as Dr Askari Chaverdi was in this period not available for another short conversation due to his dense academic agenda, I could not have a similar meeting with the Iranian scholar and the notes I have put on his interview are the results of my research or the answers given me by Prof Callieri, who very kindly helped me in this. On a more graphic level, the explanations given by Prof. Callieri that I put in note are marked with an asterisk (*).

Interview with Dr. Alireza Askari Chaverdi

Leiden, 20th April 2021

First of all, I would like to ask you, I have read in different papers and articles that Pre-Islamic art and architecture became in Iran source of interest for archaeological research and cultural studies, especially from Reza Shah's rule. There were many monuments in Iran that from and through the Pahlavi era were reconsidered. One of them is Persepolis/Taxt-e Jamshīd, but also Hatra, Arg-e Bām, also the mausoleum of Cyrus. Why among all these important monuments in Iran, Persepolis has acquired such an importance, why is so important nowadays? What is the message that conveys to its visitors?

*Do you like to hear the government's position or the common people's position?*²⁹²

I would like to ask you from the people's point of view.

If I can explain you, well, Iranian people are pretty complicated. We have to make a distinction between the period before the Islamic Revolution in 1979 and after the Islamic Revolution, in order to understand the people's position, as many people try to accompany the government's view. The relation between the government and the middle-class society was and still is quite

²⁹² After have spoken with Prof. Callieri, it is possible to say that, most probably, with the term "common people", Dr Askari identifies those people who are not insiders or that have not a deep knowledge nor interest in the Archaeological features of Iran. Probably, he identifies also with this term both local and foreign tourists visiting the site.

tight, so that it is normal that before the Iranian Revolution in the Pahlavi period, people were more interested in the site. As a reaction, after the Revolution for two decades there was a repulse towards this interest, an attitude that changed in the third and the fourth decades after the Revolution. In these two last decades, there was an improvement in the technical and scientific knowledge in Iran thanks to the efforts made by the Ministries, especially in education training. This happened especially after the inscription of many Iranian monuments in the UNESCO list, monuments such as Pasargadeh or Persepolis, but even the mosques of Isfahan.

After this move, also the people's view changed: they recognized the misuse of power from the government. Even I believe in the fact that they used this heritage according to a fascist way of doing, legitimating government by linking it to the past and introducing it with the propaganda to the common people. I think that the UNESCO view regarding the sustainable development completely changed the view of Iranians, even of the specialists. For example, I am an archaeologist and site manager of Sasanian Archaeological Landscape in Fars Region and we try to introduce in our plan the UNESCO view of sustainable development for Tourism, culture, environment condition, trying to re-introduce Cyrus and Persepolis in frame of Scientific knowledge, not as Fascism. In Universities, for students and common people. Even in Persepolis introduce to people that Persepolis is a part of History, not just a milestone and I am quite sure that my view is shared by almost 50-60% of professors of my field, for example.

For this reason, I presume you are very happy about the result of the Joint Iranian-Italian mission in Persepolis. As this year marks the 5th anniversary of the venture between University of Bologna and University of Shiraz, I would like to ask you if there are any other countries with which you have such a positive relation or any agreement.

There is agreement between the Iranian and Italian universities, is more than six year that actually we are working together. When I was rector of the Artistic and Archaeological Department of Shiraz University I have participated in many conferences and meetings in Iran and in Italy, organized by the Ministry of Iran and the Italian Embassy and Science Ministry of Italy. I think that not only in the Archaeological and Artistic fields, but also in other kinds of university such as in Mechanic and Engineering there are similar agreements with Italy. All universities in Iran have good relations with Italy, but in Culture the relation is, if I can say that, special. Also there were, before and after Iranian Revolution, little changes in the form, for example even before the Iranian Revolution, Italy had the target of restoration and conservation, as we can see in Persepolis or Shahr-e Sultan, but for what regards other countries such as US, UK, France and Germany, they came to Iran independently before the Revolution and the Iranian government gave them the possibility to make excavations. After

the Iranian Revolution, especially during the time of Director Massoud Āzarnoush, there were established different agreements. He tried to put exactly the Iranians and the foreign team in equal parts, with two supervisors.²⁹³ He also extended this shape to missions from other countries, then he conducted excavations according to the scientific method, trying to improve the quality of Iranian team.

This attitude to research quality continues even in our days. We report every night with our peer and this methodology after ten years of joint activities in Tol-e Ajori in Parse gave very interesting results, because we now know better each other and we can together investigate better the sites we are working on. Even if for 6 months we don't have our Italian peers here, we still decide together and we report all our improvements together.

That's important because it seems there is a day by day contact and the trust is very strong. I would like to talk about a slightly different topic. You have said that you and your colleagues in the University are trying to improve the knowledge of the pre-Islamic heritage in the civil society. Leaving for a moment apart the archaeological point of view, are there in Iran, currently, any project for students in schools, projects for children or adolescents in order to get pupils involved in the historical heritage?

One more thing, Joint projects are usually provided 50-50 by the Iranian government and Italian ISMEO Institute and Bologna University. And also Italian Embassy is involved in shaping this relation. We try to increase the 50 per cent, I am sure that Iranian side try to support with 80-85 per cent of the costs. For example the roofing of the site, the food for workers the rent of the houses, internet, electricity and so on, but it is fine as you know, is part of the team work in the joint activity.

We try to train the common people, we have invited Italian children from the Italian school in Teheran, they came by flight to visit the site of Persepolis and they were with us for an entire day and we try to explain our activities. Definitely we are doing the same with Iranians in general, not just for Iranian student. Normally students from Iranian university come to visit our site, but even the court people from Marvdasht district, here in Shiraz, we invite them and we try to explain them the sustainable development, history and culture, for more protection in buffer zones and core zones of the world heritage. And then 6 years ago for example I have invited them on a boat trip and they are very important and they try to support the love in for

²⁹³ Massoud Azarnoush (1945-2008) was an Iranian Archaeologist who worked with foreign teams, for example from Germany or Poland. He lived as an outcast in the USA until 1985 and then came back to Iran, where he took up the direction of the ICAR (Iranian Centre for Archaeological Research). Moreover, he had a fundamental role in re-organizing the ICAR and preparing its new location in the Mas'udieh Palace in 2002. *

heritage. This was an incredible experience, as they have learnt a lot regarding the history of Iran and the history of our civilization, trying to educate them and keep over relation with local communities and even with the workers. We use 30 workers for season and this number for each season is very good because they come usually from the villages and we try to aware them in matters and aims in the frame of sustainable tourism and touristic development of the area.

Thank you for your explanation. You previously mentioned that you see the process of encouraging people in developing a consciousness in cultural heritage as step by step process. You also said that the third and the fourth generation of professors, if I am not wrong, are trying to develop an increasing awareness on the archaeological excavation in Iran. Now, is there something that in the current situation of the site and in the current excavation you would like to see changed or improved?

Well we try to improve, I believe that training in Education and Culture should be slow and gradual and aimed to reach the guidelines in frame of the world heritage maintenance.²⁹⁴ A sudden change or a sudden boost in this direction would encounter some problems. We are doing our best efforts to intrigue people in what we do, so that they can be interested in these subject and absorb our projects. When film makers came to our site, I expressively asked them “please, make a short film but very interesting, put the monuments in the history of Iran but not in a boring way, so that people are curious and are willing to come and visit our site”. Then, during the explanation in the site it is interesting to listen to people’s ideas and points of view and see how the common people receive our point of view, and we explain them why is so important to protect our own culture and the culture of the rest of the world. It was very interesting also when they understood that the way we are carrying out our research is a scientific one.

This site is very important because it is a joint venture and the common people ask why the Italian came in Iran to continue this excavations. Normally they think that foreign countries come to our land because they are interested in the objects with high value that they find here and that’s it, but this is not the case, our relation has also become an example. Moreover, as a

²⁹⁴ With this sentence, Dr Askari Chaverdi refers to the Guidelines created by the UN agency for World Tourism (UNWTO). The aim of these guidelines is to implement sustainable development in the frame of Tourism by respecting geo-physique and socio-cultural environment in the site. The complete list of aims and purposes of this project can be found at <https://www.unwto.org/sustainable-development> .

*sign of the prestige reached, I was invited in Georgia to visit the Samshivilde site and we worked there with the Georgia University in this very interesting site.*²⁹⁵

The view of common people on heritage and archaeological activities really changed from the past, before the Islamic Revolution and after the Islamic Revolution. Especially in the last 20 years, Iranian people in the academic field and in the Institutions of the Country changed their view on the cultural heritage and its aims, you know, they sometimes come with the wrong views or confused ideas they might have, such as “why the Achaemenid king was against Islam”(chuckles). Even to the Muslim community we are trying to explain how the history of Iran is long and to the professors who are interested in Islam affairs, to let them understand that we have to understand Iran in progress and consider Islamic and Pre-Islamic times not just as a different thing but as a expression of the history and culture of our Country.

Yes, I understand your point of view, and actually you anticipated the topic of my next question with your answer, because I was also wondering if you have film makers or cinema industry that comes to Persepolis to make videos of the site, do you know if there are advertisements on tv, in internet or for tourism?

Yes, many Iranian and even European come to Persepolis and try to make a film, especially for tourism, even ARTE from France came to Iran and also other locals make videos for Persepolis, yes, they are very active.

That’s wonderful and I am glad to hear that the site has increased its prestige in the recent times. However, you have stressed out that the common people’s ideas about archaeology or about heritage have changed especially before and after the Revolution. After the Revolution you have said that the average knowledge on these topics has really improved. My question is why before the Revolution the common people didn’t know much about heritage. Maybe I might be wrong, but I have read that the Persepolis was very important during the Shah regime as it was used for the celebrations for the anniversary of 2500 years of the empire and it was a symbol of Iran, so it should have been known by the people.

I think that the King of Iran at first tried to introduce the site of Persepolis only for touristic purposes, but then after, and also during the celebration of the 2500 years of the Persian Empire also (he introduced) the whole period of this part of Iranian heritage. And then he wanted to introduce the Iranian history because before the Revolution the people were not very knowledgeable so he chose the site as a good spot where to invite historians and host events. I

²⁹⁵ Dr Askari Chaverdi here mentions the formal invite by Georgia University on the 22nd March 2019 to present the archaeological mission in Tol-e Ajori and its outcomes.

know that many and many interpretations after the Revolution (where made) and political groups have criticized him because in their view he resulted in attempting to introduce them against the Islam. But when we put in frame of cultural heritage or tourism, I think a part of his activities on introducing the history on Iran was interesting, because without this way, how could him introduce Iranian history to the personalities of all the countries? We have to be back in those times, and also understand that there are different ethnics so usually the political people of these areas they sometimes try themselves to go independently against the government even now after the Islamic Revolution. And then I think that the king of Iran tried to unite all the tribes and communities of Iran using this concept of the golden (past) of Iran so not to let them separate it or let them independent. But then the same unfortunately, the same political groups are also against the Islamic Republic of Iran, but after that, the Republic have tried to unify Iran through the use of Islamic religion.

This is how to present the two views because part of the people, they always (have tried) to be the critical group, there are in Iran and abroad common voices against Iran. But the celebration definitely was a good occasion for these critical groups (to go) against the Shah, to criticize him and then they mix everything together. And also, a reasonable judge in the past context was very difficult, if we are looking to the past I have scientific critics about the celebrations because they have cultivated many trees and they have damaged the site and with the instrumentations is hard now to understand the ground, and around (Persepolis) and they also have build structures...you know there was even a village built there...

Yes, it's true, I heard about metal structures *have damaged the site, because they were used for their interests but they ended up to damage what was there.*

Ok, ok, my view, my critique is better to say, is a scientific critique: to the big activities such as the celebrations, even the people know (the situation) of the cultural heritage objects and architecture and is very bad for the building and the city of Parse. If they wanted (to) have celebrations, they could have made a model or a market in Tehran or to rebuild the structures in another place. They could do all they wanted to do, but not into the real site. Inside is very bad, they have changed the collocation of objects, plans and architectural elements, they could have find other ways, it was not necessary that many many person came to the archaeological site and they celebrated and built many many tents inside of the Pardis and with such as the so called Jungle"...

Yes, it's true, I spoke briefly also with Dr Maryam Soleimani who is working with you and Dr Callieri in Shiraz, and she also explained me a bit the problems with the area were the tents

were. Nowadays and they are getting old and old and they are damaging the site from an artistic point of view.

Even not the jungle, you know that they have supported a special police used for the control of celebrations...and what about the military parade? Well it was not good, because you know 500 hectares in Parse were completely damaged by the celebrations. Maybe they were not able to understand the situation of the site. You know, in Parse there was not much archaeological information and the attention was all devolved to Persepolis, only recently the situation changed.

About 13 years ago Bologna University under the supervision of Dr Callieri and Shiraz University under my supervision, we wrote the proposal for the project "From Palace to Town" and we started the geo-physic system in the area of Parse and 100 hectares we tried to understand what is this, and we have published in the book "Persepolis West" the outcomes of this inquiry.

And then you know the situation of Parse. After thirteen years of joint activities, around in terrace Persepolis now we introduced a new view, really here this (ruins) is the Parse city and we need to protect it is not just Persepolis terrace and area (around). The result of these joint activities was very useful to protect the site. Now, tomorrow for (example), we have a meeting about what we have to do about the Pardis. Nowadays we have two view, one is more conservative such as keeping things as they went and as they are now, while the other is more to try to give to tourism and private company for touristic activities.

My view is better keep the Pardis and tends the same as they were, just to use them as an example of how they were in the past.²⁹⁶

Very interesting, to be honest I just hope that the Covid situation will improve, I can't wait to come back to Iran and see again Persepolis and all the improvements made in the last 4 years. I will now conclude my interview and I thank you very much for your kind availability and for the precious information that you have given me.

Fine, thank you as well and keep me updated if you need anything else, I am available.

Thank you, goodnight.

²⁹⁶ The tents Dr Askari Chaverdi is referring to in this passage are the rests of the tents located in the Pardis Garden of Persepolis. These movable facilities were ordered by the Shah in 1971 to host official delegations from the whole world in occasion of the celebration for the 2500 anniversary of the Persian Empire. However, they were never removed completely from what was thought to be a temporary location and, as a result, the metal structures of these tents are still planted in the Pardis Garden. *

Goodnight.

Interview with Prof. Callieri

Leiden, 21st April 2021

Dunque, ieri ho avuto il piacere di poter parlare con il Prof Askari ed è stato molto importante avere la sua testimonianza per quanto riguarda la situazione attuale degli scavi in Iran. Tra le cose più interessanti che sono venute a galla, c'è stato sicuramente il giudizio positivo del professore circa il miglioramento dell'insegnamento dell'archeologia in Iran e soprattutto anche professori universitari di epoca pre-Islamica che hanno iniziato a promuovere maggiormente lo studio di questo periodo storico. Ho chiesto al professore ma non ho avuto una risposta chiara: cos'è effettivamente cambiato negli ultimi 20 anni, a cosa è dovuto il maggior sviluppo della tematica.

So, yesterday I had the great pleasure to speak with Dr Askari and it was very important to have his opinion and point of view on current situation of excavations in Iran. Among the things that were brought up in our conversation, stands the professor's positive judgement of the improvements in the teaching of Archaeology in Iran and in the efforts made by the professors to let this historical period more known. I have asked the professor, but I haven't received a clear answer, what changed in the last 20 years so that there has been this improvement?

Allora, deve tenere presente che il rapporto tra la Repubblica Islamica dell'Iran e l'archeologia (tutta) è tutto un po' falsato dal fatto che l'anno successivo la rivoluzione è iniziata la guerra con l'Iraq e ha distrutto le famiglie, ha colpito tutta la nazione e ha distolto l'attenzione dalle cose meno urgenti. Questo ha influenzato negativamente la ricerca archeologica dal momento che c'è stata una battuta d'arresto nelle spedizioni di scavo ma in occidente questa battuta d'arresto viene vista dimenticandosi spesso che c'era una guerra, ora se andiamo a vedere la

situazione archeologica in occidente durante la seconda guerra mondiale ci saranno stato pochi archeologi che facevano gli scavi, no?

Well, you have to take in consideration that the relation between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Archaeology (all of it) has been distorted by the Iran-Iraq war which started the year after the Revolution. It was a tough conflict which has destroyed the nation, has fragmented families and has diverted the attention from those non urgent matters. This has negatively affected the archaeological research, as there has been a setback of all western archaeological expeditions in the country. In the West this setback due to the war is often forgotten, but if we go back to the archaeological situation in Europe during the years of the second World conflict, well there would have been few operative archaeologists, don't you think so?

Certo.

Of course.

Ecco, ora secondo me non c'è mai stato un pregiudizio vero del regime che si è venuto ad affermare contro l'archeologia, semmai alcune posizioni singole. C'è stato un "black out" che è durato fino agli anni ottanta e molti archeologi sono andati via dall' Iran, molti giovani correvano il rischio di finire in prima linea e c'è stato un prosciugamento delle risorse umane che poi si sono rimpolpate con la fine della guerra. Ecco quindi che questa tendenza di recuperare una certa dimensione della ricerca e della pratica archeologica si è sviluppata e aumentata. Una situazione di chiusura che progressivamente si è sviluppata e si è aperta.

Well, now, in my opinion there has never been a negative prejudice from the Islamic republic executive class against archaeology, probably it is only possible to affirm that there were singular positions against certain forms of archaeology, but maybe we will head back to this later. There has been a cultural and educational black out that lasted until the end of the 80s because many archaeologists left Iran because of the war, especially the young ones as they were risking to end up in the frontline trenches. There has been a drainage of human resources that after the war has been fleshed up. So that it is possible to say that the tendency to recover a certain dimension of archaeological research and practice has consequently risen up after the war.

Ho capito, infatti a quanto so, anche leggendo ultimamente nei giornali specializzati italiani, come "Archeo", il livello di relazioni tra Iran e Italia, anche grazie alle spedizioni archeologiche a Persepoli, è eccellente sotto molti punti di vista.

I understand, in fact as I am reading in different Italian specialized journals, as “Archeo”, this is a process which improved also thanks to the Italian excavations in Persepolis and both because and as a consequence of this, the relations between Italy and Iran are excellent under many points of view.

Sì, senza dubbio, tengo però comunque presente che siamo il paese che ha il legame in tempi recenti più continuo con l'Iran, insieme ai tedeschi. Gli altri paesi europei hanno avuto tutte esperienze meno positive. Come lei sa l'Inghilterra aveva una grande presenza nella nazione prima della rivoluzione assieme a US con Francia e Germania, questi erano i mostri sacri della archeologia occidentale in Iran. La Francia aveva il monopolio delle ricerche, poi negli anni 70 si erano affermati IUS e Inghilterra.

L'Italia è arrivata dopo grazie all'azione di Tucci, ha iniziato a lavorare nei primi anni 60 nel Sistan, al confine con il Pakistan.

Yes, undoubtedly. But of course we have to remember that we are the country that, together with Germany, had in recent times the closest link with Iran. All the other European countries had less positive experiences. As you know, the UK had a great presence in Iran before the Revolution, as well as the US with France and Germany, these were the so called “sacred monsters” of western Archaeology in Iran. France had the monopoly of researches in Iran, then in the '70s UK and US became predominant. Italy arrived later with the expeditions of Tucci who started working in Sistan only in the '60s close to the border with Pakistan, another countries were Italians were digging.

Che sono poi gli scavi di Shahr-e Sukhte, vero?

You are mentioning the excavations of Shahr-e Sukhte, right?

Hmm no, questa è la fase successiva, la prima fase è quella di Prof Bullini, (di) Kuh-e Khwāje... oh questo però tutta la presenza europea deve essere rivista e rivisitata alla luce di un fatto importantissimo, e il prof Adriano rossi lo ricorda spesso: l'Italia ha avuto in Enrico Mattei ha avuto una persona che ha svolto un ruolo esplosivo, tanto esplosivo che c'è pure morto

Hmm well no, that is the following phase to be honest, the first stage is the one in Kuh-e Khwāje, under the supervision of Prof. Bullini. However, going back to the main question, all the Italian presence in Iran has to be reviewed and re-analyzed in light of an really important event, and Dr Adriano Rossi, current director of the ISMEO Institute always points out: the

incredible role of Enrico Mattei. He was a character which had such a role, an explosive role...so explosive that indeed he was blown up...²⁹⁷

Eh purtroppo le ombre e le luci di quella storie sono note a molti...

Yes, unfortunately the lights and the shadows of that accident are known...

Sì praticamente lo sanno tutti che è stato ucciso.

Well yes, everybody knows that he was killed.

Sì esattamente

Exactly.

Lui non solo in Italia ma anche in Iran è ricordato, anche molto calorosamente. È stato lui che ha reso l'Italia paese amico dei paesi dell'Asia, mentre gli altri sono stati percepiti come sanguisughe, lei sa benissimo che gli inglesi sono odiati in Iran...

He is remembered not only in Italy but even in Iran, warmly remembered. He made Italy a friend of the Asian countries, while the other European countries have been perceived as leeches, you know that British are quite hated in Iran...

Sì, so bene che non godono di ottima fama, tra l'altro leggendo gli articoli che sto sfogliando per la tesi, si evince anche l'antipatia per i lavori svolti dalla Francia perché...

Yeah I read that they don't enjoy an excellent reputation there. And also, I have been reading that also the works made by France left Iranians quite unhappy because...

²⁹⁷ Enrico Mattei (1906-1962) was an Italian entrepreneur, politician, public executive and founder of the ENI (Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi), an Italian oil multinational which significantly contributed to Italian post-war recovery. He became famous in the Middle East thanks to his will to help developing the countries where the oil was extracted. In fact, as president of the ENI, he established new partnerships with post-colonial middle eastern countries, shaping an innovative collaboration between producers and extracting companies. While the multinationals of oil, the "seven sisters", bound local governments into contracts 50-50%, the "Mattei doctrine", as it was called later, was offering a 75% of the revenues to the countries producers of oil and 25% to the ENI, and by extension to Italy. This contracts clashed with the Seven Sisters interests, as that extra 25% given to local governments meant the concrete possibility of a boost for local economies and a possible emancipation of those countries from the colonial attitudes of Western oil companies. In 1962, Mattei dies in a suspect airplane crash while flying from Catania to Milan. Recent investigations leave little doubts that he has been victim of an explosion caused by a bomb placed on his aircraft.

Prof. Callieri in this sentence refers to the fact that Mattei, thanks to his long-term political and economic view made Italy an important commercial partner for the Middle Eastern countries. The "Mattei doctrine" in fact, despite the death of his inventor, put Italian commercial interests opposed to the ones of

...Sì ecco la Francia, la Francia continua ad avere un po' un ruolo ambiguo in tutto ciò perché i francesi non sono stati colonialisti come gli US o gli inglese ma in ambito archeologico sono presi come tali perché se lei va a Susa nel Khuzestān non trova molto nel museo locale.

Yeah, France also has a quite ambiguous role in all this, because French were not colonialist in the same way of the British or Americans, but in the archaeological field they had a similar reputation...if you visit the local museum of Susa in Khuzestan, well, you won't find many materials.

Infatti, volevo aggiungere che c'è stata una diatriba proprio su alcuni reperti portati in Francia e mai più restituiti.

Yes, in fact I wanted to add this to the question, there has been a fierce diatribe exactly on these findings, taken to France and never handed back.

Esattamente, ecco noi Italiani non facciamo così, non abbiamo questa situazione, al museo nazionale di arte orientale abbiamo qualche oggetto proveniente dagli scavi ma donato dal governo Iraniano per gli scavi di Shar-e Sukhte o delle spedizioni in Pakistan. Sulla base della nostra attività, i Paesi che ci hanno ospitato hanno ritenuto giusto consegnarci delle piccole percentuali dei manufatti e rinvenimenti. In Pakistan abbiamo un accordo che ci permette di riportare parte dei ritrovamenti in Italia ma noi non ne rispondiamo più. L'ultimo scavo fatto in Pakistan per esempio è del '77, quando all'epoca andai anche io e venne portata una valigetta contenente alcuni rinvenimenti che volevamo lasciarli ma già era partita la procedura per l'esportazione.

Exactly, that's what I am talking about. We Italians have never acted in this way in the archaeological field: if you go to the National museum of Oriental Art in Rome, you won't find anything but some findings from the excavations in Iran which has been donated to us by the Iranian government as a witness of the excavations in Shahr-e Sukhtà or from the expeditions in Pakistan. On the base of our activities in fact, the countries that have hosted our activities accorded to hand over to us a small percentage of materials and findings from the archaeological site. In Pakistan, for example, we have an agreement that allows us to send to Italy a part of the findings, but we decided not to follow it anymore...I mean, the last excavation in Iran heads back to 1977, when I also were there and from where we took back to Italy a small briefcase with findings that we wanted to leave in Pakistan but that because the procedures were already started, we had to keep.

Ho capito

Understood.

Quindi Enrico Mattei è colui che ha aperto le porte agli italiani in Iran. L'altro punto che distingue gli Italiani dagli altri (europei) è che se lei vede la quantità di interventi fatti dall'ISMEO e dalle altre sedi italiane in Iran, beh la metà sono restauri. Noi siamo gli unici che si sono preoccupati non tanto di scavare e portare a casa manufatti ma di restaurare. A Persepoli hanno scavato gli Stati Uniti, non l'Italia, l'Italia è venuta a restaurare. Quindi ecco noi italiani siamo gli unici ad avere un "background" (la prego non usi questa parola...) di restauro e un approccio più egualitario, molto più improntato al rispetto nei confronti di questo paese come degli altri paesi dell'Asia occidentale. In fondo, forse ci sentiamo più vicini noi agli iraniani che agli inglesi, e viceversa.

So Enrico Mattei was the one who opened the doors of Iran to Italy. The next point that distinguish Italian from the others (Europeans) is that, if you look at the amount of interventions made by the ISMEO or by other Italian Institutes in Iran, also Universities, well half of them are restorations. We are the only one who were and still are caring not just about the excavations and taking home important findings, but about the conservation and restoration of those findings and monuments. Persepolis was dug by the USA, not by Italians, Italy arrived later, to restore it. So yes, we Italians are the only ones that have a restoration "background" (please don't use this word in the translation) and an approach, a more egalitarian approach towards this country as well as towards the other Western Asian countries, much more into the respect of the local dimension. In the end, probably, we just feel ourselves much similar to them than other Europeans... than British (for example).

Sì, sono d'accordo, soprattutto dopo essere stato in Iran penso di capire cosa lei intenda dire...

Yes, I agree with this, especially after have been in Iran I think I understand what you say...

Noi con gli iraniani ci capiamo magnificamente, ora lei è del Nord Italia ma se scende al centro-Sud vedrà che il modo di agire è corrispondente e questo influisce.

In conclusione, Enrico Mattei e Giuseppe Tucci sono le due personalità che hanno reso l'Italia un importante partner per l'Iran e viceversa: Mattei per l'aspetto energetico, economico, Tucci per l'aspetto culturale perché è stato lui a volere non solo l'archeologia ma anche i restauri, alcuni molto importanti. All'epoca l'Italia era la nazione che deteneva le più sviluppate tecniche

di restauro al mondo, quindi si può dire che Tucci abbia portato in campo in Iran le punte di diamante della tecnologia restauro dell'epoca.

We Italians have a magnificent understanding with the Iranians, well, you are from the North of Italy, but if you go to the centre or to the South of our country, you will see that many attitudes are similar.²⁹⁸

In conclusion, it is possible to say that Enrico Mattei and Giuseppe Tucci are the two great personalities which made Italy a trustable partner for Iran and vice versa: Mattei for the energetic component and Tucci for the cultural one. He was the one who wanted to bring not just archaeology but even restorations, some of them very important. At that time, Italy was the country which was developing and using the most updated restoration techniques in the whole world, so Tucci brought to Iran the crown jewels of archaeology in those times.

Ho capito, il periodo storico degli interventi di Tucci e l'aiuto diplomatico di Mattei hanno fatto sì che l'Italia potesse sviluppare delle campagne di scavo durature, è quello Imperiale. Si ritrova molto spesso nei libri che sono stati scritti sul periodo, la forte impronta nazionalistica del regime dello Shah soprattutto nei confronti dei monumenti pre-islamici che sono stati recuperati e re-introdotti alla nazione in un contesto per riportare l'Iran ai fasti delle epoche pre-islamiche. Quello che mi chiedo è, quali sono stati gli errori dello Shah in questo processo, a suo giudizio? Perché è facile ritrovare nelle parole di persiani il fatto che ci sia stata attenzione solo all'aspetto invece che di reale volontà di conoscenza del periodo storico. Si ritrova in queste parole?

I understand. The historical period in which both Mattei and Tucci were acting is the Imperial one. It is often written in books regarding that historical period the heavy nationalistic approach of the Shah's regime towards heritage, especially Pre-Islamic heritage, which was used and re-inserted in a discourse leading to show how strong and respected was Iran before the Islamic period. What I would like to ask you is which are in your opinion the Shah's greatest mistakes in this process? It is easy to find even in the speeches made by Persians, that the attention was entirely on using those monuments for propaganda matters, not with a genuine intent to deepen the knowledge on this period. Is this true?

²⁹⁸ Prof. Callieri with this sentence means that Iranians and the Italian population of the southern and central regions of the Peninsula share common attitudes, humor and a similar approach to life and to daily routine. This is probably due to the peculiar history of the Southern regions of Italy, absolutely different from Northern Italy ones. Historically, in fact, Northern Italy has been looking at the "Mitteleuropa", while southern Italy has been looking at the Mediterranean world.

No, non credo che questo si possa dire, gli errori sono stati moltissimi. Io sono abbastanza vecchio, ho avuto la possibilità di avere un'esperienza diretta dell'Iran Pre-Rivoluzione nel 1972 all'età di 16 anni e poi nel 77 e nel 78. Nel 78 feci un viaggio di un mese viaggiando tra la popolazione e avendo uno spaccato della situazione sociale dell'epoca e ho potuto sentire il malcontento verso la situazione politica. Una cosa, questa, che in molti si sono dimenticati perché se lei va in Iran sente una grande nostalgia del periodo dello Shah soprattutto da parte di quelli che non sono soddisfatti della situazione attuale.

Tutti idealizzano questo periodo ma C'è da dire che quegli anni erano quelli della SAVAK che prendeva le persone e le faceva scomparire. Io stesso quando mi trovai a Bam nel 78 e ci fronte una statua d'oro dello Shah, c'era un culto della personalità molto forte con statue, manifesti, beh di fronte questa statua d'oro di 4 metri mi misi a ridere a crepapelle con questo amico. Dopo qualche minuto ci hanno fatto "toc toc " sulle spalle e c'erano quelli della SAVAK e ci siamo presi una strizza pazzesca perché ci volevano arrestare. E insomma è stato un po'...beh è solo grazie ai persiani che sono gente simpatica che si è risolta la situazione.

Comunque, tornando alla sua domanda, quindi errori ne sono fatti moltissimi, però esisteva, bisogna essere oggettivi, un servizio scientifico dell'archeologia e la cosa più importante secondo me da sottolineare è che il direttore generale delle attività archeologiche il dott. Firuz Bagherzadeh che è morto qualche mese fa, anche sul Teheran Times era riportato, viveva da esule a Parigi ... una persona di grande spessore culturale, ha avuto un volume di studi in suo onore pubblicato in Iran qualche anno fa, era stato completamente riabilitato perché pur essendo un alto funzionario della amministrazione imperiale, esule, gli studiosi che hanno detto facciamo un volume di studi su di lui hanno avuto l'ok delle autorità. Anche quando è morto le cariche dell'Iran hanno mandato diverse espressioni di cordoglio per il lutto, dunque c'era una oggettiva presa di attestazione del fatto che la persona in questione aveva fatto delle cose buone. Aveva organizzato molto bene il patrimonio culturale iraniano. Aveva organizzato un nucleo di quello che è diventato ora lo schema delle nostre ricerche archeologiche, ora sono congiunte.

No, I don't think that it is possible to say this, despite there were great and many mistakes. I am old enough to have experienced a bit of Pre-Revolutionary Iran as I was there in 1972 and then 1977 and 1978. On this last trip, I have travelled for a month around the country meeting with people and I could see and hear the people's concerns regarding the political situation. Something that many, nowadays, have forgotten, because if you go to Iran, you will hear many unsatisfied with the current situation who have a great nostalgia for those times. Many and many idealize this period but we don't have to forget that those were the years of the SAVAK

police which was taking people and made them disappear very quickly. Me too: when I was in Bam in 1978 I saw a very big golden statue of the Shah. In those times the cult of personality was very strong, and they were using for this porpoise statues, pictures... Anyway, i started to laugh in front of this statue with a friend and a few moments later two men from the SAVAK knocked our shoulders and we had such a fear because they wanted to arrest us. It was quite...well luckily Persians are good people and the situation was solved claiming that we were just admiring it.

However, heading back to your question, there were many mistakes made by the Shah's regime, but it existed, we must be objective on that, an archaeological scientific service and the most important thing to stress on this point is the important role played by the general director of the Archaeological activities: Firuz Bagherzadeh. He, who died a few months ago, was living in Paris in exile and he was a man of such a great culture that he was recently completely rehabilitated despite being a high ranked officer during the Shah's period and had a volume of studies on himself which was published some years ago in Iran with the agreement of the authorities. Even when he died the same authorities sent official condolences messages, so, there has been officially the recognition of the great work undertaken by him when he was in charge. He in fact had organized very well the Iranian cultural heritage, building the core of what is nowadays the pattern of our joint archaeological researches.

Sì.

Yes.

Ecco durante il tempo di Bagherzadeh si inserì la presenza di archeologi iraniani all'interno del gruppo della missione straniera, non erano missione congiunte, ma comunque gli archeologi iraniani c'erano e lui l'aveva fatto in modo che gli archeologi giovani iraniani venissero a conoscenza delle tecniche innovative di scavo rispetto alla tradizionale archeologia iraniana utilizzando le missioni straniere.

Well, during Bagherzadeh's time there was officially the insert of the Iranian presence in foreign archaeological missions in Iran. Those weren't already joint projects, but there were also Iranian archaeologists there and he did it to let the young Iranian archaeologists able to learn the innovative techniques coming from abroad using these foreign missions.

Questo avvenì per tutte le spedizioni straniere, non solo con quella italiana, giusto?

This happened with all the foreign expeditions in Iran or only with the Italian ones?

Sì sì, tutte le missioni straniere avevano dei rappresentanti della direzione delle antichità che andavano a lavorare presso le missioni. Non era un ruolo paritetico ma l'idea che le esperienze per giovani funzionari iraniani potesse essere ragione di crescita, perché le missioni straniere portavano approcci diversi di quelli dei grandi maestri dell'archeologia iraniana, in alcuni casi brillanti per la loro epoca, ma piuttosto tradizionalisti. Anche lì, se pensiamo a come scavava Herzfeld, non potremmo definirli molto scientifici. Quindi possiamo pensare che Ali Saami che dopo Herzfeld era la personalità più importanti per Persepoli e Pasargadeh, faceva gli scavi con la metodologia di Herzfeld, più degli sterri che degli scavi, se dobbiamo essere onesti. C'erano delle persone come Negahban che invece si sono rivolte da subito con più attenzione all'approccio metodologico. Come Ghirshman in Francia ha lavorato in modo un po' garibaldino a lungo, quando poi sono arrivati archeologi più giovani hanno introdotto delle metodologie molto più aggiornate, scientifiche.

Gli inglesi, che sono sempre stati in Europa i paladini dell'archeologia e della metodologia stratigrafica, in Iran hanno lavorato molto male, gli scavi a Pasargadeh di David Stronach, un celebrato professore morto anche lui l'anno scorso, molto celebrato, molto intelligente e simpatico, gli scavi fatti da loro negli anni sessanta, quelli del British Institute of Persian Studies, non sono brutti, sono orribili. Quando nel '56 il mio maestro Faccenna, 4-5-6 anni prima, lavorava con una metodologia aggiornata. Comunque, l'Iran come un po' come tutto l'oriente, esclusi gli italiani, era considerato una terra in cui si poteva lavorare con sistemi attempati. L'occidente ha sempre un atteggiamento un po' poco rispettoso.

Yes, all them. All the expeditions had representatives of the Iranian National Direction for the Antiquities who were working with the foreign missions. They were not peers in those missions but there was the idea that these experiences could be source of growth for young Iranian officers because the techniques used in these missions were different from the ones used by the masters of Iranian Archaeology. The techniques used by those latter had in fact sometimes brilliant outcomes, but were quite traditional. But of course, we have to relativise: if we think about the way that Herzfeld was excavating...well it's far from being nowadays called "scientific". For this reason, we can say that Ali Saami, who after Herzfeld was the one most important for Persepolis and Pasargadeh and who was using Herzfeld's techniques, was making trenches, not excavations. Others, such as Negahban immediately wanted to deepen the knowledge of methodologies...but also this happened in France, where after the old-fashioned approach of Ghirshman, younger archaeologists introduced scientifically techniques.

British archaeologists, who in Europe were well known to be the defender of the stratigraphic excavation, in Iran have worked very very bad. The excavations made in the '60s by David

Stronach, a high qualified professors who died the last year, a very intelligent and nice man, are not ugly, really horrible. However, it is my opinion that Iran, as well as the rest of the East, was considered by many Europeans, Italians excluded, as a place where you could perform excavations regardless of any care for the place and with old-styled techniques. The west had and sometimes still have a not respectful behaviour towards these countries.

E invece, sempre parlando di quegli anni e dell'approccio del regime dello Shah verso i monumenti e il patrimonio artistico archeologico e artistico, c'era una grande differenza di trattamento tra patrimonio pre-islamico e islamico? È una domanda che mi pongo perché si ritrova in molte dissertazioni o articoli il confronto tra periodo dello Shah e periodo post Shah, ma dal momento che la Repubblica d'Iran è Islamica, dovrebbe anteporre l'Islam all'identità iraniana, per sua definizione.

And now, talking about those years and the approach of the Shah's regime towards monuments and the artistic and archaeological heritage, was there any difference in approach between pre-Islamic and Islamic heritage? I ask this because many times we find in dissertations the parallel between the period of the Shah and the one of the Islamic Republic and because the Islamic Republic of Iran is such, it should put before the Islamic element, or not?

Ecco però questo è un discorso che secondo me non è così, non si può semplificare così come dice lei, nel senso che l'identità dell'Iran è un'identità composita in cui l'identità Islamica, nonostante sia molto forte e molto sentita è intersecata al midollo con quella iranica. Lei provi a dire ad un persiano che è un arabo e vedrà...

Ok, well I don't think we can over simplify this discourse in such a way. The Iranian identity is composed and the Islamic identity, although important and deeply felt by the population, is intertwined with the Iranian one. Try to ask a Persian if he is an Arab, you will see what he will answer to you...

...No no già mi hanno raccontato scene del genere...

...no no, I have already heard stories about this...

È un paese che ha una fortissima identità nazionale, che è prima iranica e poi islamica. Cioè, le dico questo, poi potrà chiederlo anche alla van den Berg lei lo sa benissimo. Quando il mese del lutto, muharram, culmina in iran con la festa di Ashura, le commemorazione della morte di Hasan e Husayn. Quando Muharram e il Nowruz combaciano, che succede? Festeggiano

entrambi? Non lo so, lo chiedo alla sua relatrice, sono sicuro che le darà una risposta interessante. Io ho l'impressione che facciano entrambe ma in maniera meno appariscente.

It is a country that has a very strong National identity which is first Iranian and then Islamic. I mean, I tell you this, then you can ask it to Dr. Van den Berg for a confirm...when the month of condolences: Muharram, which ends with the Ashura and the commemoration of the deaths of Hasan and Husayn, coincides with Nowruz, the New Year's eve, what happens? I am not sure about it, but I think that they will celebrate both, ask it to your supervisor.

Va bene, le chiederò la sua risposta allora. Senta, vorrei un attimo riformulare la domanda che lo chiedo pocanzi, ho l'impressione di non averla formulata bene... io intendevo dire se durante il periodo dello Shah c'era stato un trattamento ed una cura diversa del patrimonio artistico pre-islamico da quello islamico. Soprattutto alla luce del fatto che poi con la rivoluzione islamica, una rivoluzione in cui comunque l'elemento islamico con era quello inizialmente dominante, l'elemento islamico è stato seguito maggiormente dalle autorità.

Alright, I will do that! Listen, I would like to rephrase my question, as I think that I haven't phrased it in a good way. I meant to ask you if during the period of the Shah there was a difference in the care and in the treatment of Pre-Islamic and Islamic heritage, especially in light of the fact that later, with the Islamic Revolution, a revolution where at the beginning the Islamic component was not the most important one, the Islamic element was better followed and encouraged by the authorities.

Allora, attenzione, questo per quanto riguarda l'ideologia, ma in archeologia non è vero.

Ok, then, we have to pay attention, because this is maybe possible to say in an ideological discourse, but it doesn't apply for Archaeology.

Ho capito, la ringrazio. Potrebbe brevemente spiegarmi perché non è corretto affermare ciò?

Understood, thank you. Could you please briefly explain me why it is not correct to affirm what I stated?

Sotto lo Shah non c'era un ruolo secondario dei monumenti islamici. L'Italia ha portato grandi restauri a Persepoli e a Esfahan. Così come mi sentirei di dire che per la mia esperienza in Iran pre-Rivoluzione, non mi pare ci fosse un'enfasi particolare. Chiaramente c'era un'ideologia perché se lei va a Teheran nel quartiere del ministero degli affari esteri, vicino al museo Melli, tutta quest'architettura "achemenidizzante" degli anni 40/50, quella si è del periodo dello

Shah, non quello della celebrazione dei 2500 anni dell'Impero. C'era una grande passione per la dinastia degli Achemenidi, non è generalizzata sul preislamico.

Nella repubblica Islamica l'archeologia non ha mai dato... anzi, io trovo che l'archeologia islamica nella repubblica islamica dell'Iran sia sottosviluppata. C'è da dire che in più il mondo islamico ha la cura dei monumenti, quindi la cura c'è ma non rientra nell'archeologia. Così come in Italia abbiamo una divisione tra soprintendenza architettonica e monumentale e quella archeologica, dunque per farle un esempio, le chiese di Venezia vengono restaurate dalla soprintendenza ai monumenti e non dai beni archeologici, così in Iran la soprintendenza ai monumenti dell'Iran ha un ruolo importante nel ruolo della difesa delle moschee e dei altri monumenti islamici.

A livello di archeologia, di indagini del sottosuolo, io trovo che il periodo che gode di maggiore prosperità è quello pre-proto storico. È di gran lunga il più popolare. Lei troverà particolarmente interessante la tesi della Noghoceri in cui cerca di individuare la fortuna della proto storia. Il succo è che secondo lei, "tra i due litiganti il terzo gode".

Comunque, tornando a noi, l'archeologia islamica non è preponderante, anzi è sotto rappresentata, in più cmq c'è tutto l'aspetto di conservazione dei monumenti. L'archeologia del periodo preislamico non è penalizzata, io mi occupo di questo periodo e nessuno mi è venuto a dire "perché si occupa di questo, vada a scavare una moschea antica".

Quello che trovo è che ci sia un interesse specialmente tra i giovani sono le culture del 4-3 millennio, le grotte preistoriche, l'età del bronzo, Susa, Shahr-e Sukhte ma questa è una questione di fascino secondo me. Gli Elamiti ora sono molto importanti a livello di ideologia, perché, magari lo approfondisca, c'è una grande simpatia per gli elamiti, soprattutto da certi strati della popolazione degli accademici, come per il mitraismo ... come dire, un po' sono anche delle mode ...Sì, tra i giovani archeologi ora spesso quando si trova anche un buco e non si sa come catalogarlo "mitreo" ecco io... in continuazione mi capita di leggere delle cose senza alcun fondamento ahaha

Non è il caso degli elamiti perché non è una questione di interpretazione, ci sono questi siti importanti. Io ho la sensazione che c'è una sorta di mitizzazione, una popolazione né persiana, né araba, una sorta di "Ur" non so come dire, una popolazione, cioè chi c'era in Iran prima di tutte le invasioni. Perché se andiamo a veder questa teoria che gli ariani, questi iranici siano arrivati è accettata da tutti (io non ne sono pienamente convinto) ma cmq e quindi pensare che i veri abitanti dell'altopiano iranico fossero gente di tipo elamita piace moltissimo insomma.

Under the Shah's rule Islamic monuments or art expressions didn't suffered any discrimination. Italy brought many restores both in pre-Islamic sites such as Persepolis as well as in Islamic mosques such as in Esfahan. I don't think that it is possible to say, for what I remember from those times, that there was a special emphasis on a certain type of monument. Clearly there was a state ideology, because if you go to Teheran in the neighbourhood close to the Melli museum, the one of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, all the "achaemenidizing" architecture and style from the years '40s or '50s heads back to the idea of the Iranian State that had the father of the Shah who celebrated the 2500 of the Persian Empire in the way we know...

In the Islamic Republic of Iran, archaeology has never had...no, wait, I find that the Islamic Archaeology in the Islamic Republic of Iran is underdeveloped. We have to say that, moreover, the care for monuments and mosques is part of the Islamic behaviour, so that in Iran is the Artistic and Architectural heritage Superintendence that takes care of them, not the Archaeological one. As in Italy we have the Superintendence for monuments and Archaeology, so to give an example, churches in Venice are restored by the "Soprintendenza" for Monuments, not by the one for Archaeology.

However, for what regards Archaeology in the sense of inquiring, I think that the period who is experiencing major prosperity at the moment is the Protohistoric. It is for sure in Iran nowadays the most popular, you can find a good dissertation regarding the motivations of such a rise in interest in the dissertation by Nogocheri. The core of the entire work is that in her opinion between the diatribe between Islamic and Pre-Islamic period, it was the one more neutral.

However, going back to us, Islamic archaeology is not the majority, on the contrary is underrepresented. At the same time, The archaeology from Pre-Islamic times is not penalized: I am interested and I am working on this period and none in Iran ever asked me "Why are you busy with Pre-Islamic sites, go and make excavations around an ancient mosque!". What I find interesting is that there is a growing interest especially among the young archaeologists in the cultures from the third and the fourth millennium, for example prehistoric caves, the Bronze Age, Susa, Shahr-e Sukhte...but I think is just because of the fascination that these sites and ages have even nowadays. For example, in our days the Elamites are very important from an ideological point of view, as well as for Mithraism...they are in my opinion also some trends, also among the experts...sometimes now archaeologists when they don't know how to periodize even the smallest hole in the ground they claim "it's mitraist", or sometimes they write things without any logical fundament.

Anyway, the Elamites have important sites but I have the sensation that nowadays there is the tendency to mythologize them, you know they are an early population of Iran but not Persian nor Arabic...a kind of "Ur"...I don't know how to explain... they are seen as the population which was settled in Iran before all the conquerors. Because if we look at this theory that the Aryans or Iranics came from somewhere, a theory that nowadays is almost accepted by the majority (even if I have some little doubts on this regard) well, now the theory that probably one of the ancient Persian populations was from Iran is very much appreciated.

Ho capito, guardi questa era l'ultima domanda che avevo preparato, io la ringrazio davvero per essere stato così disponibile e la saluto... eventualmente sarebbe disponibile in futuro qualora dovessi chiederle altri chiarimenti?

I understand, well this was the last question I had prepared for you, I really thank you very much for your kind availability and for the time you dedicated to me... in case, would you be available in the future if I will have to ask you any other clarification?

Grazie a lei, sì certo se ha qualche altra domanda mi faccia sapere. Mi saluti la dottoressa Van den Berg. Buona serata.

Thank you too, of course, let me know if you have any other questions. Greetings to Dr Van den Berg. Goodnight.

Buona serata a lei.

Goodnight you too.