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Iranians' Positive Criticism on European Architecture and Its Correlation with Their Negative Criticism on Iranian Architecture and Town Planning during the Late Qajar Era

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Abstract

Problem statement: Several factors caused the fundamental changes of Iranian architecture during the early 20th century. One of these factors was the personal observations of the Iranian in Europe. These observations were effective from an urban and architectural point of view and they probably had effects on the architectural and urban mentalities of the Iranians.

Research objective: The main aim of this paper is to review and categorize the positive criticism of Iranians on the European towns and architecture in the late Qajar era until Reza Pahlavi's coup, then to compare them with the negative criticism of Iranians on architecture and town planning in Iran in the same period.

Research Method: This paper applies a hermeneutic-historical method. It is formulated in the theoretical framework of the "Multiple Modernities" theory. In this research, 21 late Qajar travelogues have been reviewed and the data related to the research questions have been separated and categorized. Furthermore, they have been compared with the negative criticism of Iranians on pre-Modern Iranian architecture and town planning.

Conclusion: The main positive aspects of European towns and architecture in the eyes of Iranian travelers have been the hygiene of the towns and buildings, building in principle (building based on a plan, and the order and regularity of the built environment), technology, height, the beauty of the staircases, protection of historical heritage, and the abundance of public spaces. Later, it is depicted that the abundance of positive criticism of some certain aspects of European towns and architecture (sanity and order) is a symptom of the authors' main concerns about the Iranian architecture and town planning, not just an objective evaluation of European towns and architecture. In other words, Iranian Modernity -which is a "different Modernity"- has paid more attention to some specific aspects and accomplishments of the architectural Modernity in Europe, based on its own local needs and concerns. Therefore, Iranian Modernity has presented a collective and local interpretation of architectural and urban modernization.

Keywords: *Occidentalism, Travelogue, Architecture and the Constitutional Revolution.*

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Problem statement

The change of course of Iranian architecture and town planning during the late Qajar and early Pahlavi era has had some causes. These causes and roots can be traced in different aspects. One of these aspects may be the personal observations of Iranians in Europe: what Iranians have seen by themselves and approbated.

Until now, the buildings themselves have been the subject of studies relating to the architecture of that era. The other important aspect, which is the confrontation of Iranian subjectivity with the European architecture and urbanism, is not largely discussed yet.

Whether how or why the Farangi (European) architecture and town planning gained a higher position represents one of the other roots of the architectural and urban changes in contemporary Iran. However, this paper focuses on a different aspect of these usually positive criticism: how are these criticism related to the negative criticism of Iranians on their own architecture and towns?

In other words, the research question can be formulated as following: What were the positive criticism of Iranians on the architecture and town planning in Europe? How were these judgements related to the characteristics of Iranian architecture and towns in that same era?

Literature Review

Among the related researches, Occidental Perceptions of European Architecture in Nineteenth-Century Persian Travel Diaries: Travels in Farangi Space (Vahdat, 2017) has the most similarity with the present study.

The author of the book, Vahid Vahdat, believes that in order to understand the constructed notions of Modernity in other regions of the world, one must seek the “transitional” phase from the west to the destination. Therefore, he tries to study the confrontation of the “Iranian self” with the “pre-imagined Other” by re-reading the Iranian travel diaries and their reflections on European architecture

and towns alongside with the correlation of these reflections with their mentalities and traditions (ibid, 4). The most related chapter of this book to this paper is the fourth chapter (ibid, 78-133). In this chapter, those characteristics of towns and architecture which have caught sight of Iranians have been studied. They include wide alleys, urban infrastructure and institutions, open yards and gardens, public spaces, construction regulations, lightning, and urban service spaces.

Besides this research, Mirzaei and Parvin’s “Representation of Other: The Position of the West in the Travelogues of Constitutional Era” (Mirzaei & Parvin, 2010) studies the stereotyping of the European people as “Others” in the writings of Iranian during the Constitutional era. In “Representation of Other: West in Itineraries Supreme to Constitution Revolution Era” (Tazikeh Lemesky, Ghobadian & Soltanzadeh, 2016), the correlation of the descriptions of Iranians on the travelogues and the changes of Iranian architecture and urban planning during the Qajar era has been discussed. Besides, researches such as Bani Masoud (2009) and Ameli (2000) have briefly discussed the relation of the Iranian trips to Europe and the architectural evolutions of Qajar era.

Theoretical Framework

• Multiple Modernities

The main theoretical framework for this research is the idea of “Multiple Modernities”. This notion, which has been defined by Eisenstadt, opposes the viewpoint which considers Modernity and the modernization process homogenous, identical, and “Western”. In Eisenstadt’s view, Modernity has evolved in other civilizations in different shapes. In other words, “Modernization” is not equal to “Westernization” and the Western models of Modernization are not the only models of Modernization. However, they are older than the other models (Eisenstadt, 2000, 3). The non-western intellectuals had no choice other than to make a choice and reinterpret the Modernity. These reinterpretations, which were related to the civilizational and traditions of these societies, made

the way for the change of Western Modernity's characteristics and the shaping of new cultural models in these contexts (Eisenstadt, 2001, 233).

Iranian Modernity was not an exception. It had to emphasize on some certain aspects of Modernism and neglected some other aspects and characteristics due to the particular cultural and social circumstances of Iran. The basis for this paper is the emphasis on the urban and architectural models of Modernity in Iran. These models are a result of the synthesis of the local needs and circumstances and the accomplishments of the western architectural and urban Modernity. These differences have led to an overemphasis on some aspects of architectural and urban Modernity in Europe and underemphasizing some other.

Research Method

This research is based on hermeneutic-historical method and uses Eisenstadt's theory on "Multiple Modernities". The data are gathered through a survey of 21 late Qajar Iranian travelogues to Europe until 1921, then categorized and discussed based on their similarities. These categorizations are compared to the Iranians' criticism on Iranian architecture and towns during the same era. Then, these categorizations and comparisons are discussed based on the theoretical framework of "multiple Modernities".

Discussion: Categorization of Iranians' Positive Judgements

• Cleanliness

Cleanliness is one of the most repetitive criteria of Iranians for considering towns and buildings "beautiful" or "pleasant".

Haj Sayyah refers to the cleanliness of European towns, such as Milan, Pesto, Leibach (Ljubljana), Venice, and Turin, several times in order to praise them (Sayyah Mahallati, 2011). The first reason of Ezz al-Dawlah¹, Nasser al-Din Shah's brother, to consider Berlin an "ultimately cultivated" city, is the cleanliness of its alleys (Saloor, 1995, 191).

Zahir al-Dawla² enjoys the cleanliness of the interior space of a train station in Baku (Zahir al-Dawlah,

1992, 85). He also praises the "decorated clean streets and passages" of Warsaw (*ibid*, 139-140). In Tbilisi he writes: "the peasant houses are very clean, both inside and outside" (*ibid*, 103).

In Brussels, Mozaffar al-Din Shah writes about the "ultimate cleanliness" of the town (Mozaffar al-Din Shah, 1904, 217). Even when he wants to compare Istanbul with Farang (Western Europe), his criterion is cleanliness: "the buildings and mansions there [...] are in the style of Farangestan mansions, but they are not that clean [and] excellent" (*ibid*, 178). This Qajar king considers the Schlaukenhort [?] village very "pretty and clean" (Mozaffar al-Din Shah, 1903, 71). Etemad al-Saltaneh reveals that he believes Iran and its towns are dirty in comparison to European towns and cleanliness is his main criterion to assess the cultivation of a town: "when this town becomes cultivated [...], if they keep the alleys clean, it will be the best town in Georgia, but now it is like Tajrish [then a village near Tehran]" (Etemad al-Saltaneh, 1978, 43). In other words, he equals Tajrish to a dirty town. While praising the integrity of Chateau de Fleurs in Paris, Etesam al-Molk only describes them as "ultimately clean" (Etesam al-Molk, 1973, 39-40).

Nasser al-Din Shah praises a bath in Haji Tarkhan³ (Nasser al-Din Shah, 1984, 17). Even in Istanbul, where he thinks is not as good as Farang (Europe), he is astonished by the warm and cold water segregation in a bath (*ibid*, 232). The seemingly small bath in Ljubljana's hospice seems "very good" in Haj Sayyah's eyes, a bath which has "two faucets" and a small pool in which the water temperature can be controlled⁴ (Sayyah Mahallati, 2011, 100). He also goes to a public bath in Lyonnais and describes the structure of baths in this city; a structure similar to the bath in Ljubljana's hospice (*ibid*, 151).

In Ezz al-Dawlah's opinion, it is "unimaginable to think of a better place [than a bath in Turin]" (Saloor, 1995, 216). He orders his servants to write a detailed description of this bath, so can he could build a similar bath in Tehran in order to be free from the "bothers" and "filths" of baths in Tehran (*ibid*, 217).

The bath he describes is also similar to the two baths which Haj Sayyah had visited.

In Baku, an Asian town in Caucasus, Zahir al-Dawlah writes: “Bravo to this bath. Its cleanliness is indescribable” (Zahir al-Dawlah, 1992, 88). In His words, a modern “numbered” bath is more compatible with Islam: “This is the khazineh water which ulama [Islamic scholars] say is mustahab [religiously suggested] to be drunk in a hand fist, not that khazinehs that I know [in Iran]” and after describing the bath, he prays: “May all my beloved ones come to this clean bath” (ibid). As soon as he enters a carriage, he orders to the carriage driver to take him to “the best of the city’s baths” (ibid, 139). They take him to a bath with “small numbered baths”. He is so excited by visiting the bath keepers in the bath that he satirically compares them to bath keepers in Iran: “Two bath keepers came by. If they were seen in Tehran, they could have been mistaken by an ambassador for sure. I recalled Karbalayi Hassan, the bath keeper in Ja’far Abad. If you pour a fist of millets on his hair, none will pass through his hair [!]” (ibid).



Fig. 1. Public Bath of Fredrik Street in Liverpool, UK. Source: bkthisandthat.org.uk.

Nasser al-Din Shah evaluates a small “Farangi style bath as “very good” (Nasser al-Din Shah, 2000, 81). Similarly, Vazir Vazayef considers a bath in Batumi “very good” (Vazir Vazayef, 2000, 54). It is interesting that although he admires this numbered bath, he is doubtful about its cleanliness (ibid), probably from a religious point of view. Figure 1 shows a bath in Liverpool from late 19th century and Figure 2 shows a bath in a miniature by Kamal al-Din Behzad, from Safavid Era.

Furthermore, in an exceptional case, Haj Sayyah becomes astonished by observing public “marble restrooms” in Italy which have been constructed in an “ultimate manner” in the town (Sayyah Mahallati, 2011, 305).

• Building in Principle

It seems that the directness and pre-planning of passages in the town or city have been a positive criterion for -at least- some Iranians.

Etesam al-Molk, for instance, describes the direct route from the chaharsuq to the southern gate of Tabas in eastern Iran as such: “there is a straight alley



Fig. 2. “Aaron in the Bath”, Attributed to Kamal al-Din Behzad. Source: <https://www.bl.uk/>

from there to the southern gate, but it is surrounded by ruined buildings and mansions” (Etesam al-Molk, 1973, 247). Because he uses the conjunction “but”, it can be inferred that in comparison to the ruins, and as he later states the “humbleness” of this region, “directness” of the alley is a positive point in his opinion. Furthermore, while describing the “cultivation” of Orsova port in Romania, he alludes to its “straight and elegant” alleys (Sayyah Mahallati, 2011, 83). In another description by Haj Sayyah, he literally mentions the “straightness” of the alleys as a value: “the night of that town [Athens] is very beautiful, because most of the alleys are [...] straight” (ibid, 318). Also, when describing the new neighborhoods of Brindisi and Barry in Italy, he also applies a similar reason⁵ (ibid, 305-306). In Petrovsky, he writes about its “very good, pave-stoned, clean, large, and ultimately straight streets, with their rowed trees” (ibid, 397). Furthermore, he alludes to the order of the streets in Paris and Novocherkassk as a sign of their beauty and goodness (ibid, 358, 170). While explaining the prettiness of Brussels, Nasser al-Din Shah mentions its “straight and wide alleys” (Nasser al-Din Shah, 1984) (Fig. 3) and while describing the good characteristics of Geneva, he refers to the “large pave-stoned alleys” of this town (ibid, 196). Besides, when he is visiting the Luxembourg palace⁶, he is pleasantly surprised by the “straight”, “large”, and “flat” alleys of the surroundings alongside with the “order” and “good taste” applied in the tree plantation there (ibid, 149). In the same trip, Ezz al-Dawleh writes about the “straightness” of Berlin alleys (Saloor, 1995, 191). In Istanbul, when Zahir al-Dawleh wants to depict the bad situation of Istanbul even in comparison with Tehran, his main evidence for judgement is the “absence of a straight street in all Istanbul” (Zahir al-Dawleh., 1992, 324) (Fig. 4). Also, Etemad al-Saltaneh describes the alleys of Baku “straight and in principle” (Etemad al-Saltaneh, 1978, 51).

It can be inferred from these texts that stone-paved passages has been a positive point for the Iranians who had visited Europe during the late Qajar period. This

is completely observable in Haj Sayyah’s travelogue. In his praiseful descriptions, he refers to the “stone-paved” passages in Tambo, Stavropol, Chemnitz, and Mainz (Sayyah Mahallati, 2011, 400, 446, 464, 478). In Italian towns of Bologna and Florence, and also in Odesa and Paris, he writes about the separation of the streets for carriages/animals (drivers/ riders) and humans (pedestrians). He implicitly considers this a positive point for these towns (ibid, 261, 266, 332,



Fig. 3. A photo of Brussels in the 19th century. Source: <https://monovisions.com>

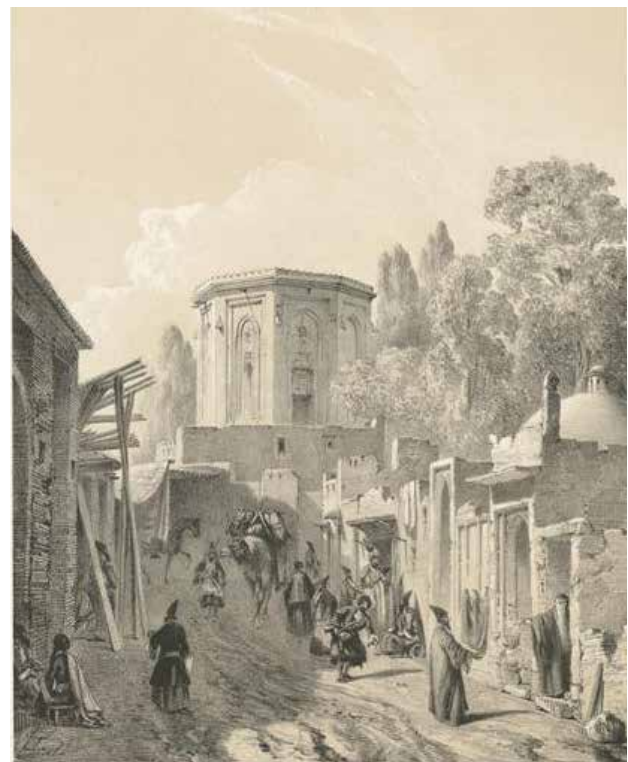


Fig. 4. A drawing of Tehran in 1851 by Eugen Flandin. Source: <https://art.rmngp.fr/fr>

158). This is in a symmetrical situation in comparison with the criticism of some Iranians of the time on the non-separated paths for humans and animals, path blockage, and disturbance of different groups in the passages in Iranian towns.

Farrokh Khan Amin al-Dawlah has some similar descriptions about Messina and the route from Marseille to Paris. He thinks that Messina is “well-combined and pleasing” because of its “straight stone-paved alleys” (Sarabi, 1994, 162). He also describes the route from Marseille to Paris “wonderful” and to prove his point, he writes:

“All villages and gardens and houses are built in the same size and type, because in this state nobody can build a building without the permission of the government and in accordance with the governmental architects. That is why every village and town and garden and farm and road is based on an architectural design” (ibid, 192).

Also Mozaffar al-Din Shah portrays mansions, each one being built “in rows” (Mozaffar al-Din Shah, 1903, 54).

The pre-requisite to build these straight ordered schemes is to have a pre-planned design. From this viewpoint, the correlation between straightness and pre-planning, a legislator institution, and building “in principle” becomes more obvious⁷.

There are two different accounts about the importance and function of urban taxes in Zahir al-Dawlah and Nasser al-Din Shah’s travelogues. After describing the taxes that the French people pay, he writes that if the urban dwellers want to live in an organized town, they should financially help the government to make reforms (Zahir al-Dawlah, 1992, 190-191). This summons the idea of Zahir al-Dawlah: construction is systematically organized in France because people pay taxes to the municipality, thus municipality keeps the city organized. In Iran, people do not pay taxes because there is no municipality, and also the people themselves do not want to pay taxes. Besides, even if there will be a municipality, it will be a source for corruption (ibid). On the other hand, Nasser al-Din Shah considers tax as a symptom of “absence of

freedom” (Nasser al-Din Shah, 2000, 209). Although he writes about this, he does not mention the duties of the tax receiver institutions.

• The Charm of Technology

Technology and its impacts on architecture and town planning also made the travelogue writers enchanted. This was especially evident in the Iranians’ encounter with modern lightings of the time in European towns and cities.

In Lyonais, Amin al-Dawlah became astonished by “abundance of gas lamps and alleys, houses and bazars’ lightings” which made the entire city “as bright as day” (Sarabi, 1994, 183). After observing “the night of Paris”, he considered every exaggeration insufficient to describe there (ibid, 189-190). In Champs-Élysées, he was attracted by the lamps of the streets and buildings (ibid, 193).

There is also a repetitive sentence in all Haj Sayyah’s travel diaries: “the entire town [is] lightened by gas lamps” (Sayyah Mahallati, 2011) (Fig. 5). When Nasser al-Din Shah enters the Royal Albert Hall, he sees there “just as heaven”, explaining that all parts of this great hall “was lightened by different strange gas lamps”⁸ (Nasser al-Din Shah, 1984, 100). Also in Paris, while explaining why he thinks this city is pleasant for him, he writes about there being “very bright” with gas lamps (ibid, 133). Furthermore, the otherworldly and poetic description of Paris in Ezz al-Dawlah’s travelogue is very interesting. Just like the Shah, he compares Paris to heaven (Saloor, 1995, 210).

Etesam al-Molk (Etesam al-Molk, 1973, 39-40) and Vazir Vazayef (Vazir Vazayef, 2000, 38) have similar descriptions in their notes. Mozaffar al-Din Shah writes about the “good appearance” and “prettiness” of “electric lamps” in Belgium (Mozaffar al-Din Shah, 1903, 88, 90). Nearly thirty years later, Zahir al-Dawlah describes Parisian nights as bright as days (Zahir al-Dawlah, 1992, 156-157).

Besides lighting, other aspects of technology were also attractive for Iranians visiting Europe. Zahir al-Dawlah satirically compares the electric fans in a hotel in Paris with the hand fan of “Shah Mosque”

(Imam Khomeini Mosque) in Tehran. In his words, the latter has “three kharwars [about a ton] weight and four persons should hurt their waists in order to move it and even then, there will be little difference [in the temperature]” (ibid, 160). He also becomes astonished after experiencing the elevator technology (ibid, 158) and describes a metro station as a small town which “is made by iron below the ground” (ibid, 156-157).

• Height

One of the other factors which had architecturally impressed Iranians was the multi-storey buildings. In Messina port, Amin al-Dawlah writes about the “great five-storey stone buildings” (Sarabi, 1994, 162). This characteristic is so bold in his mind that he considers single floor buildings a characteristic of Iranian buildings (Fig. 6). For example, in Naples, he states that the Neapolitan houses are similar to Iranian houses

and his evidence is that they are single-floored (ibid, 171). Vazir Vazayef evaluates a building in one of Russia’s parks “beautifully designed” and in explaining his reasons for this judgement, he alludes to the fact that the building has four floors (Vazir Vazayef, 2000, 48). Nasser al-Din Shah describes a “very very pretty” guesthouse which has “two floors” (Nasser al-Din Shah, 2000, 160). The importance of “greatness” and “height” in considering a building magnificent can be also traced in Mozaffar al-Din Shah’s travelogue. He writes “Although” Brussels does not have “so much grand” buildings, it is “a very good town”¹⁰ (Mozaffar al-Din shah, 1903, 211) (Fig. 7).

• Stairs

Stairs and staircases found an aesthetic value for some Iranians during this era. In contradiction to the previous traditions, they became more visible in buildings and thus, their appearance became more important.



Fig. 5. A drawing about how to turn on a gas lamp in the 19th century (Image courtesy of John Jakle). Source: www.uvm.edu



Fig. 6. The skyline of Tehran in late Qajar era in a photo from Antoin Sevruquin. Source: <https://asia.si.edu/>



Fig. 7. An image of Brussels in 19th century and its multi-storey buildings. Source: <https://monovisions.com>

For instance, while visiting Baku's train stations, a hotel in Paris, Hermitage museum, and Paris's opera house, Zahir al-Dawlah writes about the beauty of the stairs and staircases (Zahir al-Dawlah, 1992, 85, 152, 252) (Fig. 8).

• **Protecting the heritage**

Another parameter that had captured Iranians' interest was the protection of the historical buildings in Europe, in contrast to the inattention to historical heritage in Iran (Fig. 9).

Haj Sayyah visits many European museums such as Berlin museum (Sayyah Mahallati, 2011, 495),



Fig. 8. Hermitage museum's stairs. Source: <https://st-petersburg.guide/>

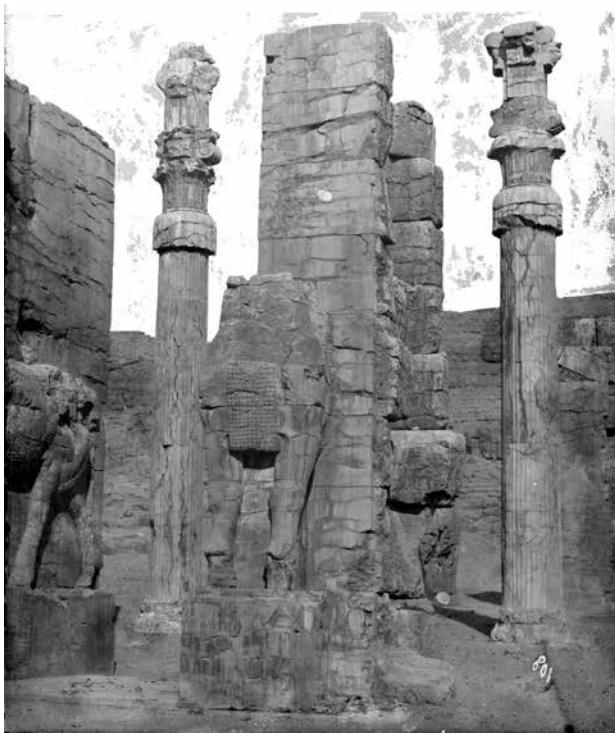


Fig. 9. Persepolis in late Qajar era in a photo by Sevruguin. Source: <https://asia.si.edu/>

Gratz museum (ibid, 96), Edinburgh museum (ibid, 517), and the "old remains" of ancient Roma such as Pantheon and Colosseum (ibid, 283-286). Likewise, Nasser al-Din Shah visits the "ethnography museum" in Moscow (Nasser al-Din Shah, 1984, 25). Ezz al-Dawlah, his brother, describes "Britannic Museum" in details (Saloor, 1995, 205-206) (Fig. 10). Just like Haj Sayyah, Mozaffar al-Din Shah visits the Colosseum and reads an exemplary poem about the destiny of this building to his chancellor, Atabk-e A'zam (Mozaffar al-Din Shah, 1903, 48). Nasser al-Din Shah visits a palace in Germany and writes: "they have kept this ruined building pretty and well-shaped so the people would come and visit and take a tour in it" (Nasser al-Din Shah, 2000, 143). He also visits the "Wilanow garden" [and palace] and writes: "the building is so old, but they have kept it in a great shape and it is a good mansion" (Nasser al-Din Shah, 1990, 170).

• **Publicity**

Free presence of the public in urban space had also captured the Iranian travelers' interest while visiting Europe.

Amin al-Dawlah, for instance, writes about the "sections dedicated to the pedestrians" in Champs-Elise (Sarabi, 1994, 214). A little after, he is so astonished by the "Boulevard Avenue" in Paris that he authorizes any exaggeration in describing there. He describes there as a place where "in all nights of the year is a promenade for the people" and "is filled with



Fig. 10. The opening ceremony of the northern wing of the British Museum in 1914. Source: <https://www.britishmuseum.org/>

light” (ibid, 215). In an account which clearly shows how much the urban public presence for leisure had been strange for him, he states that the “promenade and touring” of the French in the Boulevard Avenue is very “strange” (ibid, 217).

In Milan and Turin, Haj Sayyah describes the “Korssis” [probably referring to seats] on the sidelines of the street together with the people who sit on them (Sayyah Mahallati, 2011, 119-124). He describes a “large space” which belongs to the musicians and people gather in it to listen to street music (ibid, 397). Also, Haj Sayyah writes about a “passaj” [passage] in Glasgow, a place where people spend their time in the evenings (ibid, 514). Furthermore, Haj Sayyah describes a “good” park in a town in Russia which is for “the public” (ibid, 348). From this point of view, he describes Paris too:

“We went to a very long and wide square. All the trees were green, and in the greenery there was the brightness of gas lamps. Musicians were playing. I saw many kids and youth who were dancing out of themselves. People were in ultimate freedom, all committed to humane eminence, and all with equal duties” (ibid, 158).

He depicts the Farangi town/city as a bright, permanent, free, and dynamic scene for social interactions: “their people [are] very enthusiastic. They promenade from dusk till dawn. All the lights [are] on. People [are] in ultimate freedom” (ibid, 353). Ezz al-Dawlah applies similar statements about Paris: “nobody has anything to do with others. If somebody tours from dusk till dawn and does a thousand things as he/she favors, nobody says anything, and nobody asks how” (Saloor, 1995, 210) (Fig. 11).

Besides all these, when visiting one of Baku’s gardens, Vazir Vazayef writes: “the garden is public. Everyone can go see there and it is free of charge” (Vazir Vazayef, 2000, 48). Nasser al-Din Shah defines Luxembourg Park in France as a “public garden”, a garden where “people go to promenade everyday” (Nasser al-Din Shah, 1984, 149). In Netherlands, Mozaffar al-Din Shah visits a garden where “the prince palace” is. He writes: “this garden

has absolutely no walls” (Mozaffar al-Din Shah, 1903, 190). This clearly shows the role of “walls” in the definition of a garden in his thought.

Balconies also have a similar role in these travelogues. Mozaffar al-Din Shah orders his servants to calculate the size of a balcony in -probably- Ostend in Belgium (ibid, 1903, 88). Likewise, a “half-circled” balcony in Belgrade (Mozaffar al-Din Shah, 1904, 212), and then under construction balcony of Hungary’s parliament with its view to Danube and town seem beautiful to him (ibid, 211). Zahir al-Dawlah also praises a balcony in Vladikavkaz (Zahir al-Dawlah, 1992, 126).

Furthermore, while describing the differences of “Faranegestan’s” buildings and the importance of the outer space in their design, he writes: “the [outer] space [faza] of each house and building is limited to the alley and street” and “there is no place for leisure and promenade in the inside, except for the rich’s houses” (Mozaffar al-Din Shah, 1904, 139).

Discussion

• The Correlation of Positive Criticism on the Farangi Built Environments and Negative Criticism on the Iranian Built Environments; The New Criteria to Assess Iranian Towns and Architecture

It may seem that the above mentioned judgements and the reports are objectively focused on European architecture and town planning. However, they also



Fig. 11. “A Night in Paris” by Amedee Marcel-Clement, 1873. Source: www.fineartphotographyvideoart.com

contain some concerns about Iranian architecture and town planning as well. Repetitiveness and the quiddity of these descriptions show that these accounts also represent some facts about Iranian architecture and town planning, or at least the opinions and concerns of the writers about Iranian architecture and town planning.

For instance, the hygiene issue which is appeared in a larger extent and is repeated more in these judgements is also repeated more in the criticism of Iranians on Iranian towns and architecture. For example, the hygiene issue is the most repetitive theme in the criticism relating to Iranian towns and architecture during the Constitutional era (Salavati, 2017). In his memoirs, Haj Sayyah writes about the “abundance of the dead [animals], garbage and filth” in Tehran’s passages and he states a similar opinion about Iranian public baths (Sayyah Mahallati, 1978, 548). Eyn al-Saltaneh writes about the hygiene problems of Iranian towns, especially Tehran. In a symmetrical relation with the positive criticism of Iranians about the European public baths, Eyn al-Saltaneh writes: “Whoever comes out [of Iranian public baths] becomes dirtier” (Saloor, 1997b, 5460). This symmetrical situation is also represented in other cases. Haj Sayyah is critical of the narrowness and deformation of Iranian alleys. For instance, in Semnan he writes: “[Semnan] has narrow and deformed alleys just like other towns in Iran” (Sayyah Mahallati, 1978, 233). In accordance to the positive criticism on the pre-planning of Farangi towns and cities, Eyn al-Saltaneh is critical about the absence of pre-planning (mohandessi) in Iranian towns (Saloor, 1997a, 561).

In accordance to the praise heritage protecting in European towns, there are some accounts criticizing Iranian’s unawareness about their own historical heritage. In addition to Haj Sayyah, who criticizes the ignorance about ancient buildings and Safavid palaces (Sayyah Mahallati, 1978, 233, 85, 42), other Iranians like Vahid al-Molk write about “historical” and “magnificent” buildings in Isfahan and are complainant about the lack of attention to these

buildings (Vahid al-Molk, 1999, 31). However, this is also a reflection of a nationalistic self-awareness in that era.

In accordance to the praises of Haj Sayyah for the abundance of public urban spaces in Europe, in his memoirs, he criticizes the absence of public leisure spaces in Iran¹¹ (Sayyah Mahallati, 1978, 44). Compared to the public spaces of European cities, Toopkhaneh Square in Tehran can be mentioned (Fig. 12).

This can also be partly generalized to the critique of technology, height, lighting, or even stairs in Iran. For instance, in the case of stairs, aside from the aesthetic praises of exposed Farangi-affected stairs, there are also some functional criticism on the traditional types of stairs in Iran (Saloor, 1997b, 5981-5982).

To sum up, it can be inferred that the main and most repeated positive criticism, especially those which refer to sanity and regulation of construction, are a representative of the writers’ concerns about Iranian architecture and towns, not a mere objective description of what is seen in Europe. These concerns directly affect their reports about Farang: whatever is considered as an “issue” in Iranian towns and architecture is bolded in their descriptions of European towns.

In other words, their interpretation of these Farangi spaces is directly correlated to their everyday issues in Iran. On the other hand, other observations and judgements of Iranians which were not obviously related to their concerns on Iranian towns- like



Fig. 12. Toopkhaneh square in Tehran, early 20th century. Source: <http://www.iichs.ir/>

the aesthetic case of Farangi stairs- may have become a new criterion to later assess Iranian built environments.

Conclusion

In this paper, the positive criticism of Iranians about European architecture and towns were studied and it was described that the main positive criticism of Iranians about the European architecture and towns were focused on the issue of hygiene and cleanliness, pre-planning and building “in discipline”, technology, height, the beauty of staircases, heritage protection, and finally the abundance of public spaces.

Besides, the correlation of these positive criticism and the negative criticism on Iranian architecture and towns were discussed. Based on this discussion, the most repetitive praises on European towns and architecture, were a symptom of the subjective concerns of the writers about the problems of Iranian built environments rather than just an objective evaluation of the European built environments.

In other words, based on their inner and local concerns, Iranians filtered and chose some aspects of architectural and urban Modernity and reused them in their own socio-cultural context. As a result, as the theory of Multiple Modernities implies, a local architectural and urban Modernity in Iran was born which was very different from its counterpart in the West. This newborn architectural and urban Modernity was not a result of “importing” modernized urban and architectural elements, but a re-interpretation of those elements. These elements were the answers of Modernity –or Modernity as Iranians conceived- to local issues of the Iranian society.

This may make us rethink our pre-assumptions about the history of architectural and urban Modernism in Iran. What is considered as completely “Western” in the common explanations is another type of Modernity which has specifically been chosen and edited by Iranians. The notion of architectural and urban Modernity has been constantly modified and changed shape based on the circumstances of the host society in an ongoing two-way correlation.

The awareness of Iranians about their position was affected by their observations of Modernity and modernization. Also their observations in Farang were heavily affected by their situation on the inside. These two-way interpretations have made a unique and local situation, a situation which is a result of the mental filter of Iranians with all their concerns and experiences.

Endnotes

1. Brother of Nasser al-Din Shah and his companion in his 1873 trip to Europe.
2. Mozaffar al-Din Shah's companion in his 1899 trip to Europe.
3. Astrakhan.
4. He also writes about the “very clean baths” in Petrovsky.
5. It seems that in Haj Sayyah's interpretation, “straightness” is a symptom of being modern. In Roma, he thinks a part of the city is “in the old style”, because it has not any straight streets (Sayyah Mahallati, 2011, 276).
6. Located in Paris. It is different from Luxemburg region/country.
7. In a similar case, when explaining the reasons of the of Lyonnais's adornment, Haj Sayyah implicitly alludes to the role of urban management by stating that “twice a day, they spray water in front of the shops” (Sayyah Mahallati, 2011, 151).
8. Until 1888, 15 years after Nasser al-Din Shah's visit to Royal Albert Hall, gas lamps were used in the hall.
9. The first metro line in Paris was opened in 1900, just a little before Mozaffar al-Din Shah and Zahir al-Dawlah's trip to Europe.
10. He also states that Vienna is a very good city because of its “6 floor buildings” (Mozaffar al-Din Shah, 1903, 204).
11. In his words: great buildings in Iran are made “by one's expense [...] for one, and belong to one, but in civilized countries [...] the public have a share in its creation, advantages, visiting it, and strolling in it” (Sayyah Mahallati, 1978, 44).

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