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An investigation into the former consulate of Britain as one of the first samples of modern architecture in Iran

Mojtaba Parsaee *, Parinaz Motealleh, Mohamad Parva

Department of Art and Architecture, Shiraz Branch Islamic Azad University, Shiraz, Iran

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Abstract The Bushehr city (Iran) had been the center of attention in different historical periods by foreign countries and central government due to political and economic strategic position in Persian Gulf. The situation and condition of Bushehr, especially in Qajar era, caused that the city encountered the changes and reformations as a result of both inner and outer factors. So, the modernism process occurred in this city not long after it had emerged in Europe. So that, some buildings were built in the city which contained the features of modernism. This research, at first, introduces the former consulate of Britain (Sabzabad edifice) and discovers when the building was built based on a historical-interpretative method. After that, the principals of modern architecture are explained from the different theorists' stand point and also the characteristics of early modern architecture in Iran are explained. Finally, by describing the Bushehr condition in the early arrival of modernism, a qualitative and adaptive comparison has been done between Sabzabad architectural mechanism and the principals of modern architecture and its features in Iran. Thus, Sabzabad edifice is regarded as one of the first samples of modern architecture in Iran. The results of this research demonstrate the political, economic and also the architectural status of Bushehr city in the process of modernism in Iran which has been neglected by researchers and historians thus far.

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Introduction

Sabzabad edifice is located in Sabzabad quarter in Bushehr city (Iran) which is used currently as a maritime museum by navy of Iran. This edifice is one of those historical buildings of Bushehr city which had been constructed in south of Iran by Britain government in order to do consular affairs and also for the ambassador's residency. The comparison between architectural mechanism of traditional city buildings and Sabzabad edifice revealed a lot of differences which are almost

* Corresponding author at: Sadra town, Shiraz, Fars, Iran. Tel.: +98 917 115 6195.

E-mail address: parsaeemojtaba@gmail.com (M. Parsaee).

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new and modern in nature. So, it can be claimed that this edifice along with two other buildings (Malek edifice and Haft Bangeleh edifice), which was constructed in the vicinity of Sabzabad (in Bahmani quarter), exhibits the distinguished system of architecture in this region. Accordingly, the questions are: first, what historical period does the construction of this building had date back to? Second, what procedures had been employed internationally and nationally in Iran in this period of time? Third, what effects did these procedures have on architectural system of this building? The results of this research can clarify the state of Bushehr architecture in the architectural history of Iran. The research method is qualitative based on historical-interpretative analyses.

The Sabzabad edifice background and Bushehr condition

Bushehr city has an ancient historical background and the current city had been developed by king Nadir [1]. For a long time, the city had been considered significant by various foreign countries due to its strategic position in Persian Gulf and South of Iran. Hence, the governments of the Netherland, Portugal, France, Russia and Britain had used this city and the seaports near and far as a center for their political and economic relations [2]. Over ten foreign consulates and agencies had been located in Bushehr when the city was in its flourishing period although the locations of these agencies were unclear in documents [3]. The city had considered as a south gate of Iran for cultural relations and exchanging ideas [4].

Additionally, Bushehr was one of the first cities in Iran which experienced signs of new era (such as telegraph, electricity generating system, airplane, ice manufacturing companies) due to the development of maritime trading and political relations among Bushehr and the seaports of India, China and east Africa [5]. Therefore, Bushehr city must be considered as a pioneering city in Iran modernism history and also the modern cultural and communicational tools of European countries [6]. Moreover, the Britain, in comparison with other governments, had more and longer consideration and influences on Bushehr city. The government of Britain built and established lots of facilities and services in Bushehr so that Bushehr was changed into a city with distinctive

facilities and structure in Iran and it had been called the colony of Britain in Iran [7]. In fact, the city was the main center for British institutions in south of Iran whereas the house of Britain representative in Sabzabad, the buildings of telegraph facilities, the guardian ship of the port, which was docked in the harbor of this small port, and the other kind of such things, demonstrated the power and influences of Britain in this region [4]. Besides, English language was used as a communication tool for commercial activities in Bushehr [8]; hence, it was the only city of Iran that English language was used permanently [4].

Furthermore, the merchants of Bushehr built glorious edifices and villas inside and outside of Bushehr city (such as Bahmani quarter). Some of them contained the patterns and signs of Indian and European Building. So that, in comparison with other buildings in Bushehr, a distinctive architecture is seen in the three edifices of Haft Bangeleh, Malek and Sabzabad [3]. The remarkable point is that as a result of Russia influence, north of Iran had experienced some changes in its thoughts and also social, political and economic structure; similarly Britain and some other European governments made some changes in South of Iran especially Bushehr. So that Great Britain brought some modernity in this region for the purpose of further exploitation of Iran resources [2].

Sabzabad edifice, located in Sabzabad quarter, which is currently possessed by Iran navy as a maritime museum is a sign of this foreign governments' attention to Bushehr. Britain had resided in two main buildings, one of them inside the historical city and the other one outside, in Sabzabad quarter, which both are still existing [3]. The first settlement of Britain was in the first building and then they built the Sabzabad edifice [9]. Sabzabad edifice had been built in 1858 when Jones, the representative of Britain, prepared a new place for constructing the agency building of Britain in coordination with Tehran [10]. This building has been established in an upland, 10 km far from Bushehr (Fig. 1). At first, it was for residency of Britain representative but later it was changed to use as a permanent seat of consulate [2]. Sabzabad edifice and the other buildings and facilities of Britain in Bushehr show their power and influences in that region. The ambassador of France in Iran, 'Arthur de Gobineau', said that this beautiful house in a European style with veranda and some



Fig. 1 Sabzabad edifice (photograph by authors).

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