

Urban heritage planning in Iran: Repeated cycles of struggle for territorialization

In the following three chapters, the trajectories of urban heritage assemblage in Iran are diagnostically traced through key examples of national significance, laying out a recurring pattern of territorialization, chaos, and re-territorialization. It is my contention that the academic, legal, and administrative frameworks of conservation and heritage planning have proven inadequate in establishing a solid basis for practical implementation. Using archival research, hybrid ethnography¹ in online and offline settings, semi-structured interviews, and academic literature, the chapters illustrate the struggles of urban heritage assemblage in Iran's turbulent political, economic, and cultural climate from the early 1900s to 2022.

Part One is broken down into three chapters, each covering a cycle. The first cycle starts at the establishment of conservation and heritage bureaucracy in Iran and ends with the 1979 Revolution. The second cycle commences after the 1979 Revolution and the formation of a new heritage administration, which was accompanied by economic and political reforms. These reforms were interrupted when the conservative government assumed power in 2005, bringing with it significant political and administrative upheaval. The third cycle begins with the re-territorialization of urban heritage policy and practice during the second reformist government in 2013. However, this phase is redirected and even-

1 Lochetto, 'Hybrid Ethnography: Online, Offline, and In Between'.

tually ended due to the return of unified conservative rule, which commenced in 2018 and was solidified in 2021.

It is noteworthy that the formal and informal relationships among the various actors extend beyond the specific points in time that this book uses to outline the cycles. These historical turning points were identified based on the significant shifts observed in the urban heritage planning context. They are used to illustrate the recurring pattern discussed, rather than to strictly indicate specific time frames.

The first cycle: Assembling the conservation fundamentals between two revolutions

With the early 1900s Constitutional Revolution, Iranian society broke with the structures of the past and created a plane of possibilities on which new socio-political structures could emerge. From this plane of possibilities, which Deleuze and Guattari would call a 'Body Without Organs',² the governmental, academic, and social assemblage of modern conservation was born in Iran. The legislative-administrative conservation apparatus that developed between 1910 and 1930 was linked to the pre-constitutional socio-political networks³ around the idea of modern Iranian nationality.⁴ Nevertheless, state implementation of conservation as a central policy in Iran began with the establishment of the parliamentary state and its ministries. In this regard, Tehran's

2 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*.

3 Elsewhere, I have looked at the transition of Iranian thought from pre-modern handling of old cities to modern conservation. See: Solmaz Yadollahi, 'Reflections on the Past and Future of Urban Conservation in Iran', *Built Heritage* 4, no. 1 (2020): 1–13.

4 For a detailed historical perspective on constructing cultural heritage preservation as part of modernization process in Iran, see: Talinn Grigor, 'Recultivating "Good Taste": The Early Pahlavi Modernists and Their Society for National Heritage', *Iranian Studies* 37, no. 1 (2004): 17–45, doi: 10.1080/0021086042000232929.