

Making Histories of “Sacred” Mausoleums: Architectural Representation of Changing Islamic Ideologies

SHAHRZAD SHIRVANI

This article explores the role of mausoleums and shrines in both the construction of Muslim identity and contemporary practices of nation-building in the Middle East. Using a comparative method, it analyzes the representational qualities of two important memorial complexes in Iran: the now-demolished mausoleum of Reza Shah (r. 1925–1941), who established the former Pahlavi monarchy, and the mausoleum of Ayatollah Khomeini, the charismatic founder of the present Islamic Republic. The research engages with the form, iconography and architecture of the two complexes to discern and interpret the signs of authority and religiosity inscribed in each. It thus contributes to understanding the role of sacred space and sacred memory in the formation of national identity in Iran before and after the 1979 Islamic Revolution and under different political/religious ideologies.

The breaking news on June 7, 2017, was shocking. Twin terrorist attacks had targeted the Iranian Parliament and the mausoleum of Ayatollah Khomeini. Responsibility for the attacks, which left thirteen people dead and 46 others wounded, was claimed by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as ISIS). Initial reports indicated that the attackers included suicide bombers who intended to blow themselves up inside the *haram* of the mausoleum complex. However, it was later confirmed that the attackers had been shot and killed by guardians and police prior to entering the “holy shrine.”

Media coverage of the incident was extensive, and Iranian television showed a reporter standing at the northern gate of the shrine-like mausoleum, with its golden dome and minarets visible in the background. The image reinforced the importance of the Khomeini memorial as a symbol of national identity for the Islamic Republic. The desire of Sunni fundamentalists to bomb it likewise signified the historic revival of religious violence in

Shahrazad Shirvani is a Ph.D. Candidate in the Department of Architecture at the University of California, Berkeley.

the present. Ironically, the incident also invoked memory of an earlier attack on another Iranian national mausoleum.

In April 1980, almost 37 years previously, during the early days of the Iranian Revolution, that other attack had been led by the Shi'ite cleric Sadegh Khalkhali, known to have been a member of Khomeini's circle of disciples since the 1950s. Over the course of twenty days it resulted in the brutal demolition of the final resting place of Reza Shah, the first king of the Pahlavi monarchy. At the time, it was noted that Reza Shah's mausoleum had been constructed near the Shâh Abdol-Azîm shrine in Rey, an ancient religious city now incorporated into the southern suburbs of Tehran. Shâh Abdol-Azîm was a fifth-generation descendant of the second Shi'ite imam, Hasan-ibn Ali; and since he had been laid to rest there in the ninth century, the shrine had become one of the most sacred of sites for Iranian Shi'ites.

While leading the destruction of the Reza Shah mausoleum, Khalkhali stated that "the Iranian nation cannot tolerate seeing Reza Shah's mausoleum existing in a close distance with Shâh Abdol-Azîm holy shrine."¹ And in his memoirs, he later proudly recounted how difficult it had been to demolish the modern marbled mausoleum, claiming that the effort succeeded only as a result of popular will and effort. As he described it, two hundred men carrying picks and shovels had walked toward the holy shrine of Abdol-Azîm, with the goal of "clearing up the sacred urban landscape" from "the King's profane memories and memorial building" (FIG. 1).² In so doing, their objective had been to destroy all physical trace of the former shah, and thus open a new chapter in history for the Islamic Republic.

The stories above reflect the importance of "sacred spaces" within Shi'ite culture. In Islamic countries, but particularly in Iran, specific building types — including tombs, mausoleums and shrines — create powerful narratives of faith and desire. Such sites are generally associated with the veneration of important religious and political figures and may become important sites for pilgrimage. But as commemorative spaces, they also embody invented pasts and collective memories that nations can otherwise neither give up nor call up. National identity may thus be understood as being constantly constructed and deconstructed in these spaces to reflect the changing needs of regimes in power.

In examining how particular types of sacred space have aided the formation of national identities in Iran before and after the 1979 revolution, this article will also reflect on how they have been used to perpetuate different ideologies within the Muslim world. Thus, it is important to note that both mausoleums investigated here came under attack by groups who believed their form and symbolism to be contrary to Islamic tradition. Reza Shah's mausoleum, with its pre-Islamic references, was destroyed because the leaders of the new Islamic Republic, including Khomeini, considered the dictatorial rule of the former monarchy to be illegitimate. Perhaps in their eyes Reza Shah had not been a "true Mus-

lim." And almost 39 years later another group of Islamic radicals attacked Khomeini's own mausoleum in an effort to sow fear and hatred in the country. For them, perhaps it was Khomeini who was not "Islamic enough" to be buried in such a glorious complex. Such attacks highlight fundamental inconsistencies within Islamic traditions and ideologies. In fact, ISIS, a Sunni fundamentalist group, has never accepted the legitimacy of the Islamic Republic, which is grounded in the Shi'a branch of the faith.

In assessing the role of religious space under two contradictory authoritative political systems, before and after the Iranian Revolution, the article seeks to address several questions.³ How do different political regimes employ the idea of



FIGURE 1. Above: destruction of the mausoleum of Reza Shah by revolutionary extremists in the early days of the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Below: remnants of the Reza Shah mausoleum stand close to the Shâh Abdol-Azîm shrine in the city of Rey. Upper image from Wikipedia, retrieved at https://lv.wikipedia.org/wiki/Att%C3%A9ls:Destroying_Reza_Shah%27s_mausoleum.jpg. Lower image from the author's personal collection.

sacred space as a strategy for legitimizing power? How does the embodiment of selected pasts result in the production of spaces of national veneration? And ultimately, what role do modernity and tradition play in contemporary constructions of such sacred spaces?

TRADITION OF MANUFACTURING "SACRED SPACE"

In cities ruled by authoritarian regimes, the destruction of certain significant buildings has long given rise to the construction of others. Such activity is similar in some ways to the loss of empires: there are always new forms of domination to be built on the remnants of the past. Instances of construction and destruction may, however, provide a powerful shared memory; and particularly in the context of the contemporary Middle East, the generation of such narratives may be closely tied to the dialectics of tradition and modernity. Architecture has thus become an influential tool of representation, as the building of commemorative state monuments is used as a social strategy to construct desired national identities.

A number of scholars have previously studied how appeals to "tradition" may reinforce the legitimacy of authoritarian regimes. As Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger argued, the adaptation and "invention" of traditions paralleled the emergence of nations and nationalism.⁴ The connection between tradition and nationalism was likewise studied by Benedict Anderson, who historicized the "obscure genesis of nationalism" by emphasizing the decline of dynastic rule and the sacralization processes in the formation of nation-states.⁵ And, according to Nezar AlSayyad, the nation-building apparatus "has always been responsible for much of what might be described as official built tradition."⁶

Another important volume in such discussions is Lawrence Vale's *Architecture, Power, and National Identity*, which sought to understand the ideologies underlying the design of various capital cities and capitol buildings.⁷ In particular, Vale compared parliamentary complexes in different cities around the world, including in the Middle East, to demonstrate how different governments employed architectural abstraction to express political power and construct a sense of national identity. His effort highlighted how a dialogue between tradition and modernity was frequently essential to the relationship between architecture and government ideology, and how the siting of parliament complexes was typically the product of political forces.⁸

More recently, the art historian Kishwar Rizvi's *The Transnational Mosque: Architecture and Historical Memory in the Contemporary Middle East* has explored the production of mosques as expressions of powerful political regimes.⁹ In it, Rizvi investigated how religious and secular histories and traditions have influenced the form, function and meaning of mosques in different geographical territories, under dif-

ferent political regimes. Specifically, through an analysis of mosques in Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Iran, Rizvi showed that Islam is hardly a monolithic force. Yet she showed how the design of sacred sites frequently combines architectural representation with a selective view of history to promote ideologies of the state.

This article builds on the scholarship above by investigating the use of "sacred space" in the construction of a sense of Shi'ite national identity in Iran. This involves understanding how such concepts as "Sacred Shrine" and "Holy Haram" (Farsi translation: "Haram-e Motahhar") have been manufactured and demolished under a variety of political regimes.

Historically, the idea of a unified Shi'ite empire appeared in Iran in the sixteenth century when the Safavids merged Shi'ism with a new multicultural dynastic order. The transformation provided great new power to Shi'ite clerics. According to Rizvi, in the medieval period, shrines were among many centers for the practice of Shi'a belief.¹⁰ However, after the triumph of the Safavids, the representation of so-called "Shi'ite architecture" came to be centered on the captivating authority of imams (principal leaders and guides), whose instructions and practices were viewed as a model for life. The main focus of Shi'ite devotion thus shifted to commemorative sites, including the holy resting places of historically famous imams; and these have continued to serve as important spaces of prayer and pilgrimage to the present day.

Due to sociocultural and religious transformations in Iran, contemporary Farsi contains various words for "tomb." The variety reflects social, cultural, political and religious changes that have affected the language throughout history. A final resting place may thus be described using the words *ârâmgâh*, *maqbareh*, *marqad*, *mazâr*, *qabr*, *gûr*, *torbat*, *khâk*, *madfan*, *khâkjâ*, and possibly a few others — terms that derive from a mixture of Arabic and Persian vocabularies. A domain of religious terms also exists that belongs more particularly to Islamic tradition. One of the most significant of these is *haram*. Both the Arabic word and its Persian synonym, *ziâratgâh*, today summon a history of Shi'ite traditions, rituals and cultures.

In Islamic culture, a *haram* is a holy site of high sanctity. The architectural historian Oleg Grabar classified three such uses of the concept in the pan-Islamic context: the Haram in Mecca, the mosque, and the Haram al-Sharif [Noble Sanctuary] in Jerusalem.¹¹ He defined these as "true holy places, divinely endowed with some special sanctity," whose pious meanings are significant to all Muslims.¹² Among them, the Haram in Mecca remains a "sacred enclosure," a holy place, providing a directional focus for the prayers of Muslims around the world. It is particularly associated with Abraham, a holy man and the first Muslim, who built the Ka'aba there and commemorated it as the house of God.¹³ The Ka'aba has remained the main site for the practice of pilgrimage (*hajj*), which is considered one of the five pillars of Islam in both the Sunni and Shi'ite traditions.¹⁴ Every Muslim is bound to travel to the Haram

in Mecca at least once in his/her life, if he/she can afford it, to practice a set of defined rituals and ceremonies.¹⁵

As observed by Henri Lefebvre, “sacred space appears to come under the thrall of a divine order and provides a basis for representation of symbols of religious and political power.”¹⁶ In the Islamic world, and particularly among the Shi’ites, shrines of various attributions and forms may also be regarded as offering such sacred qualities. While many of them may be dedicated to holy figures such as imams, others may serve more generally commemorative functions.¹⁷ Nevertheless, for Shi’ite Muslims they can be considered spaces of prayer and socialization, on the order of mosques, where people may gather and participate in communal rituals of devotion. In fact, such shrines may garner even more sacred status because of the veneration within Shi’a Islam for the family of the Prophet Muhammad (literally known as *ahl al-bayt* in Arabic).¹⁸

In particular, a number of important shrines are devoted to the twelve historic imams who succeeded the Prophet as leaders of the Shi’ite community. After the death of the Prophet, the Shi’ites nominated Ali ibn Abi Talib (the Prophet’s cousin and son-in-law) to lead the faith. However, after a struggle within the larger community of believers, Abu-Bakr, the Prophet’s father-in-law, was selected as the first caliph. Although Ali did serve as the fourth caliph, Twelver Shi’ite Muslims (constituting the majority of Shi’ites today) continue to venerate Ali as their first imam and leader. Eleven succeeding sons and heirs of Imam Ali are likewise considered to have been imams, and have become the main focus of devotion and allegiance in the Shi’a faith. Memorials and shrines to these twelve pious imams, as well as memorials to their sons and daughters (*imâmzâdeh*) and the tombs of the *ahl al-bayt*, are thus all considered sacred religious sites in Iran today.

As the above discussion indicates, Shi’ite culture in Iran has long centered on the authority of the imams. But in the sociopolitical transformations that took place during the 1979 revolution, shrines dedicated to them played an especially important role in foregrounding Shi’ite ideology. Indeed, during the revolution, shrines were among the most important sites for mobilizing various groups and forces. Being open to both men and women, they provided spaces in which the public could be educated in the goals and purposes of the movement. And, as spaces of socialization and mobilization, they were transformed after the overthrow of the monarchy into theological institutions that mediated between the people and the state. Moreover, as a result of changing state ideologies, after the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988), they became sites for massive displays of public religiosity. In particular, the conservative government at the time used them as sites to reinforce the importance of commemorating the birth and death of the Shi’ite imams and *ahl al-bayt*.

In Iran, there are three major sacred sites: the shrine of Imam Reza in Mashhad (Khorasan province); the shrine of Fatima Ma’suma, the daughter of the seventh imam and the sister of Imam Reza, in the holy city of Qom (about 150

kilometers southwest of Tehran); and the Jamkaran mosque (located a short distance from Qom) (FIG. 2). Mashhad and Qom are two of the principal and long-standing religious centers in Iran; the third site is believed to be where the twelfth Shi’ite imam, the Mahdi, lived and communicated with people before his ninth-century occultation (temporary disappearance from the world).¹⁹

The idea of sacred space production in contemporary Iran has also included efforts to venerate more recent leaders. In this regard it is the 1979 Islamic Revolution, led by Ayatollah Khomeini (the first supreme leader), that provides



FIGURE 2. Typography of holy Shi’ite shrines in Iran. Above: Imam Reza shrine in the city of Mashhad. Middle: shrine of Fatima Ma’suma in the city of Qom. Below: Jamkaran mosque in the city of Qom. Above source: original portal of Astan Quds Razavi, retrieved from <https://photo.aqr.ir>. Middle source: original portal of Karimeh, retrieved from <http://www.karime.net>. Below: courtesy of Muhammad Mahdi Karim, retrieved from https://fa.wikipedia.org/wiki/مسجد_جمکران#/media/File:Jamkaran_Mosque.jpg.

the key focal point. The event solidified Shi'ism as the state ideology of the Islamic Republic as a replacement for the nominally secular Pahlavi monarchy. But in another sense the revolution merely replaced one nationalistic, authoritarian regime with another. And since the revolution, the Islamic government has attempted through state media to propagate and institutionalize such theocratic ideas as the Imamate (the Shi'ite doctrine of religious and political leadership of the Muslim community), Mahdism (the culture of waiting for the return of the twelfth imam from occultation), and martyrdom (the culture of self-sacrifice as a religious duty).²⁰

These efforts intensified during the eight years of war with Iraq in the 1980s, when Shi'ite ideology was the main instrument by which the Islamic Republic maintained its power and claim to legitimacy. Since then, it can be argued that these ideologies have been further strategically embedded in Iranian cities through architecture and urban design. Building projects have thus been used to bind the ideas of modernization and Islamization together as the visual embodiments of a modern Shi'ite nation-state. Indeed, according to Rizvi, architecture in Iran can be understood as exemplifying the resurgence of Islam “as a touchstone of nationalist discourse” since the 1970s.²¹ And she has further emphasized the reemergence of a religious identity in political and civic discourse, where “religion, as co-opted by the state, is the driving factor in the architectural program.”²²

DESIGN AND SYMBOLISM OF THE MAUSOLEUM OF REZA SHAH

Prior to the revolution, Iran's transition into a modern nation-state was begun by the Pahlavi monarchy, which consisted of the reign of two kings: Reza Shah (r. 1925–1941) and his son, Mohammad Reza Shah (r. 1941–1979). The first Pahlavi king was well known for his nationalist ideology and efforts

to modernize the country. Ironically, his son was not as successful, and his efforts ended with the downfall of the monarchic system.

In modernizing the country, Reza Shah advocated what he called “Persian Architecture,” a style that involved reinvigorating elements of Iran's ancient past to create a new national identity. In this effort, narratives of the pre-Islamic Achaemenid and Sassanian empires — mostly inherited from the epics of the *Shāhnāme* — provided a template for the construction of the Iranian nation-state.²³ The *Shāhnāme*, literally *The Book of Kings*, consists of epic poems authored by Hakim Abd al-Qāsem Ferdowsi Tusi (ca. 920–1020 CE), celebrating the myths, legends and histories of seventh-century Persian rulers. Among Iranians, *Shāhnāme* is a highly respected, nationalist work, and its rich and meaningful verses glorify the country's Persian heritage, Zoroastrian culture and faith, and pre-Islamic civilization. Reza Shah drew special attention to this iconic work by Ferdowsi as he pursued his campaign of secular modernization.

During the first Pahlavi era, expressions of this pre-Islamic civilization were key to government-supported architecture and urban design, as its utopian nationalism sometimes revived design themes from the ancient Achaemenid (559–350 BCE) and Sassanian (224–651 CE) empires.²⁴ At the time it was believed an avant-garde architecture specifically drawing from the amalgamation of modern European practices and the traditional forms of Zoroastrian fire temples could link the Pahlavi monarchy to the glory of Iran's former Great Civilization.

One particularly influential project was the construction by order of Reza Shah of a Ferdowsi mausoleum in Tus in the 1930s. According to the art historian Talinn Grigor, the project, commissioned by the Society of National Heritage (SNH), offered a nearly pure expression of authoritarian modernization (FIG. 3).²⁵ The design was assigned to a number of architects, including Karim Taherzadeh Behzad, the Frenchman

FIGURE 3. Left: the mausoleum of Ferdowsi in the city of Tus. Upper right: the centralized and elevated plan of the mausoleum. Lower right: carved inscriptions from the book of *Shāhnāme* on the front marble facade of the mausoleum of Ferdowsi, with the icon of the Zoroastrian good spirit (*Farvahar*) at the top. Left and upper right source: Archnet, retrieved from https://archnet.org/sites/5405/media_contents/43750. Lower right source: IRNA News Agency, retrieved from <http://www.irna.ir/fa/News/82525498>.

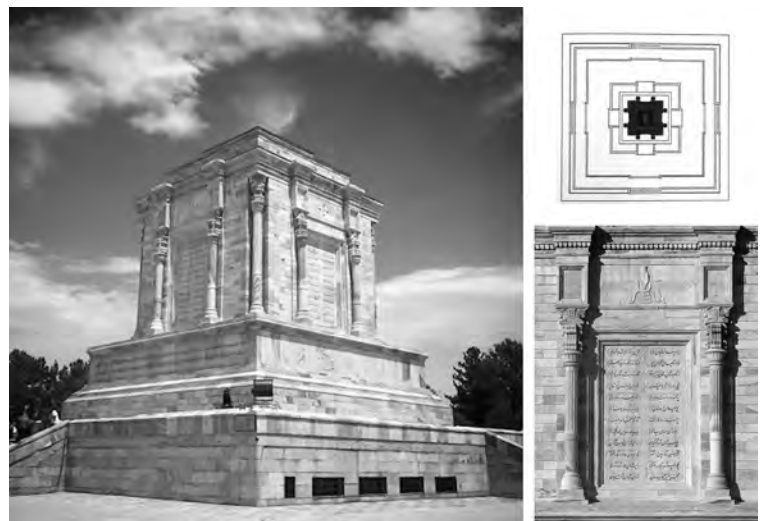




FIGURE 4. Left: tomb of Cyrus the Great in Pasargadae. Right: plan drawing of the tomb by Ernst Emil Herzfeld. Right source: UNESCO archive, retrieved from http://whc.unesco.org/?cid=31&l=en&id_site=1106&gallery=1&index=13&maxrows=12. Right source: Wikipedia, retrieved from https://fa.wikipedia.org/wiki/تomb_of_Cyrus_the_great_by_Ernst_Emil_Herzfeld.jpg.

Andre Godard, Hossein Lorzadeh, and eventually Houshang Seyhoun; and its final iconography blended aspects of both Parthian mausoleums and the Zoroastrian tomb of Cyrus the Great in Pasargadae (FIG. 4).²⁶ The finished white-marble landmark was raised above the ground and reached by a set of steps, and the main vault of its burial chamber rose above this base in a manner similar to the vault of Cyrus's tomb. In addition, the decorative symbol of the Zoroastrian good spirit (Farvahar) appeared centrally on the main facade — whose modern appearance otherwise seemed to take inspiration from the Hall of One Hundred Columns at Persepolis.²⁷ And as a final tribute to Ferdowsi, nationalist verses from the *Shâhnâmeh* were inscribed on the building's marble facades (REFER TO FIG. 3).

According to Grigor, the white cubic structure on its elevated base epitomized modernist simplicity and openness.²⁸ As such, it was intended to provide a secular, national pilgrimage site for a modern Iranian nation. However, the majority of the country's population remained Muslims; and regardless of Reza Shah's efforts to secularize Iranian society, the veneration of Shi'ite shrines and sacred spaces remained a powerful practice. Thus, the production of sacred space continued to provide an important connection between government and the people. Indeed, during the first Pahlavi era, a deliberate attempt was made to link practices of modernization to ordinary Islamic traditions and customs.

At the beginning of the second Pahlavi era, however, an increasing emphasis on programs of secular modernization was highlighted by the design and construction of a mausoleum for Reza Shah. Reza Shah had died on July 26, 1944, of a heart attack while in exile in Johannesburg; and within three months, his body was mummified and carried to Egypt, where it was kept at the al-Rifa'i mosque in Cairo. Six years then elapsed before his body could be returned to Iran, as controversy surrounded the selection of a proper burial place.

Initially, clerics rejected a proposal that the former king be buried at one of the country's two most religious cities, Qom and Mashhad. However, after extensive discussion, an alternative site was selected near the famous Shi'ite shrine of Shâh Abdol-Azîm in the southern Tehran suburb of Rey (FIG. 5).²⁹ It was argued that locating the king's mausoleum there, adjacent to the shrine and its surrounding cemetery, would provide it with an appropriately sacred context (FIG. 6).

Construction of the mausoleum began in 1948 by order of the second Pahlavi king, Mohammad Reza Shah; and a team of three famous Iranian architects — Ali Sadeq, Mohsen Foroughi, and Keyqobad Zafar — was selected to produce its design. The project was subsequently completed



FIGURE 5. This old aerial image was taken almost 23 years prior the construction of the mausoleum of Reza Shah. It shows the proximity of the Shâh Abdol-Azîm shrine to an empty site at the lower right corner of the image, which was later selected for the construction of the mausoleum. The photo was captured by Walter Mittelholzer, a Swiss pilot and aviation pioneer in 1925. Source: Walter Mittelholzer Photo Archives.



FIGURE 6. Old map of the city of Rey. Image courtesy of Adel Derakhshani, from Reza Shirazian, *Tehran-negari: Bank-e Naqshe-ha va Anavin-e Makani-ye Tehran-e Qadim* [Tehranography: Collection of Maps and Area Titles of Old Tehran] (Tehran: Dastan Publishing, 2016).

in March 1950, and in April of that year, Mohammad Reza Shah and his companions returned his father’s body to Iran after making stops in Mecca and Medina. On May 7, 1950, an elaborate royal funeral was then held, and Reza Shah was buried in his mausoleum — what Grigor has described as a “simple but austere modernist structure” (FIG. 7).³⁰

In future years, as a national edifice, the mausoleum would be visited by officials and royalty from other countries, such as Queen Elizabeth. As part of formal state visits, such figures were typically invited to show their respect there for the founder of modern Iran (FIG. 8). Important national events, such as the official state ceremonies marking the fiftieth anniversary of Pahlavi rule in 1976, were also held at the mausoleum. Reza Shah’s fifth child, Alireza Pahlavi, and Hasan Ali Mansur (the prime minister of Iran from 1964–1965) were also buried there.

In terms of its form, the mausoleum deliberately recalled the Sassanid architecture of pre-Islamic Iran. Indeed, under Reza Shah, as Grigor has noted, the Iranian state frequently attempted to combine architectural historicism and avant-gardism to construct the image of a modern nation.³¹ Visually, the king’s mausoleum thus combined both modernist and pre-Islamic iconography, and it deployed such historic

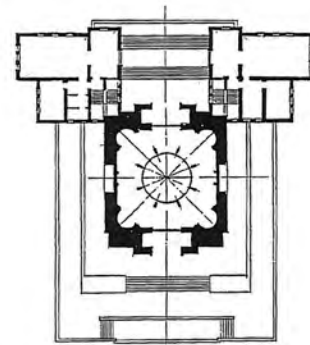


FIGURE 7. The mausoleum of Reza Shah, located close to the Shâh Abdol-Azîm shrine in the city of Rey. Above: exterior view from the 1978 Albert Lamorisse documentary video *The Lovers’ Wind*. Below: plan for the mausoleum and its surrounding landscape. Source: Wikimedia, retrieved from https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/ab/Reza-shah_mausoleum5.jpg.

concepts as centrality and directionality in the configuration of the actual burial space. Its design further employed reference to the ancient Iranian prototype of the *châhâr-tâq*, the basic form taken by Zoroastrian fire temples in pre-Islamic times (FIG. 9). This form had been used earlier in the tomb of Ferdowsi, and would be used extensively in state building projects during the second Pahlavi era. A *châhâr-tâq*, literally meaning “four arches,” consists of four vaults with a dome placed above them on a central square base.³² Such a three-dimensional composition produces a room of cruciform plan. In the case of the king’s mausoleum, however, the dome was constructed 7 meters (23 feet) lower than the main dome of the Shâh Abdol-Azîm shrine, to show loyalty and respect for Shi’ite culture and tradition.

Besides the building’s modernity and nationalist symbolism, its reception among the people as a legitimator of the Pahlavi monarchy was a major concern. Thus, the landscape surrounding the mausoleum was planned as a small public park with beautiful plants. Ordinary people, however, were

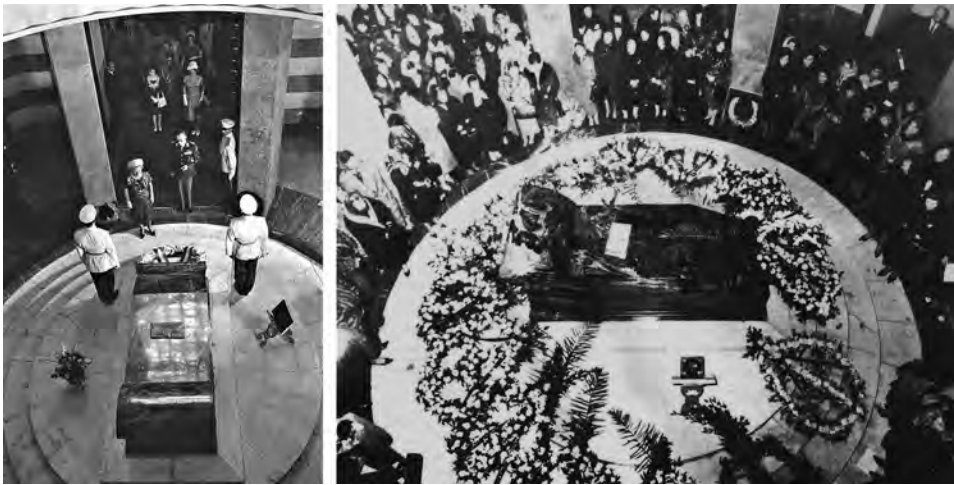


FIGURE 8. Interior of the mausoleum of Reza Shah. Left: during a visit by the Dutch royal family in 1963. Right: during the Kashf-ee Hijab commemoration January 7, 1963, which was attended by government officials and their families. Source: Wikiwand Archives, retrieved from http://www.wikiwand.com/fr/Mausolée_de_Reza_Chah.

prohibited from entering the building, where the king's gravestone was located, and its main entrance was locked and protected by two guards, who were present almost every day, except when the shah's family was visiting. On those days, the whole area, including the park, was blocked off by the army to let the royal family pass their time in comfort.

During fieldwork, the author conducted interviews with several men and women in their fifties who claimed that people from all around the country used to come to the mausoleum to pray for Reza Shah. In particular, the visitors said "Fatiha" to show respect to the king for his national achievements. Reciting Fatiha after a person's death is a longstanding tradition within Islam, and in Iran it is an important social practice to show respect while visiting people's graves. The Arabic term may be defined as "the opening" (to a prayer or to the faith), and is also the name of a Surat in the holy Quran. By reciting Fatiha, family and friends in a state of grief typically ask God to give certain promised rewards to the deceased person. Thus, it is believed the recitation of Fatiha will bring peace to the soul of the dead person.

During the fieldwork interviews, one respondent told the author how, when he was younger, he occasionally traveled to Rey to visit the Shâh Abdol-Azîm shrine. On his way, he said, as he passed Reza Shah's mausoleum in his car, he would also

say prayers and recite Fatiha for the king. Such statements show that before the revolution most people retained respect for Reza Shah and admired his nationalist endeavors and modern achievements. In fact, as he wrote in his memoir, one of the main reasons Khalkhali set out to destroy the king's mausoleum was to stop ordinary people from reciting Fatiha to Reza Shah when they visited the Shâh Abdol-Azîm shrine.³³

Khalkhali's memoir is one of the most important post-revolutionary documents, and it describes many barbaric acts of destruction and erasure of history and heritage in Iran. In it, Khalkhali also proudly proclaimed that he ordered the removal of Nassereddin-Shah's gravestone from the Shâh Abdol-Azîm memorial to wipe it clean of all traces of monarchic history. Nassereddin Shah was the fourth king of the Qajar dynasty, who ruled Iran from 1848 to 1896, when he was assassinated during a visit to the Shâh Abdol-Azîm shrine. After about six months, however, as a sign of respect, his body was buried there, with the commission for his gravestone going to a prominent sculptor, Hossein Hajjar. Hajjar took four years to produce a masterpiece, with the image of the king's body delicately carved on green marble. The gravestone was then placed in a separate room inside the shrine (FIG. 10).

For years, the resting place of the Qajar king was open to the public, and people of all ages would visit it, including pil-



FIGURE 9. The Persian concept of châhâr-tâq. Left: a Zoroastrian fire temple (atashkadeh) at Niasar, Kashan, in which four heavy piers with joined arches carry the weight of a dome to create a simple pavilion. Right: employment of the châhâr-tâq idea in the design of the mausoleum of Reza Shah. Left image from the author's personal archive. Right image from the 1978 Albert Lamorisse documentary video *The Lovers' Wind*.

FIGURE 10. *Nassereddin Shah's gravestone is now exhibited in the Qajar-era Golestan palace in Tehran. Image courtesy of Stefan Krasowski, retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naser_al-Din_Shah_Qajar#/media/File:Naser_al-Din_Shah%27s_tomb_stone.jpg.*



grims to the shrine. In an interview, one 59-year-old woman told the author how, as a child, she had traveled to Rey with her parents on a pilgrimage to the Shâh Abdol-Azîm shrine. And she remembered how some other old men and women had come there specifically to visit the grave of Nassereddin Shah to show respect to him and the Qajar dynasty.

According to another interviewee, during one of her visits, she was surprised to see an old man crying over the king's grave and lamenting the Pahlavi kings. While mourning Nassereddin Shah, he complained about the increased price of eggs during the time of Pahlavis. After praying for the king of Qajar and reciting *Fatiha*, the old man then left the grave room to show respect to Shâh Abdol-Azîm.

DESIGN AND SYMBOLISM OF THE MAUSOLEUM/ SHRINE OF AYATOLLAH KHOMEINI

Passing along the Persian Gulf Freeway, the main road between Tehran and Qom, toward Zahra Paradise, the main cemetery of Tehran and the place where the martyrs of the revolution and the Iran-Iraq War are buried, a magnificent shrine-like edifice glares in a distance, catching the eye of every traveler. This building is the final resting place of the charismatic clergyman and leader of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Ruhollah Mousavi Khomeini (FIG. 11). The first supreme leader of Iran is today known as "Imam" among his devotees, a theological term whose significance has been explained above. Ayatollah Khomeini died on June 3, 1989 (almost a year after the announcement of a ceasefire in the Iran-Iraq War), from intestinal cancer and a heart attack.

Soon afterwards, a committee was formed to determine an appropriate burial place. It consisted of close relatives and companions, including Seyyed Ahmad Khomeini, his younger son, who had served at his father's right hand during his revolutionary lifetime. Instead of thinking about a simple memorial, it was Ahmad who proposed the construction of a mausoleum complex. And the construction of a grand, national project was soon begun under his supervision, with the cooperation of the Jihad of Construction (*Jahâd-e Sâzandegi*) and the Army of the Guardians of the Islamic Revolution (*Sepâh-e Pâsdârân*).

From its beginning, the memorial complex was hailed by the Islamic government as a way to honor "both the person buried in it and the revolution he inspired."³⁴ Indeed, the glare of the mausoleum now signifies a number of desires and intentions. It has since also served as the burial site of other important political and religious figures from the Islamic Republic. Among these is Ahmad, himself, who died of heart disease on March 17, 1995, and was buried next to his father. Later, Khomeini's wife, Khadijeh Saghafi, who passed away on March 21, 2009, and his son-in-law, Mahmoud Borujerdi, who died on February 20, 2011, were also buried there. More recently, on January 10, 2017, the body of Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the chairman of Iran's Expediency Council and the former president of the country (1989–1997), who died of a heart attack, was laid to rest there, close to his mentor Khomeini.³⁵

Despite its avowed national significance, however, after almost 26 years, the grand memorial complex in southern Tehran is still under construction. And although its design has been advertised as defining the Islamic Republic's ap-

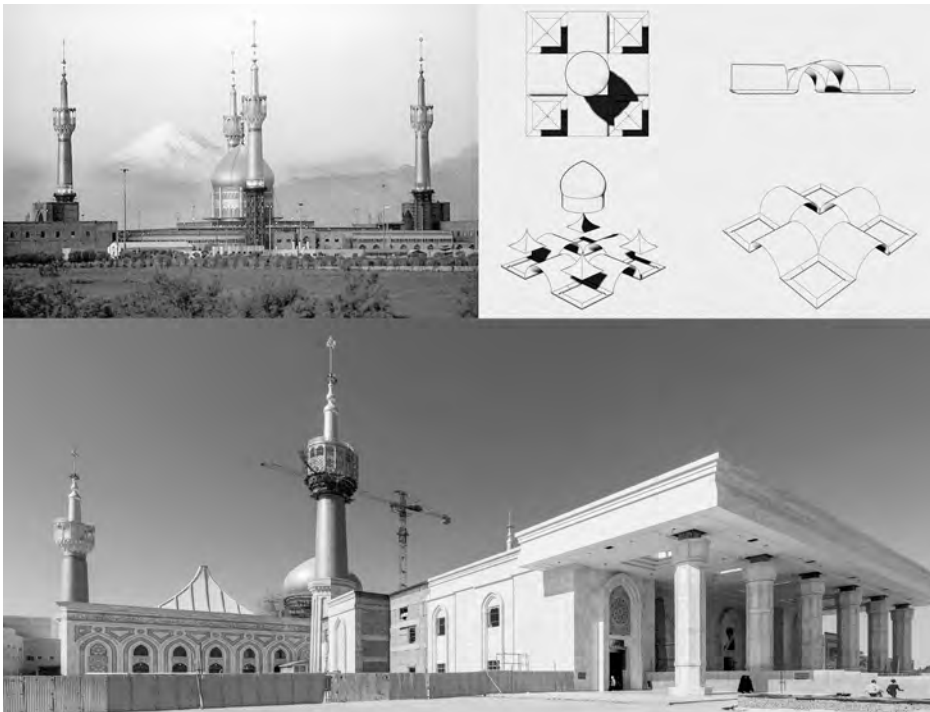


FIGURE 11. Design transformation of the mausoleum of Ayatollah Khomeini in southern Tehran. The upper images show the initial phase of the design. The lower image shows its second phase of design and development. Above left source: http://nagsh.ir/63-امام-خمينی-رد-4443-emam_khomein-nagsh-105. Above right source: <http://memari.مرقد-امام-21106/1396/03/14/>. Below image from author's personal collection.

proach to “Iranian-Islamic architecture,” it does not seem to embody any official code or principle. To date, the project has also comprised two very different phases. Initially, between 1989 and 1991, the structure exhibited a temporary quality, based on the idea of the centrality of the *zarih*, the holy burial space. The first phase of the reconstruction then began in May 1991 with the covering of the interior by a space frame to shelter visitors. Thereafter, four minarets were added to indicate the four directions of the central dome, and later, four smaller domes were constructed on the corners of the vast rectangular site. Then, in 2007, the main golden dome was replaced with a silver coating for an unknown reason. However, the gold color was reinstated during a second, comprehensive reconstruction phase, so that the mausoleum would more clearly resemble other Shi‘ite holy shrines.

Completion of the second phase of reconstruction, planned to mark the 26th anniversary of Khomeini’s death on June 4, 2015, transformed the mausoleum complex into a luxurious ceremonial space, if not a palatial edifice (FIG. 12). In addition to a complete redesign of the main interior space and its revamping with decorative tiles and glitter, this included the reconstruction of two giant eastern and western courtyard wings named Shohadâ (meaning “the Martyrs”) and âgha-Mostafâ (after the older son of Ruhollah Khomeini who died mysteriously on October 23, 1977). A new VIP entrance was also constructed for important guests, with a high ceiling resting on eight columns, a design feature intended to recall historical Iranian palaces. The ongoing development of the larger complex will eventually include hotels, temporary residential areas for pilgrims, cultural centers such as the

Imam Khomeini Museum, commercial spaces to service visitors, as well as a hospital. A vast parking area and helicopter landing zone have also been included in the project — even though the front gate of the complex is within close walking distance of an underground Metro station. Further, the complex is now located in close proximity to the International Fair of Tehran, Shahr-e Aftâb (meaning “Sun City”), inaugurated on April 20, 2016, by the Tehran municipality.

To fully appreciate the architectural manifestation of the mausoleum, it is important to understand the role of iconic numbers and Shi‘ite symbols in its design. During my most recent visit, a tour guide emphasized how “the designers were asked to implement iconic numbers in the design of the mausoleum-shrine.”³⁶ Specifically, he said, the mausoleum takes the form of a 126-by-126-meter square, which can be subdivided into nine smaller squares of 42 by 42 meters. The guide explained the number 126 is a symbolic reference to the total number of prophets and messengers. In the initial phase, the central *zarih* (holy burial space), was located under the main dome, which was erected on a drum 8 meters in height (almost 26 feet), supported by eight green columns. The guide indicated that the number of columns and the height of the dome’s drum embodied a reference to the eighth Shi‘ite imam, Ali al-Rezâ, whose shrine is located in Mashhad.

Similar information has appeared on the official website of the government’s Islamic Development Organization.³⁷ There, Ali Akbar Zanganeh, project manager for the mausoleum complex, claimed that the most important objective of the project has been to exhibit an exemplary “Iranian-Islamic architecture” and Shi‘ite architecture style.³⁸ But he did not

FIGURE 12. Interior design of the mausoleum-shrine of Ayatollah Khomeini. Above: after the initial phase of construction (1991) eight columns surrounding the burial space carried the weight of the main dome. Below: after the second reconstruction phase the interior was vastly expanded and the dome was raised to create a new ceremonial space. Top image from the author’s personal collection. Bottom source: Wikimedia, retrieved from https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/ff/f4/Mausoleum_of_Ruhollah_Khomeini_07.jpg.



offer any further explanation of what exactly the two phrases might mean. What he did stress was the continued importance of the iconic numbers since the initial design. According to Zanganeh, the dome was designed to be 42 meters high as a reminder of the year 1342 in the Hijri Shamsi calendar (1963 in the Gregorian calendar), to mark the starting point for the anti-monarchic movement in Iran. Likewise, measuring from the base, the dome is 57 meters high, signifying the year 1357 (1979 in Gregorian calendar), during which the Iranian Islamic Revolution occurred. Finally, the structure’s total height from its base to the top of its decorative lantern is 68 meters, a reference to the year 1368 (1989 in the Gregorian calendar), that in which Ayatollah Khomeini passed away.

Further symbolic is that the complex includes a total of five domes (the main golden one in addition to four smaller turquoise ones) as a reflection of *Āl-e Abâ*, the “Family of the Cloak,” which includes the Prophet Muhammad, his daughter Fâtema, his cousin and son-in-law Ali, and his grandsons Hassan and Hussein.³⁹ Zanganeh also noted that the height of each minaret is 91 meters (298 feet), a reference to Ayatollah Khomeini’s age.⁴⁰ However, Khomeini lived for only 87

years (from 1902 to 1989), raising questions about whether the minarets accurately reference his age.

Besides the use of iconic sacred numbers in the first phase of construction, the reconstruction added other important symbols to the complex. For example, during its reconstruction, the roof of the *haram* was redesigned to exhibit the Shi’ite symbol of *kheimeh* [a tent]. According to Zanganeh, it was Ahmad Khomeini who first proposed this addition as a reference to the historical noon of *Āshurâ*, when the army of the Caliph Yazid, after killing Imam Hussein, burned the tents of his followers in the desert of Karbala (in present-day Iraq).⁴¹

Such features indicate the importance of establishing a fusion of physical form, memory, and the Shi’ite activity of pilgrimage. Indeed, the Islamic Development Organization website describes how Ahmad Khomeini desired the form of the mausoleum complex to symbolize “*enghelâb-e âshurâ-ye*.”⁴² The two terms — *enghelâb* (revolution) and *âshurâ* (the tenth day of the month of Muharram in the Islamic calendar) — deliberately interweave the Iranian Revolution with Shi’ite commemorations of the events at Karbala.⁴³ Specifically, it revives memory of the martyrdom of Imam Hussein (the third Shi’ite imam and grandson of the Prophet), along with

the 71 members of his family and followers who were killed in Karbala in the year 688 CE as a consequence of Hussein's pious and valiant fight against oppression and the unjust ruler of the time, Caliph Yazid.

By associating itself with a symbolically charged moment in Shi'ite culture, the mausoleum announces itself as sacred territory. The holiness of the site is further impressed on pilgrims by the iconic appearance of its golden dome and four minarets against the horizon, and by the vast open space that surrounds it (FIG. 13). Moreover, its proximity to the state cemetery associates it with the memory of the caravans of faithful Iranian soldiers who fought in the Iran-Iraq War. Loyal to the leader of the revolution, they are remembered for their martyrdom on the frontlines defending the country against the secular Ba'athist regime of Saddam Hussein. The space thus highlights the borders of life and death in addition to the greatness of the man buried within.

All these features also indicate how the Iranian regime has long viewed construction of the complex not just as a mausoleum but as a shrine to legitimize its standing within Shi'ite mythology. Soon after Khomeini's death, the global media started to report on the construction of a grand burial space for the religious leader.⁴⁴ For example, on June 20, 1989, a few days after the leader's death, the *New York Times* reported that a mosque would be erected on his burial site which could be expected to become "a Shi'ite place of pilgrimage."⁴⁵ The caption for a photograph that accompanied the article described how "The emotional outpouring at the funeral reflected both Iranians' grief over the death of the leader who seemed to embody their revolution and the emphasis Shi'ite Muslims place on martyrdom and death."⁴⁶ Then, two years later, on July 8, 1991, another *New York Times* article reported that President Hashemi Rafsanjani and the Islamic government had promised to promote the spiritual legacy of Ayatollah Khomeini, and had therefore "authorized the construction of a \$2 billion cultural and tourist center on the Ayatollah's burial site."⁴⁷ The article further emphasized how the shrine "demonstrates the power of Shi'ite Islam, which predominates in Iran."⁴⁸

From its early days, the mausoleum area has also been described as "*haram*" in the Islamic state media. In this campaign, *Kayhan*, a conservative government-sponsored news-

paper, has led the way in propagating the term "Haram-e Motahhar," meaning "the Holy Shrine" — instead of more ordinary terms that might have been applied.⁴⁹ Thus, gradually, the idea of a simple mausoleum has been transformed into a site of holy pilgrimage, on a par with other Shi'ite shrines. According to Rizvi, it has also become a successful state symbol, fulfilling the "propagandistic agenda of the republic."⁵⁰

In attempting to understand peoples' reception of the mausoleum as Haram-e Motahhar, it is further important to mention its relation to two important days in the mythology of the Islamic Republic: 14 and 15 of Khordad (June 4 and 5 in the Gregorian calendar). Among the events of June 1963 in Iran were the 15-Khordad revolts [Tazahorat-e 15 Khordad] against the arrest of Ayatollah Khomeini. At the time, the second king of the Pahlavi monarchy was attempting to initiate a movement known as the White Revolution to promote modernization and legitimize his rule. But, after Khomeini denounced Mohammad Reza Shah, the public responded with massive demonstrations. As the Iranian-Armenian historian Ervand Abrahamian has written, "[The] White Revolution had been designed to preempt a Red Revolution. Instead, it paved the way for an Islamic Revolution."⁵¹ When the Pahlavi monarchy was overthrown, the new Islamic government announced that 15 Khordad (June 5) would be set aside as a national holiday. And soon after Khomeini's death, 14 Khordad (June 4) was added to it to commemorate the founder of the Islamic Republic.

Despite initial plans by the government to use the two days to organize events of mourning and grief, however, they soon became a time for ordinary people to seek fun and entertainment. This was particularly the case among youth born after the revolution. To counteract this trend, the government mandated the closure of all public entertainment venues on those days, including cinemas, theaters, performances, restaurants, cafes, and other leisure spaces. As an alternative, the common preference today is for people of all social levels to spend the holiday traveling, and as a result, roads and highways are typically jammed.

Nevertheless, to emphasize the holiday as a time of public mourning, government officials schedule a variety of events in the mausoleum-shrine. These include public prayers and other ceremonies for Khomeini along with of-



FIGURE 13. Left: sign to the "holy shrine" of Ayatollah Khomeini. Right: a pilgrim to the shrine; the writing on the backpack reads "The lover of Hossein, the pilgrims of Khomeini." Left image from the author's personal collection. Right source: Farhang News Agency, retrieved from <http://www.farhangnews.ir/content/203618>.

ferings of free food and beverages. Such events attract huge crowds of low-income families, government officials, religious pilgrims, and devotees of the deceased imam. To facilitate attendance, the government offers free public transportation to the site via special buses from various parts of the city and from the Metro, and a huge open-air lot offers free parking for more than a million visitors. For political purposes, state media then herald the huge crowds that visit the mausoleum-shrine over the national holiday.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE TWO MAUSOLEUMS

History and culture shape the very need for authority. According to Hannah Arendt, authority rests on a foundation in the past.⁵² As a language of continuity, works of architecture can be used to legitimate authority based on this chosen past. Thus, as a process of interpreting power, political authority may be transformed into symbolic and iconic edifices.⁵³ Stability and order expressed in memorial buildings such as mausoleums and shrines may hence help in constructing a desired national identity.

Richard Sennett has used a psychoanalytical approach to exploring the dynamics of political authority. In particular, he has described the effect of authority as a "emotional bond" as well as a "condition of real history."⁵⁴ Through such a bond, authority may legitimize itself by creating a feeling of attraction to figures whose legitimacy might otherwise be questioned.⁵⁵ Authority thus legitimizes itself through a change of identity.⁵⁶

According to Sennett, however, "bond" is a term that offers two contradictory meanings: it can be a "connection" while also being a "constraint." A bond thus becomes a mode of simultaneous *rejection* and *acceptance*.⁵⁷ In particular, emotional bonds that create the modern fear of authority "knit people together against their own interest, as when a people feel loyalty to a charismatic leader who takes away their liberty."⁵⁸ Sennett has traced how such desires appear in relation to monuments, such as massive churches and shrines in the Western world, and he has explained how these buildings may serve as strategic symbols that allow systems of authority to last generations.⁵⁹

Following this line of reasoning, both mausoleums investigated here may be seen as powerful visual manifestations of "bonds of authority," intended to legitimize regimes of power. However, it is important to note that both complexes were designed, planned and constructed by the successors of the leaders they commemorated. Thus, the notions of authority embedded in them were neither created by those leaders, nor necessarily supported by them. In both cases, it was actually those who inherited their power who were responsible for their construction as legitimizing signs of authority. The mausoleum of Reza Shah thus emblemized the second

Pahlavi king's imagined empire in the form of a reborn Great Iranian Civilization with him at its apex, and the mausoleum of Ayatollah Khomeini represents "Shi'ite identity" as interpreted by his son and successors. Such interpretations can be misleading, however, and they may even contradict the values of the deceased. For example, it is possible that Iran's first supreme leader wanted to be buried among the martyrs of war and revolution. But it was the Islamic government that decided his burial place would evolve into in a multi-billion-dollar ceremonial shrine, creating a paradox with regard to his revolutionary beliefs.

Both mausoleums have sought to establish religious foundations connected to selected sacred pasts to signify the legitimacy of particular regimes of power. In architectural terms they achieve this first through siting. Mohammad Reza Shah thus attempted to sanctify Reza Shah's memory through his selection of the religious city of Rey as a burial place. The city dated to ancient times, when it was one of the most important religious centers in the Achaemenid Empire and the seat of the Zoroastrian leader. And the more recent construction of Shi'ite shrines there, such as those of Shâh Abdol-Azîm, Emamzadeh Hamzeh, and Emamzadeh Teher, also provided a sacred Islamic foundation.

As Grigor has written, "historically, Ray [Rey] and Tehran were both rivals and a complementary pair; Ray was the soul of Tehran, and Tehran the body of Ray." And while Tehran was the seat of the government and the place for living, "Ray offered the site of the holy, the place of prayer, and the city of the dead."⁶⁰ Burying the first Pahlavi king there thus had double significance. It related the regime both to the virtuous moral standards and values of the ancient Zoroastrian belief and to Islamic tradition in a country where a majority of people were Shi'ite Muslims.

In a similar way, the decision to locate Ayatollah Khomeini's mausoleum adjacent to the Behesht-e Zahra [Zahra Paradise] cemetery was intended to make a historic connection. By placing a glittering shrine amidst martyrs' grave-stones, it sought to link the stories of Karbala, martyrdom, the Imamate, and Imam Mahdi's occultation (as interpreted by the Islamic government) to the Islamic Republic — and so connect a mythological past to an imagined future in the gaze of the present.

In terms of formal qualities, both mausoleums further feature burial spaces that are symmetrically centralized to draw attention to the authority of the deceased. But as Lefebvre has argued, a monumental building "extends far beyond itself, beyond its façade (assuming it has one), its internal space."⁶¹ Thus the sacred foundation of both mausoleums are made visible through symbolic manifestations.

In the case of Reza Shah's memorial this involved the use of the *châhâr-tâq* as an architectural prototype, linking the modern memorial to ancient Zoroastrian fire temples. In pre-Islamic Iran, the half-enclosed space of the *châhâr-tâq* functioned as a temple, in which the sacred fire constantly

burned. Further noticeable was its similarity with the tomb of Cyrus the Great. But antiquity was also linked to secular modernity in the building — through the use of openly expressed modern building technology, simplicity of form, and white marble to coat the mausoleum's concrete shell.

On the contrary, the design of the mausoleum complex of Ayatollah Khomeini has assumed the form of a traditional Shi'ite shrine, even if modern materials such as concrete, prefabricated space-frames, and contemporary decorative ornaments have been used to realize it.⁶² According to Rizvi, its initial manifestation combined “Shi'ite iconography with the avant-garde visual language of other modern revolutions” as a reference to both historic and contemporary times.⁶³ However, the more recent reconstruction has created a design paradox by transforming the more spartan quality of that earlier space into a lavish ceremonial hall. The holy shrine thus becomes an indicator of a particularly modern religiosity, combining “references to religion and to the modern nation-state.”⁶⁴

The religious historian Mircea Eliade famously analyzed how “sacred space” is separated from the larger world of the profane.⁶⁵ In any religion, sacred space may signify the center of the world, an *axis-mundi* serving as the vertical connection between heaven and earth. The designation of such a location allows an irruption of the divine into the everyday world, so that humans may experience transcendence. Such threshold spaces enable the two modes of sacred (inside) and profane (outside) to coexist. Such liminal space highlights the boundary between two modes of place and the limit of communication between two modes of existence.⁶⁶ Through the employment of symbols, signs and ornaments, the sacred territory thus embodies an entirely different space than its surroundings.⁶⁷ However, modern constructions of sacred space may also establish conditions in which the profane is no longer entirely opposed to the sacred. The boundary between the two concepts is thus frequently blurred (and, indeed, the two may even be partially integrated into one another) as a result of changing ideologies and political strategies. This may particularly be seen in the context of contemporary Iran.

In the case of the mausoleum-shrine of Ayatollah Khomeini, the signs, symbols, and important numbers used in its design are intended to distinguish it from its surroundings. Yet those surroundings can hardly be considered profane, as they include a cemetery where the martyrs of the 1979 revolution and later war with Iraq are buried. In fact, the shrine is intended to express a form of sacredness in *accordance* with its surrounding and adjacent spaces. Similarly, the sacred quality of the mausoleum of Reza Shah as a white, modern building was largely *derived* from an adjacent structure, the shrine of Shâh Abdol-Azîm. One of the very premises of its design was that the two buildings would coordinate in defining the meaning of the sacred. Therefore, instead of emphasizing an actual physical separation between the sacred and the profane, it is more proper to evaluate the limits and boundaries of sacredness involved in both complexes as a function of social

relations already established in the built environment. It can thus be argued that the two buildings manifest a more contingent quality of sacredness, which has also changed to reflect evolving political atmospheres and religious ideologies.

As a way of clarifying how ideologies have changed in Iran over the last three decades, it is important to point to the controversy that resulted from the completion of the second phase of construction at the Khomeini mausoleum on June 4, 2015. In an article titled “Distance between the Haram and Imam Khomeini's Culture,” Hojjat al-Islam Masih Mohajeri, the director of the *Jomhoori Eslami* newspaper, explicitly disapproved of its extravagance.⁶⁸ Those who had proposed the idea of transforming the older, simpler mausoleum into a luxurious space believed it would better reflect the greatness of Ayatollah Khomeini. But Mohajeri disagreed, arguing that such a glamorous *haram* contradicted Imam Khomeini's simple culture and lifestyle, and that its excessive cost could never be justified.⁶⁹

Nevertheless, the twenty-sixth commemoration of Khomeini's death was intentionally scheduled to coincide with the inauguration of the reconstructed shrine. And during the ceremony, Iran's second supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, gave a speech that praised Khomeini's simple lifestyle. According to reports published on his official website, Khamenei described seven principles of Khomeini's political and social way of living.⁷⁰ The fourth was his support for the poor and oppressed in Islamic society. During Khomeini's early life as a revolutionary, he decried economic inequality and the existence of an Islamic aristocracy. He thus praised *kukh-neshinân* (slum-dwellers) and rejected the ceremonial lifestyles of *kâkh-neshinân* (the rich). Indeed, one of Khomeini's most famous statements was that “one strand of the hair of the slum-dwellers and those who gave martyrs is far superior, in honor, to all palaces and palace dwellers of the worlds.”⁷¹

In stark contrast to this statement by the supreme leader, the new phase of construction has employed an immense array of ornament and decoration, which has transformed the mausoleum into a magnificent ceremonial shrine for the Iranian-Islamic nation (FIG. 14). As a result, it is certainly now more representative of the world of “palace-dwellers” than of “slum-dwellers,” and it stands in contradiction to the founding ideology of the Islamic Republic. An article published by the Islamic Students' News Agency (ISNA) on August 21, 2016, further reported a plan to remove a considerable number of homeless people who reside in the existing green areas outside the luxurious palatial complex built to bury the man who admired *kukhmeshinân*.⁷²

CONSTRUCTION AND DESTRUCTION OF HISTORIES

Acts of deliberate desecration and destruction have been used by different governments in Iran to legitimize their power. By destroying heritage sites, such actions typically seek to



FIGURE 14. *Changing ideologies and Islamic traditions. Left: Ayatollah Khomeini's speech inside the reconstructed mausoleum-shrine at the 26th commemoration of Ayatollah Khomeini's death. Right: speeches by Khomeini during the early days of the revolution emphasized the concept of simplicity, as he praised the value of kukh-neshinân (slum-dwellers) and criticized the ceremonial lifestyles of kâkh-neshinân (the rich). Left source: Khabaronline News Agency, retrieved from <http://www.khabaronline.ir/detail/422538/multimedia/picture#>. Right source: Aksdin Image Archive, retrieved from <http://www.aksdin.com/showthread.php?t=49279@s=e3300cb33169b886a1c15013c55d5443d>.*

erase the memory of selected national pasts. However, the ultimate outcome of such destruction is to strip the nation of its historical cultural identity.

After the 1979 revolution, the sites destroyed by the new Islamic Republic were often those it considered heretical to its political/religious ideology. In the eyes of the new conservative government, these were typically edifices that either expressed memory of past monarchies or embodied what it considered forms of idolatry. Following the "tradition" of authoritarian architecture, such acts of destruction were used to erase evidence of the past and help construct a new history that would legitimize the Islamic Republic's future. Thus, in Iran, the spatial strategies of one authoritarian regime have built on those of the past to validate its own claim to power.

As sites for the expression of national identity, shrines and mausoleums have played a particularly important role in this process. As sacred sites, they provide powerful representations of selected histories, imagined traditions, and the allure of empire. Beyond the country's borders, these commemorative edifices also reveal a complex interplay of changing ideologies and religiosity in the larger Islamic world. Indeed, they stand at the core of contemporary discourse in many Middle Eastern countries, particularly those inhabited by Shi'ites, where they may provide similar impetus for the simultaneous construction and destruction of identity and history.

Being associated with death and funerary practices, mausoleums carry inherent spiritual associations. But here the mausoleum of Ayatollah Khomeini is fundamentally different from that of Reza Shah. While the former carries religious and divine connotations, the spirituality of the latter was embodied in its modernism. Before it was demolished,

its design and iconography sought to give modern representation to the history of a glorious civilization ruled by rightful kings. And its location adjacent to a sacred pilgrimage site sought to associate this history with contemporary religious culture. By contrast, the spirituality of Ayatollah Khomeini's shrine is derived from the core ideology of Shi'a Islam. But the extensive and eclectic ornamentation used in its reconstruction now promotes a vision of "glamour" far more than "simplicity." It thus materially contradicts the values and beliefs of the person it honors — even if it can be argued that it has been transformed to adapt to changing interpretations of Islamic ideology and traditional practices.

In the case of both mausoleums, constructed narratives of history and the place of a heroic figure within it have been rendered into built form as an immanent reflection of contemporary political and religious conditions. As such, they highlight different forms, representing different religious and political ideologies. Such a notion of the sacred belies the view of Islam as a monolithic force. In both cases investigated here, considerations of past, present and future were intertwined to produce buildings whose purpose was to legitimate the claim to power of those who succeeded the figures they honored (and who had originally consolidated that power). However, Islamic ideologies do not remain constant, and the sacred quality of both buildings could easily be challenged by changes to the bonds of authority.

Both mausoleums also illustrate and problematize narratives of tradition and modernity in the context of the Islamic Republic. According to AlSayyad, the apparatus of nation-building has been responsible for much official built tradition.⁷³ Indeed, this tradition of legitimation can be seen as a

primary purpose behind both structures, as their design and construction represent a desired future by putting the forms of a selected past to work in the service of present campaigns of nation-building.

It should be mentioned that the symbolic embodiment of the Iranian Islamic nation is not limited to the construction of mausoleums and other sacred spaces. However, far more extensive research into everyday urban and architectural practices will be needed to fully develop a socio-spatial and political understanding of the role of the built environment in questions of identity and authority in contemporary Iran.

The transformation of the Khomeini mausoleum, however, is proof that this process is ongoing. The initial design of the structure thus did not fully anticipate the need for a glorious shrine. That effort was more concerned with locating and sanctifying the memory of Ayatollah Khomeini within the surrounding context of a cemetery for the martyrs of war and revolution. However, the subsequent transformation of this complex into an elaborate pilgrimage center serves

to legitimate and strengthen the authority of the Islamic Republic. As proof of the growing ambitions of contemporary Islam, the magnificent shrine also seems to accept the inevitable expansion of the Islamic Republic's ideology to promote and defend its view of a future Islamic empire. It is perhaps here that the structure became most objectionable to the rival Islamists of ISIL who attacked it in the summer of 2017.

Connecting to this story of construction is a narrative of destruction, however. Indeed, from outside the narrow perspective of the Islamic Republic, it may be argued that the demolition of the mausoleum of Reza Shah was an un-Islamic act, one which resulted in an unforgivable loss of cultural heritage. Its perpetrators claimed it was carried out in the name of the Islamic Revolution, as a way to erase memory of an illegitimate monarchy and so enable the writing of the new history of an imagined, enduring Iranian-Islamic nation. But perhaps it is only the story of empires being refashioned on the selected remnants of history that will endure, as religious ideologies constantly replace one another in a world where it is only the seductions of power that never end.

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16. H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford, U.K., and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1991), p.48.
17. Rizvi, *The Transnational Mosque*, p.11.
18. More information on the names of *ahl al-bayt* (Prophet Muhammad's family members), according to different Sunni and Shi'ite opinions, can be accessed from the *Shi'ite Encyclopedia of Al-Islam*. See "Who Are Ahlul-Bayt? Part 1," *Al-Islam.org*, 2017. Accessed October 20, 2017, at <https://www.al-islam.org/shiite-encyclopedia-ahlul-bayt-dilp-team/who-are-ahlul-bayt-part-1>.
19. The Iranian state thus has plans to expand it extensively and transform it into one of the biggest Shi'ite pilgrimage sites in the world. There are also Shi'ite shrines located in cities outside the borders of Iran, including Baghdad, Najaf and Karbala.
20. Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) is directly subordinated to the supreme leader of the 1979 revolution. It operates under the surveillance of a committee composed of the president, the head of the judiciary branch, and the Islamic Consultative Assembly. Martyrdom (*shahâdat*) is a voluntary act of self-sacrifice with roots in Islamic Shi'ism. It goes back to the martyrdom of Imam Hussein (the third Shi'ite imam and the grandson of Prophet Mohammad), along with his 71 family members and followers, in Karbala (currently located in Iraq) at noon on the day called "Ashura" in 680 CA. Imam Hussein has been a symbol of social change throughout the history of Iran and Shi'ite culture. See M.J. Fischer, *Iran from Religious Dispute to Revolution* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003). See also P.J. Chelkowski and H. Dabashi, *Staging a Revolution: The Art of Persuasion in the Islamic Republic of Iran* (London: Booth-Clibborn Editions, 2000).
21. S. Isenstadt and K. Rizvi, *Modernism and the Middle East: Architecture and Politics in the Twentieth Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), p.24.
22. Ibid., p.25.
23. The epic poems of Ferdowsi became symbols of nationalist ideology during the Pahlavi era. For more information, see A.M. Ansari, *The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p.114.
24. For more information on the characteristics of this particular era of architecture in modern Iran, see T. Grigor, *Building Iran: Modernism, Architecture, and National Heritage under the Pahlavi Monarchs* (New York: Periscope Publishing, distributed by Prestel, 2009).
25. Ibid., pp.47–77.
26. A. Shahpur Shahbazi, "Ferdowsi, Abu'l-Qasem III Mausoleum," in E. Yarshater, ed., *Encyclopedia Iranica* (New York: Columbia University, 1990), available at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/ferdowsi-iii>.

27. Grigor, *Building Iran*, p.63.
28. *Ibid.*, p.61.
29. T. Grigor, "The King's White Walls: Modernism and Bourgeois Architecture," in B. Devos and C. Werner, eds., *Culture and Cultural Politics under Reza Shah: The Pahlavi State, New Bourgeoisie, and the Creation of a Modern Society in Iran* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), pp.95–118.
30. *Ibid.*, p.111.
31. *Ibid.*, p.105.
32. D. Huff and B. O'Kane, "Čahārtāq," in Yarshater, ed., *Encyclopedia Iranica*, available at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/cahartaq>.
33. Khalkhali, *The Memoirs of Ayatollah Khalkhali*, p.350.
34. K. Rizvi, "Religious Icon and National Symbol: The Tomb of Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran," *Muqarnas*, 20 (January 1, 2003), p.209.
35. Rafsanjani was one of the most influential political figures in Iran after the 1979 revolution, and was a key supporter of reformists in recent years.
36. During my latest visit to the Khomeini mausoleum complex I interviewed a tour guide named Abbas who provided information on the importance of iconic numbers in its construction.
37. The information regarding the importance of the iconic numbers can be accessed through the official website of the Islamic Development Organization, available at <http://old.ido.ir/a.aspx?a=1392031305>.
38. *Ibid.*
39. As recorded in both Sunni and Shi'a books of tradition, the Prophet went out one day wearing a striped cloak of black camelhair and encountered first Hassan, then Hussein, then Fâtima, and afterwards Ali. When they gather beneath his cloak, the Koranic verse 33:33 revealed to him: "God wishes only to remove taint from you, people of the Household, and to make you utterly pure." See H. Algar, "Al-E Aba," in Yarshater, ed., *Encyclopedia Iranica*, 1/7, p.742; an updated version is available at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/al-e-aba-the-family-of-the-cloak-i> (accessed Sept. 26, 2017).
40. *Ibid.*
41. Every year, Iranian Shi'ite communities also participate in public performances where tents are burned to resurrect the memory of Imam Hussein and his companions.
42. N. Nurbakhsh, "میدادگاه عاشقان خمینی کبیر [The Tryst for Khomeini Devotees]," Sazman-e Tablighat-e Islami [Islamic Development Organization], June 3, 2013, available at <http://old.ido.ir/a.aspx?a=1392031305>.
43. H. Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundation of the Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2008 [1993]), p.175.
44. P. Shenon. "Khomeini's Tomb Attracts Pilgrims," *New York Times*, July 8, 1990, World sec., available at <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/07/08/world/khomeini-s-tomb-attracts-pilgrims.html%27>.
45. For the photo caption information, see "Photo Reveals Depth of Frenzy of Khomeini's Funeral," *New York Times*, June 20, 1989. Accessed December 15, 2013, at <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/06/20/world/photo-reveals-depth-frenzy-khomeini-s-funeral-eight-people-were-trampled-death.html>.
46. *Ibid.*
47. *New York Times*, "Khomeini's Tomb Attracts Pilgrims."
48. *Ibid.*
49. February 1, 1979, was the day Ayatollah Khomeini returned to Iran after many years of exile. In celebration of the revolution, the ten days that followed have been commemorated and called the Fajr Decade since 1979. *Kayhan Newspaper*, "Transportation Services on the Annual Celebration of February 1–12. خدمات ترانسپورتی," January 28, 2014, sec. News. Available at <http://kayhan.ir/fa/news/4190/>.
50. Rizvi, "Religious Icon and National Symbol," p.209.
51. E. Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p.140.
52. H. Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), p.95.
53. R. Sennett, *Authority*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, 1980), p.19.
54. *Ibid.*, p.11.
55. *Ibid.*, p.18.
56. *Ibid.*
57. *Ibid.*, p.15.
58. *Ibid.*, p.3.
59. *Ibid.*, p.18.
60. T. Der-Grigorian, "Construction of History: Mohammad-Reza Shah Revivalism, Nationalism, and Monumental Architecture of Tehran, 1951–1979," Master's thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1998, p.28. Available at <http://dspace.mit.edu/handle/1721.1/36093>.
61. H. Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p.38.
62. Isenstadt and Rizvi, *Modernism and the Middle East*, p.25.
63. Rizvi, "Religious Icon and National Symbol," p.209.
64. *Ibid.*
65. M. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, W.R. Trask, trans., 1st American ed., Harvest Book, HB 144 (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1959).
66. *Ibid.*, p.25.
67. *Ibid.*, p.26.
68. M. Mohajeri, "Distance between the Haram and Imam Khomeini's Culture," Online News Channel, *Alef News Agency*, May 19, 2015, available at <http://old.alef.ir/vdcj8ve8iuqeaiz.fsfu.html?271525>.
69. *Ibid.*
70. The speech was published in the official website of the Office for Preservation and Publication of the Writings of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei [Daftar-e Hefz va Nashr-e Āsâre Hazrat-e Ayatollah al-Ozmâ Khomeini], retrieved from <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/news-content?id=29892>. The speech report was also covered by Khabar-Online News Agency. See "7 Principles of Ayatollah Khomeini." Khabar Online News Agency, June 4, 2015, available at <http://www.khabaronline.ir/detail/422510/Politics/leader>.
71. *Ibid.*
72. See "کارتخوابی کارگران شهرداری در اطراف حرم" [Homeless Workers around the Haram]," Online News Channel, Iranian Students' News Agency (ISNA), August 21, 2016, available at <https://www.isna.ir/news/95050119709/>.
73. AlSayyad, *The End of Tradition?* pp.4–6.