

**IRAN'S USE OF ANCIENT ART AND ARCHITECTURE TO
CONSTRUCT A NATIONAL IDENTITY**

An Undergraduate Research Scholars Thesis

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ABSTRACT

Iran's Use of Ancient Art and Architecture to Construct a Modern National Identity

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In the sixth century BCE, the Achaemenid Persian Empire stretched from the Nile River to the Indus Valley, incorporating the art of conquered civilizations into a collective Persian culture. In twentieth century Iran, the Pahlavi Shahs utilized this Achaemenid past in an attempt to fabricate a national narrative. However, it is unclear how the role of antiquity in Iran has changed since the Islamic Revolution of 1979 that overthrew the Shah. My research takes an interdisciplinary approach, employing a modern perspective of nationalist theory in order to better understand the art of antiquity and its use in Iran since the beginning of Reza Shah Pahlavi's reign in 1925. Through looking at textbooks, the architecture of government buildings, museum exhibitions and lectures, archaeological research and conservation projects, and festivals, this project seeks to add to the understanding of the government's role in utilizing antiquity to invent a national identity.

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INTRODUCTION

Today, Iran seems elusive. As James A. Bill said in his 1978 article in *Foreign Affairs*, “America knows astonishingly little about Iran.”¹ Years after the Islamic Revolution, in his 2002 State of the Union address, U.S. President George W. Bush equated Iran with the “Axis of Evil.” Since then, in the fall of 2015, America opened up ties with Iran again, cutting back on sanctions as a part of the Iran Nuclear Deal, or the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. This has allowed scholars and archaeologists to return to Iran in order to better understand this ancient land of empire; this also allows for the heritage of Iran to be displayed on a larger world stage. However, in light of recent events, the future of the U.S.-Iranian relationship is at risk.

My paper will be organized in the following way: First, I will discuss Achaemenid Persia under Cyrus the Great and Darius in order to better understand the art forms used during this time period and how the kings utilized the art of conquered civilizations in order to convince the people within the empire that they were now all a part of the same group. Then, I will consider the twentieth century uses of antiquity under Reza Shah Pahlavi and his son, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi. This will include heritage preservation, neo-Achaemenid architecture, and the 1971 celebration of 2500 years of continuous Persian kingship. Finally, I will explore how antiquity has been utilized by the current Iranian regime since the 1979 Revolution. What part, if any, does Achaemenid history and art still play in Iranian national identity?

Throughout this paper, I will discuss these time periods, rulers, and art forms through an approach based in nationalist theory. This project will explore how national identity is invented through the government’s creation of a collective memory, including an origin story and a myth

¹ James A. Bill. “Iran and the Crisis of '78.” *Foreign Affairs* 57, no. 2 (1978): 323.

of linear destiny. Nationalism offers a different lens and dimension to the understanding of art history and its context, illustrating how art is harnessed for political purposes.

Ernest Gellner, Eric Hobsbawm, and Etienne Balibar all approach nationalism from a modern perspective and ask how the nation is formed. They understand that the nation is not a natural entity that has always been there, but rather is a product of modernity. These authors also discuss how the nation is often fabricated by the government.

Ernest Gellner, a British-Czech philosopher and social anthropologist, argues for the nationalist principle, in which the nation and the state must be congruent. Thus, the state, which is the political entity of the nation, utilizes nationalist rhetoric in order to legitimize its existence. Nationalism also uses as raw material the cultural and historical inheritances from the pre-nationalist world; this adds to our understanding of why and how antiquity is a popular tool for legitimizing current regimes.²

Eric Hobsbawm, a British Marxist historian, argues that traditions linking us to an immemorial past were often actually invented in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries by governments. Hobsbawm adds that the state must now formulate new forms of civic loyalty, because dynastic legitimacy, divine ordination, and historic right and continuity of rule have lost power as guarantors of loyalty.³ These outdated tools were all utilized by the Shahs, but were ultimately unsuccessful in creating an Iranian national identity.

Etienne Balibar, a French theorist and author, describes the presentation of the nation's formation as twofold: a project and a destiny. This convinces the people that the nation has always been there and that it continues to develop toward a greater purpose. Balibar, as well as

² Ernest Gellner. *Nations and Nationalism*. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 47.

³ Eric Hobsbawm. *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 84.

Benedict Anderson, argues that all communities are imaginary;⁴ the community is imagined through a collective narrative, a common name, and an immemorial past. Public schools are an effective way, he argues, to create the collective narrative.⁵

In “Images of the Nation: Cinema, art and national identity,” Anthony D. Smith, a British historical sociologist, acknowledges the ideas of these modernist authors while discussing the historicist vision of the nation. However, he identifies a problem with their perspective: failing to analyze the content and the tone of the nationalist message to convince the masses “that this was indeed their nation, and that they should identify with it and defend it.”⁶ Thus, Smith researches mass media, such as epic cinema and history painting, and how it promotes the nationalist ideology. He identifies certain criteria that set the tone of the nationalist message: historical reconstruction, pictorial tableaux, period accessories, and ethnoscape. Although the Shahs used these criteria in some cases, their nationalist agenda failed to appeal to the masses, and the subsequent backlash led to the Iranian Revolution of 1979.

⁴ Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 2006.

⁵ Etienne Balibar. “The Nation Form: History and Ideology.” In Balibar, Étienne, and Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein. *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*. (London; New York: Verso, 1991), 96.

⁶ Anthony D. Smith. “Images of the Nation: Cinema, art and national identity.” In Hjort, Mette, and Scott MacKenzie. *Cinema and Nation*. (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), 43.

CHAPTER I

ACHAEMENID PERSIA

Persia in the sixth century BCE was a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual empire that would grow to stretch from the Nile River to the Indus Valley. The Achaemenid Persian kings conquered twenty-eight different groups of people, including the Elamites, Judaeans, Babylonians, and Egyptians. Thus, they utilized images, languages, and symbols to acknowledge the diversity of this vast empire and their right to rule over it.

Cyrus the Great

Cyrus II ‘the Great’ reigned from 559 to 529 BCE. Around 559 BCE, Cyrus became king of Anshan, claiming descent from the royal house of Persia. He is considered the founder of the Persian, and in particular the Achaemenid, Empire. During his rule, Cyrus built Pasargadae, the first Achaemenid Persian capital; this is also the location of his monumental tomb. In 549, he captured the Medean capital of Ecbatana and proceeded to conquer Lydia, Phoenicia, Judaea, and finally Babylon in 539. Through these conquests, “Cyrus’s empire took on much of the culture of previous Elamite, Assyrian, and Babylonian empires, notably in its written script and monumental iconography.”⁷

Cyrus Cylinder

As was written on a cylinder seal, this conqueror of Babylon promised to maintain religious freedoms within the new empire (Fig. 1). Further, Cyrus restored the Temple of Marduk, criticizing the previous ruler, King Nabonidus of Babylon, for not maintaining religious

⁷ Michael Axworthy. *A History of Iran: Empire of the Mind*. (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 12.

sites well. The Cyrus Cylinder implies that the Babylonian god Marduk searched for a better king and found Cyrus to be the messiah. The Cylinder proclaims this in the Babylonian script:

I am Cyrus, king of the universe, the great king, the powerful king, king of Babylon, king of Sumer and Akkad, king of the four quarters of the world, son of Cambyses, the great king, king of the city of Anshan, grandson of Cyrus, the great king, king of the city of Anshan, descendant of Teispes, the great king, king of Anshan, the perpetual seed of kingship, whose reign Bel and Nabu love, and with whose kingship, to their joy, they concern themselves.⁸

This rhetoric legitimized his conquest of Babylon by connecting to the city's gods, Bel and Nabu, invoking his divine right to rule. He also portrayed his royal lineage and continuity of rule. "The perpetual seed of kingship" derived from Cyrus's ancestors listed here invokes a sense of destiny, adding to the feeling of national identity, because Etienne Balibar argues that a nation must construct a history in such a way that the people believe it was predetermined.⁹

In 529 BCE, the Persian kingship did perpetuate when Cyrus was succeeded by his son Cambyses, who extended the empire through the conquest of Egypt. This led Persian art to incorporate Egyptian motifs, such as at Persepolis and the nearby tombs of Naqsh-e Rostam. Following a short reign and a revolt in c. 522 BCE, Cambyses was succeeded by Darius I.

Bisitun

The Bisitun rock relief is a symbol of post-revolt propaganda that seeks to assert the power of Darius I after he crushed a Magi revolt in c. 522 BCE and assumed the kingship.¹⁰ Magi were priests of the Zoroastrian religion. Guamata, one of the Magi, had ordered a three-year remission of taxes and destroyed the temples of those sects of which he did not approve. Against this revolt, King Darius claimed to have fought nineteen battles in the first year of his

⁸ The British Museum. "The Cyrus Cylinder."

http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=327188&partId=1.

⁹ Balibar, "The Nation Form," 86.

¹⁰ Also spelled Bisotun, Bisutun, Behistun, and Bagastana.

reign. The circumstances of this ancient revolt have even resonated with modern historians of the 1979 Iranian Revolution.

An Iranian Revolution, led by a charismatic cleric, seizing power from an oppressive monarch, asserting religious orthodoxy, attacking false believers, and drawing support from economic grievances – how modern that sounds.¹¹

The Bisitun carving depicts Darius's reaction to the revolt (Fig. 2). The image displays rows of captives – each dressed in their own cultural attire, portraying that the revolt affected the entire empire. The Magi Guamata lies in submission under Darius's feet. In order to legitimize his claim to the throne, Darius commanded that this image be created on a high cliff along the caravan road that connected the Achaemenid capitals of Ecbatana and Babylon so that travelers below could be a witness to his triumph as they crossed his empire. This inscription acted as a political billboard, illustrating his power over this multicultural empire.

In connection with many other works by the Achaemenid Persian kings, the written inscription on the relief is in three different languages: Old Persian, Elamite, and Babylonian. If the picture did not speak a thousand words, the writing next to it did. Linguistic identity is an essential aspect of nationalism; Etienne Balibar wrote that both linguistic identity and racial identity must be utilized in order to produce a fictive ethnicity, and thus, a national identity.¹² Centuries before Balibar's writing, Darius I utilized this idea to convince the people of his empire that they belonged, incorporating a variety of languages in order to represent the people whom he conquered.

On this Bisitun inscription, Darius declares, "This is what I have done, by the grace of Ahura Mazda have I always acted."¹³ Ahura Mazda is the creator and the god of blessing in the

¹¹ Axworthy, *A History of Iran*, 17.

¹² Balibar, "The Nation Form," 96.

¹³ Axworthy, *A History of Iran*, 19.

Zoroastrian religion.¹⁴ The relief depicts the winged disk of Ahura Mazda, while the king mirrors his gesture and dress. Their right hands are raised; the god's left hand grasps "the ring, which bestows sovereignty on monarchs."¹⁵ The king's left hand holds a bow to illustrate that he is the protector, carrying out the god's will in his empire. As many other leaders throughout time and cultures have done, Darius legitimizes his rule through a religious authority, here through his mirroring of Ahura Mazda. Darius was not the heir to the throne, as he was "descended from a junior branch of the Achaemenid royal family, and even in that line he was not preeminent," so it was essential that he legitimize his reign through other means.¹⁶ Although this was an effective tool for the Achaemenid Persians, Eric Hobsbawm tells us that divine ordination can no longer guarantee civic loyalty at the time of the Shahs in the twentieth century.

Persepolis

The capital cities of the Achaemenid rulers, such as Persepolis and Susa, stood for the entire empire, and thus, had to represent the entire empire; Persian kings employed language and art in order to convey this. The imagery at the palace of Persepolis further served to legitimize the reign of King Darius I and his successors. Within this palace, it can be seen that Darius did not reject or disdain earlier Elamite culture, but engaged Elamite cultural legacies "as instruments of historical memory."¹⁷ Further, with his re-conquest of Egypt in 518 BCE, architecture was included within Persepolis that evoked the Egyptian culture. With every new

¹⁴ Fritz Graf. 'Ahura Mazdā'. In *Brill's New Pauly*, edited by Hubert Cancik, Helmuth Schneider, Christine F. Salazar, Manfred Landfester, and Francis G. Gentry. New Pauly Online.

¹⁵ George G. Cameron. "Darius Carved History on Ageless Rock." *The National Geographic Magazine* XCVIII, no. 6 (1950): 826.

¹⁶ Axworthy, *A History of Iran*, 18.

¹⁷ Margaret Cool Root. "Achaemenid Imperial Architecture: Performative Porticoes of Persepolis." In *Persian Kingship and Architecture: Strategies of Power in Iran from the Achaemenids to the Pahlavis*, edited by Sussan Babaie and Talinn Grigor. (I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd, 2015), 3.

people and land added into the Persian fold, the imagery of those people was often added to the sculptural program of the capital cities. Darius even brought masons from Egypt and carvers from Assyria to construct his palace.¹⁸

Gate of All Nations

Built under King Xerxes, who was the successor of Darius, the Gate of All Nations is the gate through which visitors, including tribute bearers and foreign ambassadors, would have entered the palatial complex in order to pay homage to the Persian king (Fig. 3). As these visitors entered, they would have seen the trilingual inscription on the wall in Babylonian, Elamite, and Old Persian. This inscription proclaims Xerxes' kingship and divine right to rule.

The gate is flanked by two monumental bull guardians that harken back to the lamassu figures of the Assyrian culture, which was one of the civilizations incorporated into the Persian Empire. This bull motif can also be seen in other locations throughout the complex.

Apadana

The Apadana, or Audience Hall, is where the king would sit on his throne to receive tribute from his subjects. The staircase leading to the Apadana displays lines of tribute bearers bringing goods from all across the empire, reflecting the actual people who would have ascended the staircase in order to offer tribute to the king on his throne within the Audience Hall (Fig. 4, 5). Each group of tribute bearers can be recognized as a member of a certain ethnic group within the empire because of their clothing, their hair, and the goods that they bring. The Treasury

¹⁸ Sava Popovitch. "The Iranian Element in Persian Art." *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 57, no. 331 (1930): 193.

Relief depicts the end of the tribute procession, where the gifts are presented to the Persian king seated on his throne (Fig. 6).¹⁹

Scholars believe that the imagery on the Apadana staircase represents a celebration of the Iranian New Year, or Nowruz, with the tribute brought for this celebration. Within the Gregorian calendar, Nowruz, meaning ‘new day,’ occurs on March 20 or 21, the spring equinox. This is when the sun crosses the celestial equator, marking the beginning of the growing season. The lion and bull, displayed prominently on the Apadana staircase, represent Nowruz, because in the Near East, the lion has been associated with solar energy, while the bull has been associated with the moon; the lion attacking the bull is a symbol for the sun’s overtaking of the moon and the beginning of spring. Among the tribute bearers, the Elamites bring a lioness and her cubs, while the Babylonians offer a bull to be sacrificed for the celebration. In addition to the staircase images, there are columns with lion and bull protomes throughout the complex.

Buried within the foundations of the Apadana, archaeologists discovered gold and silver tablets. The trilingual text on these tablets declares, “This is the kingdom which I [Darius] hold, from the Scythians, who are beyond Sogdiana, thence unto Kush; from Sind thence unto Sardis.”²⁰ This idea of representing a vast, multicultural territory is at the foundation of both the palace and the empire.

The imagery of Persepolis creates “a mystique of magnificent kingship that might not have come about but for the initial doubts over [Darius’s] accession.”²¹ Darius and his successors utilize art in order to legitimize their kingship by invoking their divine right and by acknowledging the diverse cultures within their jurisdiction.

¹⁹ The name “Treasury Relief” comes from its discovery in the Treasury, but archaeologists have discovered that this relief was originally displayed within the Apadana.

²⁰ Axworthy, *A History of Iran*, 19.

²¹ *Ibid*, 20.

Tombs at Naqsh-i-Rustam

Cut into the cliffs of Naqsh-i-Rustam near the site of Persepolis are the tombs of Darius I and his successors (Fig. 7). The tomb façade has columns with campaniform bases and bull protome capitals, as seen within the Apadana. The upper reliefs of these tomb façades share imagery with the sculptural program of Persepolis, but here it is in a funerary context. As in the Bisitun Inscription, the king mirrors the gesture of the winged disk of Ahura Mazda. The image of a fire altar further demonstrates the king's respect for and celebration of the god. King Darius stands on a three-step pedestal, and the royal guard surrounds him. The king is seen atop a lion bed, like the one seen in the Pharaoh Hatshepsut's Birth Colonnade at Deir el-Bahri, Egypt. Darius's bed is held up by twenty-eight personifications of the different lands constituting the Persian Empire. They raise him up as he participates in a ritual, which may have been a greeting recognizing all four corners of the Empire. This image of the load-bearing support of the people displays "the power of collective action in the service of a belief system."²² All Persians play a part in upholding the grandeur of kingship and the empire. Further, borrowing imagery from Ancient Egypt further seeks to include the Egyptians who are now a part of the Persian Empire.

Through trilingual inscriptions and imagery appropriated from older and subject cultures, the Achaemenid kings sought to create a sense of unified Persian identity. Although these specific works are part of a larger landscape, these, in particular, are essential to understanding twentieth and twenty-first century Iran, as they will reappear in reimagined ways.

²² Root, "Achaemenid Imperial Architecture," 34.

CHAPTER II

IRAN UNDER REZA KHAN

Reza Khan rose through the military ranks as a commoner. Displeased with the state of his country after the Anglo-Iranian Treaty of 1919, he instigated a coup d'état in 1921, applying military force to convince Ahmad Shah Qajar, the ruler of Persia at that time, to appoint a new government. Reza Khan was chosen to be the Minister of War. On October 31, 1925, the Parliament voted to oust Ahmad Shah, ending the Qajar dynasty that had ruled Persia since 1785. A constituent assembly then voted for Reza Khan to become the next Shah. His coronation took place on April 25, 1926, and he changed his name to Reza Shah Pahlavi.²³ After this radical change in government, the new Shah sought legitimacy and a redefinition of Persian national identity.

As a part of this redefinition, in 1934, Reza Shah Pahlavi, “wanting to distance his state from the decadent, ineffectual Qajar government that he had displaced, instructed his embassies overseas to require foreign governments henceforth to call the country Iran in official communications.”²⁴ This new name is thought to mean ‘Land of the Aryans.’²⁵ However, this change in how to acknowledge and identify the nation conflicted many people. “Some Iranians outside Iran still prefer the term Persia because it retains the ancient, often happier, connotations.”²⁶

²³ Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. *Answer to History*. New York: Stein and Day, 1980. 53.

²⁴ Axworthy, *A History of Iran*, xiii.

²⁵ Reza Zia-Ebrahimi. “Self-Orientalization and Dislocation: The Uses and Abuses of the ‘Aryan’ Discourse in Iran.” *Iranian Studies* 44, no. iv (2011): 445-472.

²⁶ Axworthy, *A History of Iran*, xiii.

The Society for National Heritage

In 1921, following Reza Khan's coup, the Society for National Heritage (SNH) was created; its purpose was to "preserve, protect, and promote Iran's patrimony."²⁷ In addition to the building of mausoleums for particular Iranian national figures, the SNH worked on over sixty preservation projects and created a national museum and public library. Memoirs and Iranian publications since that time say that the Society was created under the auspices of Reza Khan, who was War Minister at the time. In addition to archaeological projects, the SNH nationalized the Persian language, removing foreign words and adding Old Persian words.

On April 22, 1925, the American art historian Arthur Upham Pope delivered a lecture to the Society of National Heritage in Tehran on Iranian art from the Achaemenids to modern times.²⁸ Pope's lecture was in English, but concurrently translated into Persian so that Iranians themselves could listen. Pope stressed Iran's cultural contribution to world civilization, and he emphasized that Iranian kings have always served as patrons of the arts. This encouraged Reza Khan to further pursue a patronage of art and culture in Iran.

Also in 1925, the Society created a list of national heritage sites in Iran with the help of Ernst Herzfeld, a German archaeologist; it was entitled *A Brief Inventory of the Historical Heritage and Edifices of Iran*. Of the 247 sites on the list, 82 were pre-Islamic.²⁹ This list allowed the state to define Iran's cultural heritage and present that to the Iranian people. The sites not selected could, thus, be destroyed, because they did not merit the Society's preservation. At this time, those sites destroyed were largely Qajar, the period directly before Reza Khan took

²⁷ Talinn Grigor. "Recultivating 'Good Taste': The Early Pahlavi Modernists and Their Society for National Heritage." *Iranian Studies* 37, no. 1 (2004): 17.

²⁸ Kishwar Rizvi. "Art History and the Nation: Arthur Urban Pope and the Discourse on "Persian Art" in the Early Twentieth Century." *Muqarnas* 24 (2007): 47.

²⁹ P. Avery. *Modern Iran* (New York, 1965), 287, quoted in Grigor, "Recultivating 'Good Taste,'" 30.

power. As history shows us, any movement, group, or individual often seeks power by discounting the works of those who came directly before them.

The SNH also assisted in ending an existing French monopoly on Iran's archaeological sites, which allowed other countries to participate in archaeological research within Iran. This allowed for Iran's prestige and history to be broadcast to a larger and broader audience. In the midst of this excitement, an article published in *The American Magazine of Art* in 1931 stated, "It is perfectly possible that Persia may assume, in coming years, the importance of another Egypt or Mesopotamia in the archaeological field."³⁰ In 1931, the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute started official excavations at the Achaemenid Persian palace of Persepolis.³¹ These excavations were led by Ernst Herzfeld and financed by the American philanthropist John D. Rockefeller. Reza Khan strongly supported the preservation of Persepolis, once commenting, "We should build a wall around Persepolis, so we could prevent more damage from happening to the site."³² When two pairs of gold and silver foundation tablets were found beneath the Apadana, Reza Shah "ordered that both pairs be kept and brought to the capital."³³ According to the 1930 Antiquities Law of Iran, one pair should have been given to the Oriental Institute instead of both staying with Iran. However, Reza Shah was intent on keeping and protecting Iran's heritage.

The Society for National Heritage also hosted lectures to promote Iran's heritage. The archaeologist Ernst Herzfeld delivered a public lecture at the Ministry of Culture, saying, "If you

³⁰Rudolf M. Riefstahl. "Persian Art At Burlington House." *The American Magazine of Art* 22, no. 6 (1931): 461.

³¹ Talinn Grigor. "Preserving the Antique Modern: Persepolis '71." *Future Anterior: Journal of Historic Preservation, History, Theory, and Criticism* 2, no. 1 (2005): 24.

³² Quoted in Kaymar Abdi. "Nationalism, Politics, and the Development of Archaeology in Iran." *American Journal of Archaeology* 105, no. 1 (2001): 60.

³³ Ali Mousavi. "Persepolis in Retrospect: Histories of Discovery and Archaeological Exploration at the Ruins of Ancient Parseh." *Ars Orientalis* 32 (2003): 230.

refer to world history, you will see that no nation has so much cultural heritage.”³⁴ By comparing Iran’s past with the past of other civilizations, Iran appears superior, he argues. This lecture was translated into Persian, published, and distributed. According to Education Minister Isa Sadiq, this translation was “for the use of teachers all over the country.”³⁵ This allowed Iran to promote its immemorial past through public schooling.

Further, in 1939, the archaeological museum of Iran and adjoining library were completed in Tehran. This allowed the state to choose what the people would see and how they would see it. Through state-sponsored museums, the state defines the history and cultural heritage of the nation. Eric Hobsbawm argues that traditions linking us to an immemorial past were often actually invented in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. There are three kinds of invented traditions: 1) those that establish or symbolize social cohesion of membership in a group; 2) those that establish or legitimize institutions, status, or relation to authority; and 3) those whose main purpose is socialization, the inculcation of beliefs, value systems, and conventions of behavior.³⁶ The activities of the Society fit into the third type of invented tradition because it sought, through the national museum and library, to socialize the Iranian people into believing that their pre-Islamic history was not only important, but also emblematic of the modern nation.

The Society for National Heritage was a state-sponsored group tasked with reviving the nation’s history, using Iran’s cultural heritage for political propaganda. The Society had the power to preserve and restore some structures, while destroying others — those that did not serve the Shah’s political agenda. However, these foreign, “secular, modern intelligentsia,” such as

³⁴ Grigor, “Recultivating ‘Good Taste,’” 27.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Eric Hobsbawm. “Introduction: Inventing Traditions.” *The Invention of Tradition. edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 9.

Arthur Upham Pope and Ernst Herzfeld, along with the Shah, were the ones to “create and disseminate the historical myths of nationhood,” rather than the masses.³⁷ Even though the Shah’s message was effective toward foreigners, his nationalist rhetoric did not have the desired effect on his own people.

1931 International Exhibition of Persian Art

In 1931, the Royal Academy of Art in London sponsored the International Exhibition of Persian Art. Reza Shah Pahlavi and King George V of the United Kingdom were official patrons of the exhibition, while Arthur Upham Pope was the director and organizer. The exhibition covered Persian civilization from prehistory to the nineteenth century, with one room focused on works from the Achaemenid civilization. The intent of this exhibition was to construct a continuous Persian identity, as the viewer moved through the galleries on a chronological tour of Persian history and art. Works were gathered from museums and private collections all over the world. A relief depicting tribute bearers from the Apadana staircase at Persepolis was on display,³⁸ as well as a cast depicting the lion and the bull.³⁹ A 1931 article in *The American Magazine of Art* said:

The exhibition took place at a most opportune moment, just at the moment when Persia is making a new start in her life as an “archaeological country.” This change is due to the policy of the new regime which wants to open the country to the life of a modern world and which at the same time does not lack understanding for the importance of a great artistic and historic past.⁴⁰

³⁷ Smith, “Images of the Nation,” 43.

³⁸ “On View in the International Exhibition of Persian Art at the Royal Academy, Burlington House, London.” *Parnassus* 3, no. 1 (1931): 28.

³⁹ M. S. Villard. “The International Exhibition of Persian Art in London.” *Parnassus* 3, no. 2 (1931): 30.

⁴⁰ Riefstahl, “Persian Art At Burlington House,” 461.

With the reign of Reza Shah, the world perceived Iran to be going through a new age. This idea of modernity, while maintaining the allure of antiquity, will be reiterated under Mohammad Reza Shah.

Neo-Achaemenid Architecture

Throughout the 1930s, public and government buildings in the capital of Tehran were designed to resemble the sculptural program at Persepolis and other Achaemenid Persian sites. In particular, bull protomes and the image of Ahura Mazda are utilized to represent this era. The Zoroastrian Majlis deputy Arbab Keikhosraw, a member of the Iranian Parliament, promoted this Neo-Achaemenid style, rather than European styles, in an effort to socialize Iranians to their pre-Islamic past.⁴¹

In 1934, the Society for National Heritage built a new mausoleum for the tenth-century Persian poet Ferdowsi in Tus, Iran (Fig. 8). Ferdowsi's major work, the *Shahnameh*, meaning 'Book of Kings,' describes the heroic age of Achaemenid Persia. Ferdowsi was a nationalist figure himself, using poetry to show the people that the nation was ancient and eternal. By building a monument to honor him, the Society for National Heritage, and in extension the Iranian government, is showing that they support his message. In plan, this mausoleum is reminiscent of the tomb of Cyrus the Great, while relief sculptures on the façade are reminiscent of the iconography at Persepolis. There are columns topped with bull protomes, like the ones seen in the Apadana. An icon of Ahura Mazda is on the central front façade. Today, the Iranian passport includes an image of this mausoleum, displaying that the state still values this monument as part of its cultural heritage and that the Iranian people would recognize this monument as part of their national identity.

⁴¹ Grigor, "Recultivating 'Good Taste,'" 21.

On February 4, 1934, Reza Shah laid the cornerstone, a gold foundation plate, for the Department of Archaeology at Tehran University. He was inspired by the gold and silver plaques discovered by the Oriental Institute excavations in 1931 at the foundation of the Apadana at Persepolis, which are inscribed with cuneiform inscriptions from King Darius I.

In 1935, the National Bank of Tehran was completed. The columns are modeled on those in the Apadana Hall at Persepolis, with lotus-shaped bases and bull-headed capitals. At the top lies the winged image of Ahura Mazda.

In 1939, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was completed in Tehran (Fig. 9). Crenellations line the staircase, similar to those lining the Apadana staircase at Persepolis. Four columns and four pilasters with bull protomes hold up the portico and façade. The doorframes resemble the gates at Persepolis. Through the architecture of this government building, Iran puts its Achaemenid past on display for foreign diplomats.

Having outlined the activities of the state in the section above, the following section will briefly present the public response, both within Iran and internationally. On March 15, 1935, an article in *Le Journal de Téhéran* said:

“Following its ancestral roots, Iran has once again revived and remains always the nation which has demonstrated the ability to assimilate with the certainty of catching-up with the lost years. Nothing can prevent a nation to arrive at its goals, and those goals are waiting for us.”⁴²

This quote presents three ideas: 1) The nation has always been there, but it is only now ‘revived.’ 2) The nation of Iran, since the time of the multi-ethnic and multi-lingual Achaemenid Empire, has been able to promote assimilation and a common culture. 3) The nation has a destiny. All

⁴² “Editorial: Notre But.” *Le Journal de Téhéran* 1 (Tehran, March 15, 1935): 1, quoted and translated in Grigor, “Recultivating ‘Good Taste,’” 40.

three of these ideas are powerful tools for nationalism, as argued by Etienne Balibar.⁴³ A sense of revival and reawakening is a common theme in the rhetoric of both Reza Shah and Mohammad Reza Shah.

A 1938 article of *Time Magazine* called Reza Shah the “20th-Century Darius.”⁴⁴ On the cover, the Shah is shown in front of blue faience tiles of a lion striding across the walls of the Achaemenid Persian capital of Susa (Fig. 10). Although most Iranians would not have seen this, *Time* is an internationally popular magazine that showcased Reza Shah’s kingship and Persia’s antiquity to the world.

However, soon after, in 1941, the Shah is overthrown by foreign armies and replaced by his son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. The Shah’s son continued his father’s legacy, connecting himself and his reign with that of the Achaemenid Persian kings.

⁴³ Balibar, “The Nation Form,” 96.

⁴⁴ “Iran. 20th-Century Darius.” April 25, 1938.

<http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,931008,00.html>

CHAPTER III

IRAN UNDER MOHAMMAD REZA SHAH PAHLAVI

Mohammad Reza Pahlavi received a Western education in Switzerland; this experience inspired his admiration for Western culture and modernity. On September 16, 1941, he replaced his father, Reza Shah Pahlavi, who was forcibly removed and exiled by the British and Soviet Union occupiers of Iran.⁴⁵ European powers saw neutral Iran as a high-priority for World War II due to its oil reserves and its strategic location. The Allied invasion was prompted by Reza Shah's refusal to expel German nationals from Iran. Through naval attacks, armored tank divisions, and air raids, Britain and the Soviet Union overran the Iranian military and partitioned the country. However, a treaty committed these countries to leaving Iran after the war.⁴⁶ Due to the uncertainty brought on by this foreign occupation, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi needed to restore national confidence and identity in Iran.

Through celebrations and cultural preservation, the Shah intended to create a 'Great Civilization' that acknowledged Persia's immemorial past while striving for modernity. This "myth of a glorious ethnic past and an equally promising national destiny" is what Smith and Balibar argue to be the most effective form of nationalism created by the state. Through archaeological excavations and his 1971 celebration of Persian kingship, the Shah reaches "back into the past to repurpose history for a new role in the modern age."⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. *Answer to History [translation, Michael Joseph Ltd.]*. (New York: Stein and Day, 1980), 68.

⁴⁶ "Fact File: Persia Invaded." Last updated on October 15, 2014.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/timeline/factfiles/nonflash/a1130121.shtml>.

⁴⁷ Alam Saleh and James Worrall. "Between Darius and Khomeini: exploring Iran's national identity problematique." (*National Identities*, 2015), 81.

Under Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, excavations were resumed at Persepolis and Pasargadae. In 1969, Dr. Akbar Tadjvidi, an Iranian archaeologist, and his team of locals began work at Persepolis. Tadjvidi's work was greatly benefited by funds available from the government in preparation for the festivities of 1971. Thus, the government approved his research proposal on the condition that his work "would not hinder preparation for the grand festivities that would highlight the glorious ruins on the Takht."⁴⁸

1971 Celebration at Persepolis

In 1971, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi celebrated the 2500-year anniversary of Persian kingship, inviting heads of state from all around the world for three days of festivities. The festivities began in Pasargadae, one of the five Achaemenid Persian capitals, at the tomb of Cyrus the Great, the founder of the Achaemenid Empire. Iran borrowed the Cyrus Cylinder from the British Museum for this celebration.⁴⁹ To further demonstrate to the world its permanence and power, Iran presented the United Nations with a replica of the Cyrus Cylinder.⁵⁰ The Cylinder was also used as an emblem for the Shah's celebration. Further, the Crown Prince was sometimes called Cyrus Reza Pahlavi, after Cyrus the Great. At the beginning of the celebration, the Crown Prince and his father marched in front of the tomb of his namesake (Fig. 11). Here, the Shah gave a speech, ending it by saying, "Rest in peace, Cyrus, for we are awake, and we will always stay awake."⁵¹

⁴⁸ Mousavi, "Persepolis in Retrospect," 240.

⁴⁹ The Cylinder was discovered in Babylon, which is in present-day Iraq, during excavations conducted by the British Museum in 1879.

⁵⁰ Garrett Nada. "Cyrus Connects Ancient Iran and U.S. Democracy." *The Iran Primer*. United States Institute of Peace, 2013. <http://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2013/mar/18/cyrus-connects-ancient-iran-and-us-democracy>.

⁵¹ Cyrus Schayegh. "Seeing Like the State: An Essay on the Historiography of Modern Iran." *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 1. (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 41.

Next, the Pahlavis and their guests proceeded to Persepolis, another one of the Achaemenid Persian capitals. Mohammad Reza Shah insisted that his guests camp outside the palace, similar to what the Assyrians, Lydians, Babylonians, etc. would have done during the time of the Achaemenid kings, so a great Tent City with all of the modern amenities was erected right below the ruins of the ancient palace. Each tent had two bathrooms and a kitchen. They were decorated with the finest French crystal, red silk, and chandeliers. That evening, there was an extravagant dinner and a modern sound and light spectacle. On the morning of the final day, over six thousand men paraded in front of the ruins in a display depicting Persian history, from the Achaemenids to the modern Pahlavi state.⁵²

Through this celebration, the Shah optimistically highlights Persia's antiquity as a tool to bring the Iranian people together. The celebration defined the origin of the Iranian nation with the Shah's acknowledgement of Cyrus the Great as the founder of the Persian Empire. "The formation of the nation thus appears as the fulfillment of a 'project' stretching over centuries, in which there are different stages and moments of coming to self-awareness."⁵³ His celebration presented the myth that the nation had always been there, but the Iranian people were now "awake" to realize it. Gellner acknowledges this nationalist rhetoric, but calls it "misguided;" he argues that nationalism is not the awakening, but it is indeed how it presents itself.⁵⁴

The celebration was a form of invented tradition promoted by the government of Iran. With Eric Hobsbawm's three kinds of invented traditions in mind,⁵⁵ the 1971 celebration fulfills the second kind because it sought to legitimize the status of the Shah, and the institution of

⁵² Talinn Grigor. "Orientalism & Mimicry of Selfness: Archaeology of the Neo-Achaemenid Style." *Orientalisme architectural entre imaginaires et savoirs*. (Paris: Picard, 2005), 7.

⁵³ Balibar, "The Nation Form," 96.

⁵⁴ Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 46.

⁵⁵ Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," 9.

Persian kingship, in the eyes of both world leaders and the Iranian people. By arguing that Persian kings had ruled this land for 2500 years, the Shah reiterates the rhetoric of “the perpetual seed of kingship” that Cyrus had presented in the sixth century BCE.⁵⁶ However, as Hobsbawm tells us, the historic right and continuity of rule lost power as a guarantor of loyalty.⁵⁷

This celebration was an act of political theater; Persepolis was the stage, “an ostensibly authentic site of national origin,” on which to perform the invented tradition.⁵⁸ The Shah sought to convince Iranians and foreigners of the epic grandeur of the nation. Particularly with the parade of Persian history, “the Shah was remodeling history to his own political and personal ends, presenting it as a kind of Hollywood epic.”⁵⁹ Furthering this idea, the Persian soldiers in the parade wore period clothing and were told not to shave in order to make it more ‘realistic;’ this historical reconstruction set the tone of the nationalist message. Each group in the parade acted as pictorial tableaux, representing each period of Persia’s history. This parade occurred in front of Persepolis, which was meant to act as the ethnoscape for the celebration. However, some Iranians felt that the soldiers and monument did not actually resemble their idea of the nation.

Although some were able to watch the parade of Persian history on television, most Iranian people were excluded from this celebration. If we follow Anthony Smith’s argument, this exclusion is why the Shah’s nationalist agenda failed to convince his people of an Iranian identity stemming from antiquity. “All the country’s money went into ridiculous celebrations of the 2500 years of dynasty and other frivolities...All of this to impress heads of state; the

⁵⁶ The British Museum. “The Cyrus Cylinder.” http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=327188&partId=1.

⁵⁷ Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, 84.

⁵⁸ Grigor, “Preserving the Antique Modern,” 28.

⁵⁹ Michael Stevenson. *Celebration at Persepolis*. (Bristol: Arnolfini, 2008), 27.

population couldn't have cared less."⁶⁰ Instead, the celebration was primarily an act of theater for the world. The Shah invited other world leaders to this celebration, because a sovereign nation requires recognition and legitimization from other nations. These visiting world leaders "paid tribute to Cyrus and his Kingdom" like the tribute barriers portrayed on the Apadana staircase at Persepolis (Fig. 5).⁶¹ The Shah, in particular, wanted the Western, First World to acknowledge Iran as an historic, yet modern nation-state.

The modern amenities of the Tent City and the light show at Persepolis were an attempt to portray Iran's modernity. The Shah's modernization sought to convince the Iranian people of a "promising national destiny," while also acknowledging its past.⁶² For his foreign guests, the Shah staged the ruins so that they provided the guests with "a modern look without impairing their antique allure."⁶³ At the time, the Shah even replaced the Islamic calendar with the ancient Persian one. The year was reset to 2535, so that now Europe (1976) would look forward to Iran (2535).⁶⁴ Similar to how the Western world defines its history by using the death of Christ as its year zero, the Shah attempted to socialize Iranians to the idea that their national memory began with the creation of the Persian monarchy under Cyrus the Great. This gave the perception that the nation was both eternal and natural, when it was actually a government-sponsored invention.

Stamps and banknotes were also used as propaganda to glorify twenty-five centuries of Iranian achievement, depicting the Shah next to the Apadana Hall or the tomb of Cyrus the

⁶⁰ Marjane Satrapi. *Persepolis*. (Paris: Pantheon, 2003), 29.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Smith, "Images of the Nation," 43.

⁶³ Grigor, "Preserving the Antique Modern," 25.

⁶⁴ Stevenson, *Celebration at Persepolis*, 28.

Great.⁶⁵ These were important tools for the socialization of Iranians to the idea of a collective past, as stamps and banknotes are both items that regular Iranians would often use.

Over the course of the Shah's reign, there were multiple attempts on his life, and he was involved in two dangerous airplane crashes; he survived each event, so, he argues, God must have saved his life. As Marjane Satrapi remembers in her memoir *Persepolis*, the first page of her schoolbook said that the Shah was chosen by God.⁶⁶ Through this rhetoric, he intended to legitimize his divine right to rule, as Achaemenid kings had claimed before him. However, as Eric Hobsbawm argues, this divine ordination could no longer guarantee civic loyalty.⁶⁷

Road to Revolution

The Pahlavi Shahs' funding of archaeological research and conservation projects and the 1971 celebration at Pasargadae and Persepolis intended to create a collective memory that supported Iran's longevity and continuity. However, the Shahs' political propaganda was ultimately unsuccessful in creating a 'Great Civilization' — the imagined national community.⁶⁸ The Shahs attempted to make modernization and nationalism a top-down affair, when, in reality, it needed the support of the Iranian people. Alam Saleh and James Worrall argue, "A top down approach to the construction of nationalism was always likely to make more enemies than the fostering and promotion of bottom-up conceptions of identity."⁶⁹ As Anthony Smith claims, these historical myths and symbols needed to be "easily accessible to the mass of the 'national' membership," rather than instigated by a secular, modern intelligentsia that was often comprised

⁶⁵ Peter J. Chelkowski and Hamid Dabashi. *Staging a Revolution: The Art of Persuasion in the Islamic Republic of Iran*. New York: New York University Press, 1999. 194.

⁶⁶ Satrapi, *Persepolis*, 19.

⁶⁷ Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, 84.

⁶⁸ 'Imagined community' as described in Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

⁶⁹ Saleh and Worrall, "Between Darius and Khomeini," 82-83.

of foreigners, such as Arthur Upham Pope.⁷⁰ It seemed as if foreigners, along with the Iranian monarchy, were trying to force Iranian national identity upon the people. This was particularly ineffective due to the distaste for foreigners following the European occupation of Iran at the beginning of Mohammad Reza's reign and additional foreign intervention during the Mossadegh era.⁷¹

There was also backlash saying that Iran needed to focus on its Islamic roots, rather than its pre-Islamic, Achaemenid roots. "[T]he Achaemenids meant little to most Iranians," and few had visited Persepolis or heard about the archaeological discoveries.⁷² The Pahlavi government misunderstood what the people believed to be the collective narrative of the nation. Many scholars argue that the Shah's secular nationalism and failure to include the people provoked the Iranian Revolution in 1979.

⁷⁰ Smith, "Images of the Nation," 43.

⁷¹ Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. *Answer to History [translation, Michael Joseph Ltd.]*. (New York: Stein and Day, 1980), 79-92.; Robert Graham. *Iran, the Illusion of Power*. (London: Croom Helm, 1978), 64-67.

⁷² Axworthy, *A History of Iran*, 251.

CHAPTER IV

IRAN SINCE THE REVOLUTION

In 1979, as revolutionaries tore down the statue of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi in front of his palace in Tehran, a new nation was born – The Islamic Republic of Iran (Fig. 12). An Iranian propaganda poster shows a statue of the deposed Shah having stood atop a pedestal with imagery from Persepolis; this furthers the idea that the Shah's reign and power stood atop a pedestal, or stage, of antiquity. Other posters show the columns of Persepolis crumbling behind the fallen Shah. After the Iranian Revolution of 1979 that overthrew the government of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi and founded the Islamic Republic of Iran, the nation was in need of a new national identity that broke away from the secular, Achaemenid identity that the Shahs had defined for the nation. In general, Iran after the revolution has focused on the Islamic history of Iran rather than the pre-Islamic, Achaemenid past. However, the Islamic government's growing re-appreciation for its pre-Islamic past can be seen through museum exhibitions, archaeological expeditions, and government rhetoric toward ancient sites.

After the revolution, there were calls from some to not only flatten the Tent City of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, but to also flatten Persepolis, which had now been poisoned with monarchist undertones due to the Shah's 1971 celebration. This destruction was prevented, but other sites were not as lucky. In February 1979, Reza Shah's mausoleum in Tehran was destroyed by revolutionaries, and the place was later transformed into a public restroom.

Instead of being destroyed, some sites were repurposed under the new nationalist agenda. For example, the Shahyad Tower that was commissioned by Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi in 1971 in order to celebrate 2500 years of Persian kingship was renamed after the revolution to

Azadi Tower, meaning “Freedom Tower” (Fig. 13). This modern, monarchical monument was repurposed for the use of the Islamic Revolution, such as for rallies. Today, Iranian leaders are often seen giving important speeches in front of this monument.

After the revolution, Mohammad Reza Shah lived in exile in a variety of locations: Mexico, America, Panama, and Egypt. In looking at his nation after the revolution, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi bemoans “this obliteration of our national identity and the cultural and spiritual heritage of Iran.”⁷³ In his memoir entitled *Answer to History*, he retells the history of his “very old country,” starting with the Achaemenid Dynasty, discussing how this empire was the paradigm for future empires around the world.⁷⁴

However, Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who led the revolution and imagined Iran as a state founded on Islamic principles, “saw national affiliations as a product of Western thought, which was inimical to, and used as an instrument to undermine, the ‘unity of Islam.’”⁷⁵ Nationalism was rejected and suppressed, as it was believed to detach the individual from the rest of the Muslim world. Archaeology and pre-Islamic history were considered “symbols of monarchical tyranny” instead of visual representations of a common Iranian identity and history.⁷⁶ The new regime declared that children given ancient Persian names, such as Cyrus and Darius, would not be issued birth certificates.⁷⁷ Textbooks were rewritten in order to “demonarchize” the curriculum, particularly those for history, sociology, religious studies, and art.⁷⁸ The Pahlavi regime is demonized in these new textbooks, and the West is accused of

⁷³ Pahlavi, *Answer to History*, 190.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 35.

⁷⁵ Saleh and Worrall, “Between Darius and Khomeini,” 75.

⁷⁶ Abdi, “Nationalism, Politics,” 70.

⁷⁷ Nasrin Alavi. *We Are Iran*. (London: Portobello Books, 2005), 132.

⁷⁸ Golnar Mehran. “Socialization of Schoolchildren in the Islamic Republic of Iran.” *Iranian Studies* 22, no. 1 (1989): 37.

“attacking the cultural heritage of once proud nations by taking away their identity and replacing it with pale carbon copies of the Western personality.”⁷⁹ Instead of portraying the origin of the nation at the reign of Cyrus the Great, textbooks from the Islamic Republic of Iran define the national origin at the rise of the Prophet Mohammad. The pre-Islamic period is only mentioned to describe the “tyranny” and “depravity” which allegedly existed before Islam.⁸⁰ The post-revolution government understood that primary and secondary schooling, as Etienne Balibar argued, has the ability to socialize the next generation to a new national identity.⁸¹

Turning a New Leaf

When Iranian President Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (1989-1997) visited Persepolis on April 20, 1991, he wrote in the guest book, “Visiting the incredible remains at Persepolis provokes considerable national pride in every individual.”⁸² He was the first Iranian leader since the 1979 Revolution to visit this ancient site. This “national pride” would be felt if Persepolis were recognized as part of Iran’s history and identity. His statement opened the door to further national appreciation and international cooperation regarding Iran’s pre-Islamic past.

In 1995, joint archaeological expeditions began again in Iran, such as one with the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, which had originally begun work in Iran in 1931 under Raza Shah Pahlavi. In the 1990s, Iran also sponsored two symposia, a lecture series, and a periodical on archaeological research.⁸³

⁷⁹ Ibid, 44.

⁸⁰ Haggay Ram. “The Immemorial Iranian Nation? School Textbooks and Historical Memory in Post-Revolutionary Iran.” *Nations And Nationalism* 6, no. i (2000): 78.

⁸¹ Balibar, “The Nation Form,” 96.

⁸² Abdi, “Nationalism, Politics,” 72.

⁸³ Ibid, 71.

After Iranian President Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005) visited Persepolis in 2001, “he called for its restoration and instigated its return to official national narratives.”⁸⁴ Khatami initiated numerous, more tolerant cultural policies with the financial support of the state. This included art exhibitions, publications, and programming.

In August 2003, the Iranian Cultural Heritage Organization (ICHO), which was formed in 1985, hosted an international conference on ancient cultural relations between Iran and the West. Foreign archaeologists were flown in, courted, and taken on a tour of historic sites, such as Persepolis. Masoud Azarnash, director of ICHO’s Archaeological Research Center in Tehran said, “We had the impression that archaeologists served to enhance certain ideological aspects of the regime before the revolution.”⁸⁵ This was seen in the 1920s with Arthur Upham Pope and the Society of National Heritage. Although there is a lingering distrust stemming from the period of the Pahlavi Shahs, Iranian archaeologists are now more willing to work with foreigners, as this international conference demonstrates.

In April 2004, the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago returned three hundred cuneiform tablets to Iran; these tablets were discovered at Persepolis in 1933 during an expedition led by the Oriental Institute. Gill Stein, Director of the Institute, sees “returning these tablets as part of a partnership.”⁸⁶

Also in 2004, Pasargadae, the Achaemenid Persian capital founded by Cyrus the Great, was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List. The site is owned by the government and is

⁸⁴ Tallin Grigor. *Contemporary Iranian Art: From the Street to the Studio*. London: Reaktion Books, 2014. 123.

⁸⁵ Quoted in Andrew Lawler. “Iran Reopens Its Past.” *Science* 302, no. 5647 (2003): 971.

⁸⁶ Quoted in The University of Chicago News Office. “University of Chicago returns ancient Persian tablets loaned by Iran.” April 28, 2004. <http://www-news.uchicago.edu/releases/04/040428.tablets.shtml>

managed by the government-funded Iranian Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicraft Organization (ICHHTO).⁸⁷

In 2008, the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei said, “Iran’s advancements after Islam are incomparable to its past. However, pre-Islamic history of Iran is also part of our history.”⁸⁸ This acknowledgement of Iran’s antiquity is much warmer than the rhetoric of the former Supreme Leader and leader of the Islamic Revolution, Khomeini.

Cyrus Cylinder Exhibition

In 2010, the British Museum, at the request of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005-2013), loaned the Cyrus Cylinder to Iran (Fig. 1).⁸⁹ However, this exhibition caused backlash in the Western media, who argued that the Cyrus Cylinder, a symbol of human rights for its representation of religious freedom to the conquered Babylonians, did not belong in Iran, a country that has allegedly violated human rights. A UN special reporter on human rights in Iran said that the Cylinder should “serve as a reminder to the Government that Iranians will continue to demand, and must be granted, their most basic human rights by their political leaders.”⁹⁰ The exhibition gained so much attention and popularity among the Iranian people that it was extended for three months. Thus, from Darius to Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi to President Ahmadinejad, a connection to Cyrus has been a powerful tool of legitimacy. However, in the

⁸⁷ UNESCO World Heritage Convention. “Pasargadae.” <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1106>.

⁸⁸ “Nowruz: Traditions for Persian New Year.” *The Iran Primer*. United States Institute of Peace. March 16, 2015. <http://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2015/mar/16/nowruz-traditions-persian-new-year>.

⁸⁹ Nada, “Cyrus Connects Ancient Iran and U.S. Democracy.”

⁹⁰ Barbara Slavin. “‘Cyrus Cylinder’ Reminder of Persian Legacy of Tolerance.” *Al-Monitor*. March 6, 2013. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/en/originals/2013/03/cyrus-cylinder-iran-religious-freedom-minority-rights.html>.

eyes of some, “[Ahmadinejad] stands accused of advocating Iranian nationalism” due to his lauding of former Persian kings, particularly Cyrus.⁹¹

After the exhibition’s success in Iran, the Cyrus Cylinder, along with sixteen other Achaemenid Persian artworks, was shown in the United States on a traveling exhibition sponsored by the British Museum.⁹² Neil MacGregor, Director of the British Museum, said that the proclamation on the Cyrus Cylinder was “the first attempt we know about running a society, a state with different nationalities and faiths — a new kind of statecraft.”⁹³ Although this traveling exhibition was not sponsored by the Iranian government, it was financed by members of the Iranian diaspora and by the Iran Heritage Foundation, a charity in the United Kingdom.

In looking at other museum partnerships, on January 28, 2016, the Iranian Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicraft Organization (ICHHTO), which is overseen by the Vice-President of Iran, and the Louvre in Paris signed a deal to renew cultural and scientific cooperation, including plans for exchanges of exhibitions, publications, and archaeological digs. A French team may even be able to return to research the Achaemenid capital of Susa, where they had previously discovered the Code of Hammurabi.⁹⁴

Protests at the Tomb of Cyrus the Great

On October 28, 2016, hundreds of “nationalist protestors” demonstrated in front of the tomb of Cyrus – the same tomb where Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi held the first day of his

⁹¹ Abbas Milani. “Ahmadinejad vs. The Ayatollah.” *The National Interest* 114 (2011): 47.

⁹² The British Museum. “The Cyrus Cylinder travels to the US,” 2012. http://www.britishmuseum.org/about_us/news_and_press/press_releases/2012/cyrus_cylinder_travels_to_us.aspx.

⁹³ Slavin, “‘Cyrus Cylinder’ Reminder of Persian Legacy of Tolerance.”

⁹⁴ Vincent Noce. “Louvre inks historic deal with Iran to cooperate on archaeological digs, exhibitions and exchanges.” *The Art Newspaper*. January 31, 2016. Accessed December 29, 2016. <http://theartnewspaper.com/news/museums/louvre-inks-historic-deal-with-iran-to-cooperate-on-archaeological-digs-exhibitions-and-exchanges/>.

festivities in 1971. This day, October 28, marks the day Cyrus conquered Babylon in 539 BCE.⁹⁵ Protestors shouted slogans praising the Achaemenid king. Senior Iranian clerics condemned these acts as sacrilegious, and the protestors were arrested by the state.⁹⁶ If Cyrus is a symbol of the freedom of religion, then he does not represent the freedom of assembly or of speech.

These monuments from antiquity “were perceived as public signs that celebrated an unwanted monarch, only later to become sites of resistance to an equally unwanted theocracy.”⁹⁷ Throughout time, Cyrus has been a symbol of freedom and benevolence. During and after the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, his tomb became an emblem of secular monarchy, and was, thus, hated by the Islamic government. Now, the tomb has become a nationalist icon, imbued with the hope of returning to both the immemorial past of the Achaemenids and the ‘Great Civilization’ of the Pahlavis.

On the same day as these protests, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani published a picture on Instagram of himself at Persepolis,⁹⁸ saying, “Persepolis is one of the invaluable and unique remains of the ancient history of this land, which demonstrates the antiquity of the civilization, the ingenuity, the wisdom, and the management skills of the great people of Iran, as well as their monotheism” (Fig. 14).⁹⁹ President Rouhani acknowledges the antiquity of Iran, as well as promoting its history of monotheism, from Zoroastrianism to Islam. Government leaders are utilizing new tools, such as social media, to administer their nationalist rhetoric to the people.

⁹⁵ The ‘Day of Cyrus’ is actually October 30, but they had to move it due to the overlap of leap years in the Iranian and Gregorian calendars.

⁹⁶ Saied Jafari. “‘Cyrus the Great’ enters Iranian politics.” *Al-Monitor*. November 2, 2016. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/11/iran-cyrus-day-commemoration-nouri-hamedani-protest.html>

⁹⁷ Talinn Grigor. *Building Iran: modernism, architecture, and national heritage under the Pahlavi monarchs*. (Berkshire: Periscope Publishing, 2009), 203.

⁹⁸ Hassan Rouhani. Instagram post. October 28, 2016. <https://www.instagram.com/p/BMHWM6SBR1x/?taken-by=hrouhani&hl=en>

⁹⁹ Jafari, “‘Cyrus the Great’ enters Iranian politics.”

Every Iranian president since Rafsanjani in 1991 has interacted with Iran's Achaemenid past, touting its importance to Iran's collective memory. From sites imbued with monarchical overtones to sites of national protest, Achaemenid Persia has been essential to the understanding of Iranian identity. Through international cooperation on archaeological research and museum exhibitions that showcase Iran's Achaemenid past to its people and to the world, Iran is promoting its antiquity as a part of its national identity.

CONCLUSION

Persia has always been a multi-ethnic land with a need to socialize its people behind a common identity and collective memory. Although other periods of Persian art, language, and other aspects of culture have been utilized for Iran's nationalist agenda, the art and architecture of antiquity are essential in the construction of a collective narrative for the nation. The rhetoric of the Shahs attempted to prove that the Iranian nation is a natural, pre-destined entity that began with the rule of Cyrus the Great. However, this rhetoric was ultimately unsuccessful, as the 1979 Revolution shows, because the Shahs failed to create an inclusionary message. They were focused on promoting Iran's antiquity to Europeans, through exhibitions, lectures, and archaeological projects, as well as political theater. Since the Islamic Revolution, the Iranian government has warmed to its pre-Islamic past, as presidential rhetoric has shown since 1991. The history of Achaemenid Persia has been, and continues to be, a part of the story of the Iranian nation, as defined by the government.

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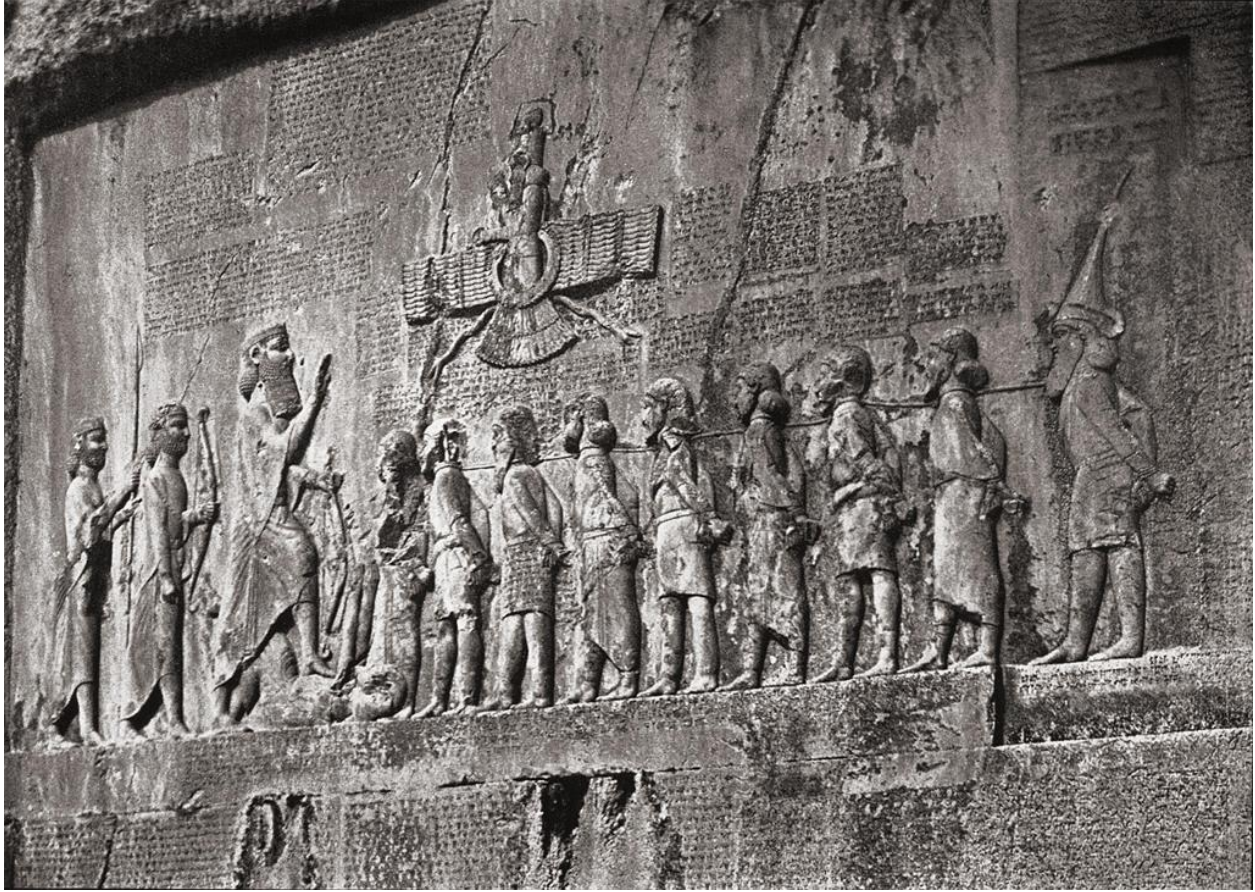


Figure 2. Bisitun Inscription. [Photo courtesy of University of California, San Diego]



Figure 3. Gate of Xerxes (Gate of All Countries). East Side. [Photo courtesy of Bryn Mawr College (MJM-03892), Photographed by Machteld Johanna Mellink, 1968]



Figure 4. Apadana: processional stairway and entrance. [Photo courtesy of Art History Survey Collection, Catalogued by: Digital Library Federation Academic Image Cooperative]

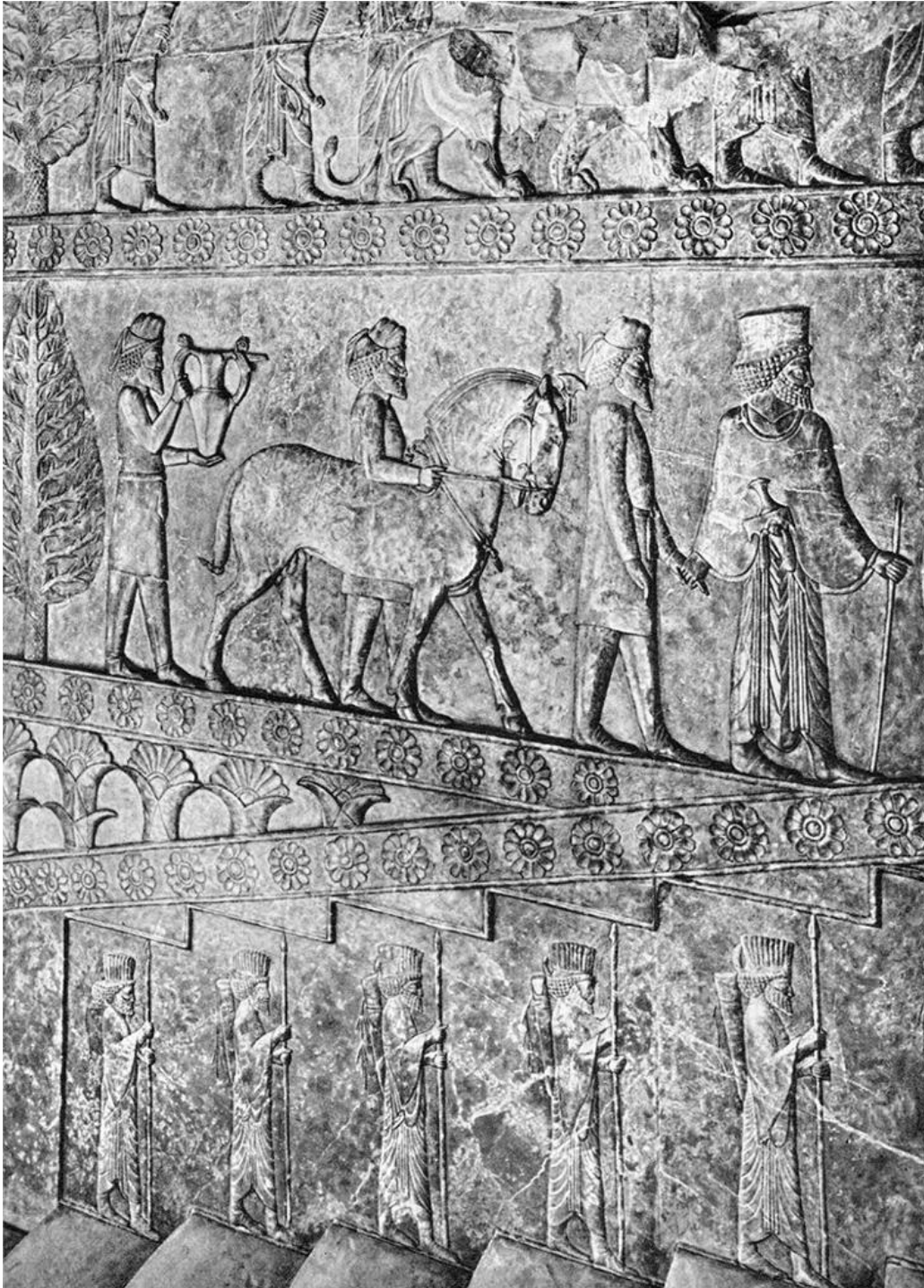


Figure 5. Three registers, Susians, Armenians, Persian guards. Bringing of tribute. [Photo courtesy of Archive for Research on Archetypal Symbolism, aras.org, Image: from Ghirshman. [JF 4329]]

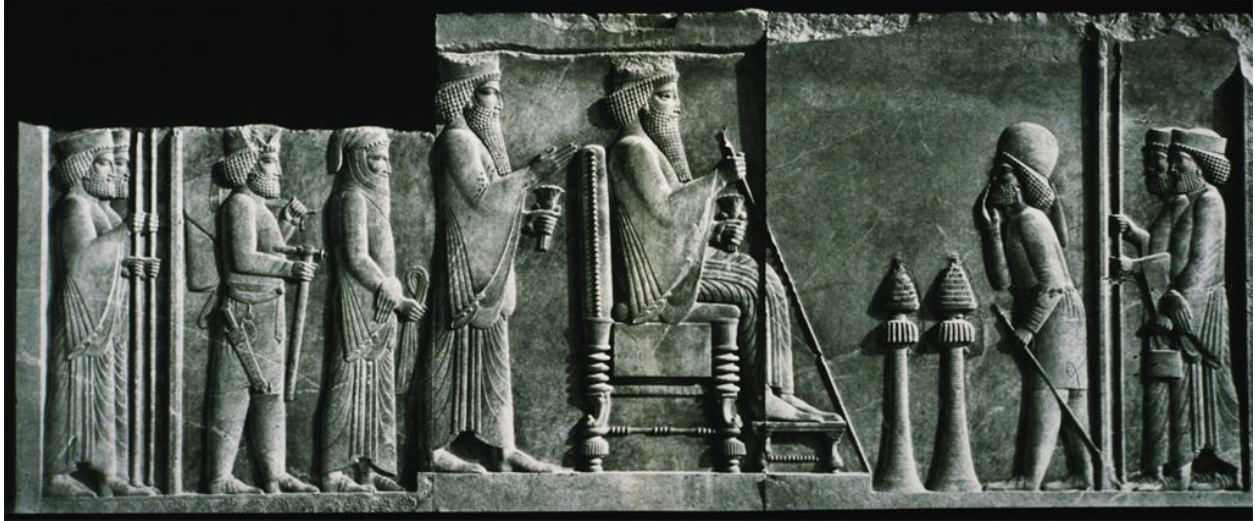


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Figure 7. Naqsh-i-Rustam: Tomb of Darius I: Ext.: Relief over door. [Photo courtesy of University of California, San Diego.]



Figure 8. Tomb of Ferdowsi. [Photo courtesy of Leo71538 at en.wikipedia [GFDL

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Figure 9. Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tehran. [Photo courtesy of sipo, Flickr, 2010]

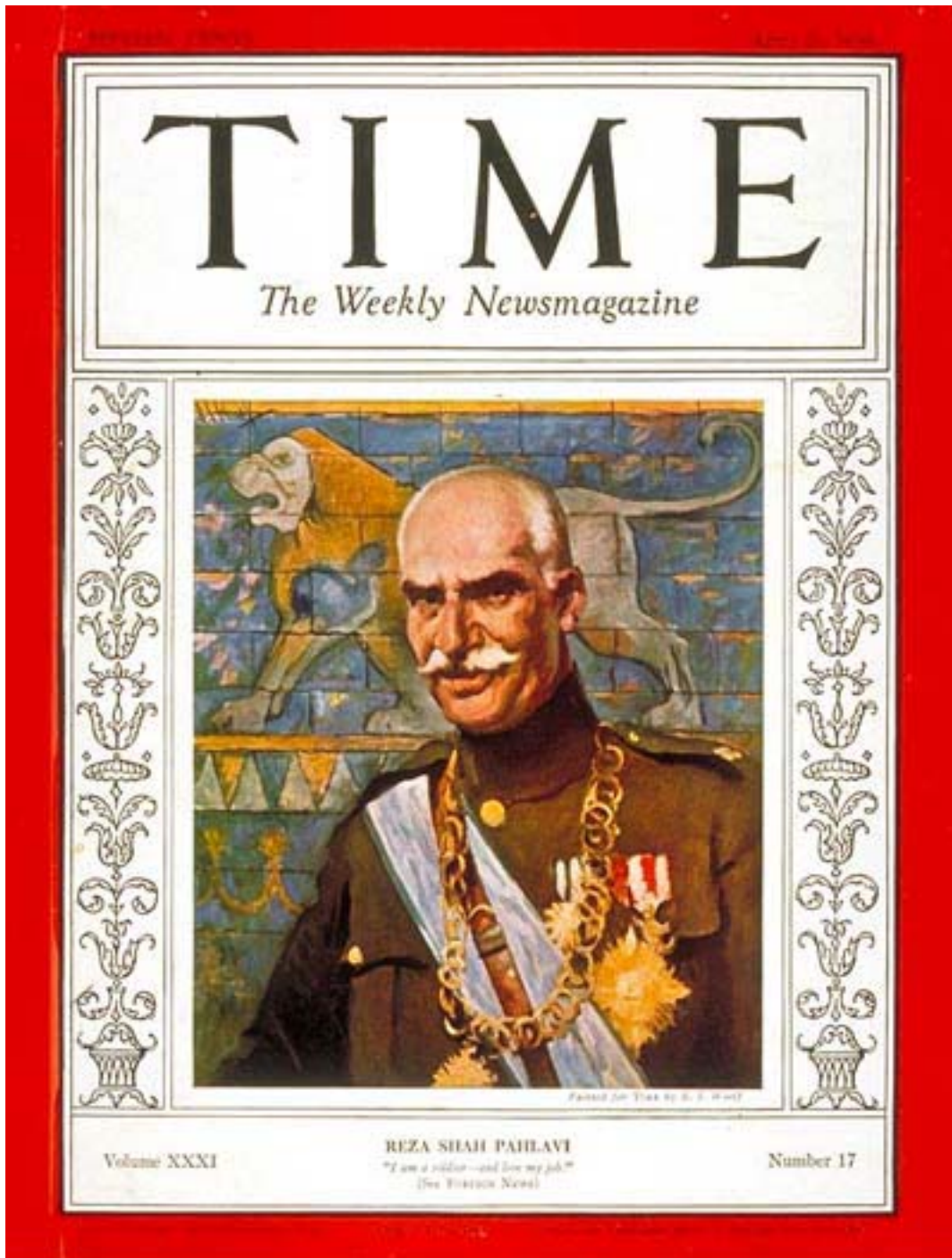


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Figure 11. At the tomb of Cyrus the Great, celebrations of the 2500th anniversary of the monarchy, 1971. [Photo courtesy of Magnum Photos, PAR232595]

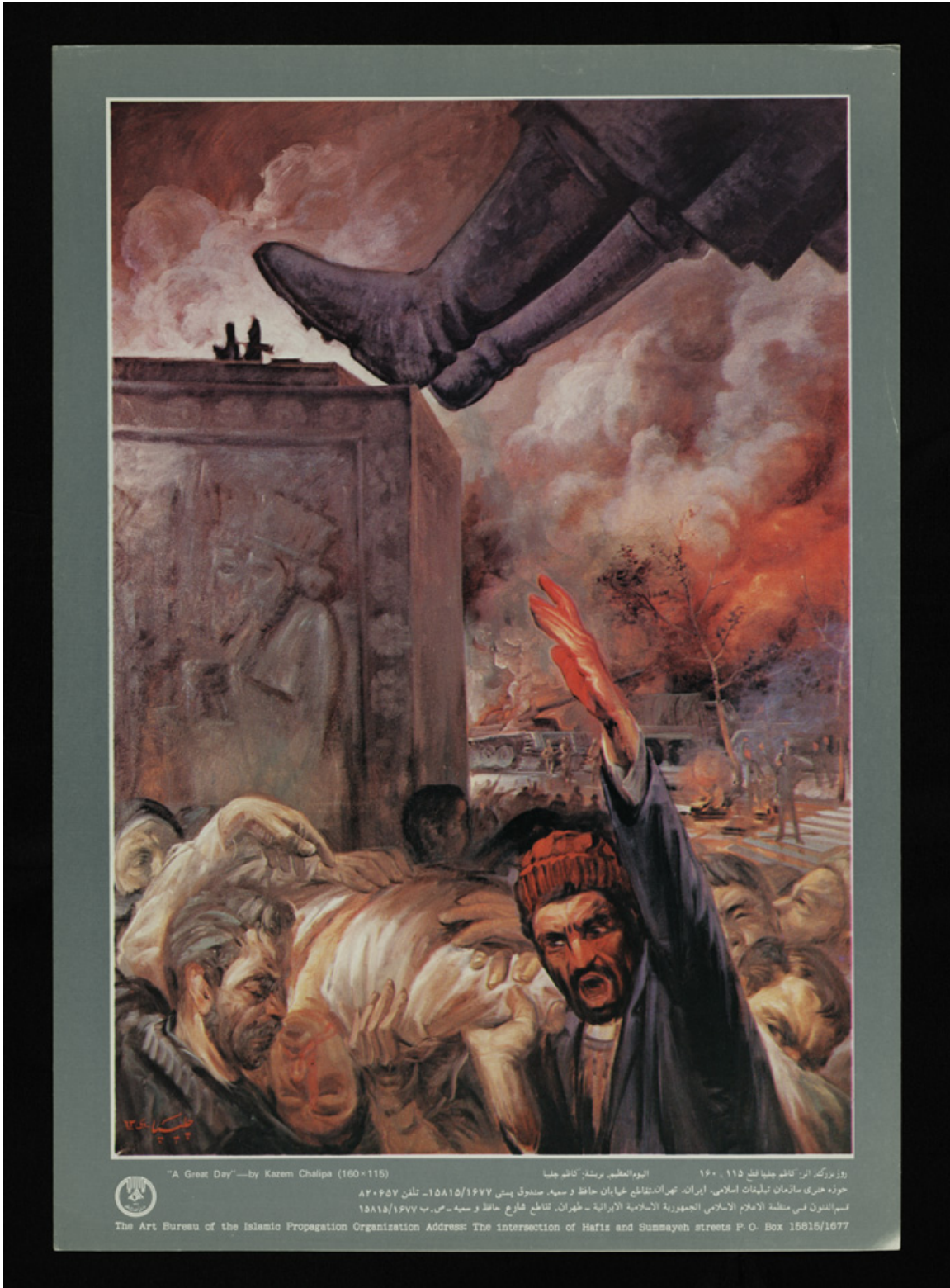


Figure 12. Poster of revolutionaries tearing down the statue of Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi.
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Figure 13. Rally of the Fedayin Khalg in front of the Azadi (freedom) monument, formerly the Aryamehr (light of the Aryan), 1980. [Photo courtesy of Magnum Photos]



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Figure 14. Hassan Rouhani in front of the Gate of All Nations at Persepolis.
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