Legacy of Teispian and Achaemenian Materiality. Reassessing the History and Role of Monuments in 19th - 21st Century Iranian Nationalism

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Abstract

This paper explores the ways in which the materiality of the Achaemenian Empire was incorporated into the narratives of different polities and political groups on the Iranian Highlands. These approaches, which have continued into the present day, have marked these sites as objects of appropriation, imposition, resistance and negotiation by various actors in different discursive arenas. The current study further deals with the question of whether there was a biographical difference between distinct sites.

Keywords: Archaeology and Society, Nation Building, Achaemenian Monuments

Introduction

Walking through an Iranian city today, one will surely pass several shops, banks and supermarkets which are either named for historical Achaemenian sites or depict visual icons related to Achaemenid materiality. Both the knowledge of these sites and their prominent role in several discourses within Iranian society would have been impossible without the socio-political and archaeological developments of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The research during that period was part and parcel of our modern understanding of distinct sites, their histories and architectural and iconographic repertoires, leading to knowledge beyond classical sources about the exact meaning of their monumental qualities and their semiotic resources for Teispian[1] and Achaemenian rulers, who from around 559 BCE to 333 BCE subjugated large parts of Western Asia and parts of Southeast Europe.

Without the colossal works of archaeologists from different nations we would not know enough to understand that imperial policy, which dictated the creation of a distinctly new architectural and iconographic repertoire. This was built upon stylistic elements

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[1] The term refers to a very likely dynastic break between Kanbuzia (Kambyses), the son of Kūruš, and Darayawauš. As a result, the older dynasty should not be considered part of the Achaemenian lineage and therefore renamed according to its primary dynastic reference, namely Cispis (Teispes). For further information on that matter see Quintana (2011: 178).

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appropriated and recontextualised from palatial and religious architecture and associated pictorial sources from different parts of the large imperial territory, creating the narrative of a religiously pious and divinely ordained concept of worldwide monarchic rulership. These were poured into monumental structures in different parts of the empire, both in the heartland between Çūšā (Susa)[2] in the alluvial plains and Pārsa (Persepolis), and Paϑragadā (Pasargadae) in the southern part of the Iranian Highlands, as well as in the distant administrative centres of the satrapies e.g. Sardis in Western Anatolia and Qaračamirlı in the Caucasus. On the other hand, it is exactly this monumentality, paired with all its neatly interwoven semiotic resources first and foremost related to the monuments at Pārsa, which offered distinct paths of affordance for the appropriation and recontextualisation by different actors throughout the history of the Iranian Highlands, reaching the present day.

The dynamics started to change drastically in the 19th century with the advent of nationalistic, racist, anti-Arab and anti-clerical intellectuals and related political movements. For them, the material legacy from the distant, pre-Islamic past grew into focal points of individual, societal and political interest. In a close link with the nationalist circles of influential intellectuals and politicians, the rulers of the Pahlavid dynasty (1925–1979) strongly supported all efforts to form a coherent grand narrative. Its focus was to carve out Iranian nationality, territorial and cultural integrity, evidence of the benevolent influence of a superior Iranian culture on bordering regions, and a secular religious concept of monarchy reaching back more than 2,500 years. Several sites were considered central nodes of the red thread of this homogenising grand narrative, two of which were Pārsa, which even in its ruined state is still an impressive monument today, and the less monumental (regarding architecture) site of Paϑragadā, which gained its dominant role as the confirmed resting place of the mythically glorified first 'Achaemenian' ruler Kūruš (Kyros I) (Fig.1).

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[2] In the course of this paper, I employ Old Persian names as opposed to the more modern Western terms that tend to be based on Old Greek malapropisms.
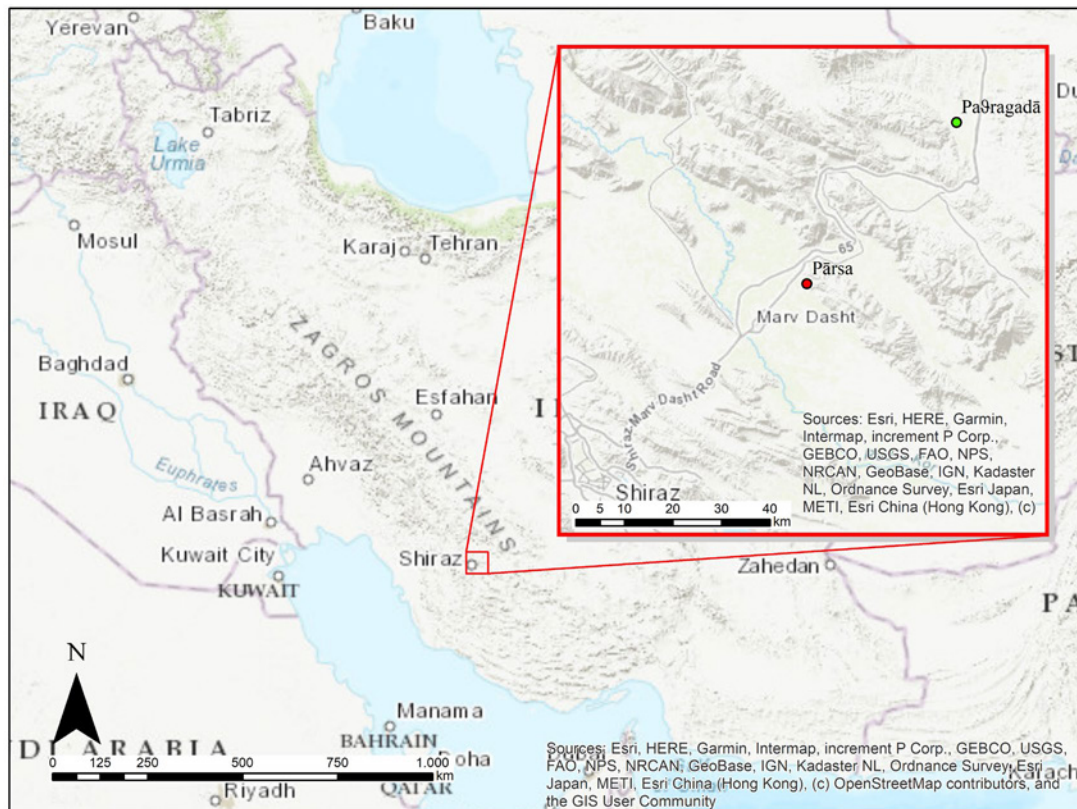
Figure 1. Map of Iran with location of Paϑragadā and Pārsa north-east of Shiraz, the provincial capital of Fars. Credits: Aydin Abar 2020 (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

In both cases, but especially the more recent period, appropriation was fundamental: both sites were excavated to a great extent, thereby dismantling and washing away the materialities of the monument, which were not considered part of the original building, alongside with century-old local legends, myths and practices which were interwoven with this materiality. Most of this was not documented. In the course of the following fifty years, both sites were redressed and recontextualised as monuments and imperial memory spaces, culminating in the events of the '2,500-year celebration of the Persian Empire' in 1971.

Following the revolution in 1979, and a new political doctrine, the sites did not play any major role in the context of governmental (re-)presentation for more than ten years. The sites' role, particularly the role of Paϑragadā, changed in the wake of the Sivand dam project controversies, when activist groups were able to outmanoeuvre official state organs, eventually initiating a renewed interest in the Achaemenian legacy of Paϑragadā. This then led to an ongoing multifaceted struggle for sovereignty over discourses about the past, some of which have persisted into the present.

Why the Return to Teispian and Achaemenian Monuments?
Research on the sites, their imagery and the history of their rediscovery and appropriation in the following centuries has been extensive, though mostly focussed on Pārsa and to a much lesser extent on Paϑragadā. After the publication of the German-American

excavations by Herzfeld and Schmidt at Pārsa between 1953 and 1970, a plethora of articles have dealt with numerous aspects of the site. For example, ground-breaking work on the iconography of the site was published by Margareth Cool Root (1979). A meticulous, synoptic work on Pārsa was published by Ali Mousavi (2012), who focussed on the reception of the site throughout history, as well as the antiquarian and archaeological research dealing with it. Yet the socio-political role of the site played only a minor role. This topic was picked up by Tallin Grigor, an art historian, who meticulously analysed the history of its reception and appropriation by state authorities, especially in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The topic of the social and political dimension of the sites was not considered a topic of concern among archaeologists until recently, and Dezhamkhooy and Papoli-Yazdi published the first overview (2018).

To date, two points have been only touched upon superficially:
First, in most cases the two sites, Paϑragadā and Pārsa, are mentioned in the same breath, neglecting their very particular and different biographies throughout the Achaemenid dynasty up into recent times. Nonetheless the biographies had a tremendous impact on the manner of their appropriation.

A second less detailed aspect addressed is the shifting role of the site from the nineteenth century onwards and how the appropriation of the monuments, based on their materialities, shifted between different actors for rather different societal and political reasons. The most frequent view is a top-down perspective, which leaves little room for the dynamics emerging in the nineteenth century, as well as underestimating the role of individuals aside from state authorities, and first and foremost the role of autocratic rulers.

The Monuments of Pārsa and Paϑragadā, an Archaeological Overview

Both monuments have attracted a lot of attention, particularly when their legacy was employed to project discourses of heritage and identity: the Teispid capital of Paϑragadā (Pasargadae) and the Achaemenid[3] site of Pārsa (Persepolis). Both sites lie in the present province of Fars in the southern region of Iran, ca. 50 km north-east of the modern city of Shiraz.

The slightly older site of Paϑragadā is situated in the fertile plains of the Dašt-e Morġāb. It consists of several monumental buildings spread over a surface of ca. 100 ha, with different palaces and pavilions that were once embedded in a lustrous landscape of canals and gardens. The main outline was established under the reign of the Teispian ruler Kūruš (Cyrus II, unknown–401 BCE), who was buried in a mausoleum ca. 1 km south of the palaces (Stronach & Gopnik 2009). While the palaces disintegrated into ruins, the sepulchre has survived until today and is still a landmark with high visibility from the surrounding plain (Stronach 1978: 26). The surviving iconography associated with the buildings is scarce. What is left shows a major impact from Mesopotamian (Stronach

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[3] Here I follow the well-founded argument that Darayawauš was not a member of the direct family line of Kūraš and Kanbūǰiya (Cambyses), but part of a more distant line. For more information see Lincoln (2010: 3–16).

1978: 68–69) and Egyptian (Stronach 1978: 49) traditions. The surviving image of a winged figure is difficult to interpret, not only because of its singularity but also because of the many different elements which were brought together from Egyptian and non-Egyptian iconic traditions (see Stronach 2010). The monumental sepulchre is almost undecorated aside from a heavily eroded bas-relief below the front gable (Stronach 1971). We do not know whether depictions might have been painted on the surfaces. Paϑragadā fell out of use as a political centre after the founding of Pārsa, but stayed closely connected to the empire through its ideological role as the resting place of Kūruš and a site of continued reverence and sacrifices for the deceased ruler. Though it is not clear what the exact role was, it is clear that it was important in the context of rituals related to the Achaemenian dynasty (Henkelman 2020).

Figure 2. View from Kuh-e Rahmat over the site of Pārsa in direction of the Marvdašt-plain. Credits: Carole Raddato, Wikimedia Commons, 2019 (CC BY-SA 2.0).

The second site, Pārsa, is the epitome of a monument: situated in the Marvdašt-plain, ca. 50 km north-east of the modern city of Shiraz, the master builders chose a site located at the western feet of the mountain *Kuh-e Rahmat*, with the longitudinal section of the terrace facing westward towards the plain (Fig. 2). It is undisputed that the planning and construction of the site happened by the order and under the watchful eye of of Darayawauš (Darius I; ~550–486 BCE) after he took over the throne and established himself as the ruler of the Achaemenid dynasty. Both the architecture and the iconography pick up elements known from other parts of the realm (Canepa 2018: 295) and show how in an elaborate fashion appropriation and recontextualisation were used to form a completely new imperial iconographical repertoire. The technique did not consist of a simple reinterpretation of iconographic elements, filling them with a new meaning (Dezhamkhooy & Papoli-Yazdi 2018: 33). In fact, in most cases, a large number of

syntagmatic intact combinations were taken, e.g. the king placing his foot on top of a vanquished enemy, and modified in small but important ways.[4]

These new visual resources were, aside from written sources (Frye 1984: 101), important means in the context of imperial propaganda, and integral to forming and consolidating a coherent imperial identity and ideology. Many buildings at Pārsa are engraved with artfully worked bas-reliefs, the majority of which are found on the staircases of buildings related to audiences and official ceremonies. The main recurring theme and epicentre is the emperor (Schmidt 1953: 123), who is surrounded by his military and court officials (Schmidt 1953: 22). Where the ruler is not depicted, as in the case of the tributary emissaries from other parts of the realm, the relation with the architecture fills the void: the emissaries walk up the staircases to the audience hall of the imperial court, in other words they walk towards the epicentre of imperial power. This circumstance is underlined by the fact that the strictly symmetrical and antithetical composition is exclusively directed towards the centre. Giving a roughly sketched semiotic interpretation, the recurring overall theme is the propagandistic legitimation of a benevolent and glorious imperial power, which put an end to chaos, brought divinely ordained peace and prosperity and serves as a guarantor of the same to all by divine will.[5] Achaemenian use of the two sites ended with the premeditated destruction of Pārsa and Paϑragadā during the Alexandrian war of conquest around 331 BCE (Mousavi 2012: 61–70).

Briefly, I argue that while Paϑragadā was the centre of the empire during the time of the Teispian dynasty, at least from the view of the Iranian Highlands, its monumentality was very much limited in comparison to what was to follow with Pārsa. Building on different examples, Darayawauš and his successors understood much better the role of monumental buildings, powerful iconography and their constitutive possibilities in the general architecture of power and control. Pārsa was one of the central arenas of imperial politics, a stage on which a neatly orchestrated imperial play regarding imperial identity was staged, which placed less attention on the provenance and ethnicity of groups, and instead centred the ruler at the core of an organic 'togetherness' of different regions, obfuscating the blood and tears befalling those who dared to resist.

Reflections of the Monuments in Emerging Iranian Identities

Though my main aim lies in analysing modern appropriations and recontextualizations, I consider it important to historicise the single threads in the past and to show how narratives changed throughout the biography of the two sites. I also address the point at which the narratives changed, as over time they frayed and lost their close relationship, allowing for very different appropriations. This is also important in the light on how the later re-splicing of both made for an almost surgical operation.

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[4] This article does not have the room to go into detail here, which will be detailed in a future article.
[5] What is often omitted is the consequences for anyone who dared to step out of that 'divinely-ordered' context (see also Dezhamkhooy & Papoli-Yazdi 2018: 43–45). Achaemenid warfare and Achaemenid punishment was by no means less ruthless than in any other monarchy before or after (Rollinger 2016). Standing in the tradition of West Asian rulership, religious legitimation played an important role in Achaemenian imperial language and iconography.

Part of modern-day Iranian cultural identity is a mysterious form of connection to the glory of the past, resulting from an assumed 2,500 years of unbroken cultural continuity. These rather innocent-looking ideas are frequently entwined with paradoxical concepts about Iranian superiority over other groups, particularly the Arab world, while at the same time being suppressed by the same groups through religion, resulting in a very common fascination for Aryan myths, as well as different forms of latent and open racism (Zia-Ebrahimi 2011). The mechanisms closely resemble developments in Europe at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century (Priester 2003: 166–167).

The timeless and essentialist concepts of culture and identity expressed during the nineteenth and twentieth century are highly problematic and do not hold water against the little we know about the historical reality. It is sometimes argued that similar concepts existed in the far past already, as far back as in the Achaemenian Empire. To start with, it is important to keep in mind that *Iranianness* as a political concept embraced by a majority of inhabitants of a state in the sense of "… a people belonging to a political community…" (Sharifi 2013: 3) did not exist before the twentieth century. What we know from archaeological and philological sources demonstrates that the Achaemenid Empire was inherently multi-ethnic, and people were oftentimes displaced and moved from one part of the empire to another, wherever their particular skills were needed (Henkelman 2013: 538; Zilberg 2019). There is ample evidence that group-related differences were perceived, but were considered fluid and changeable, and ethnic affiliation seems not to have been a limiting factor for success in the imperial administration (Zilberg 2019).

In 224 CE, more than 500 years after the end of the Achaemenid Empire, Ardašir I challenged and overthrew his Arsacid overlord Ardavān (Artabanos IV), establishing himself as the new 'king of kings'. This established the dynasty of the Sasanians as the ruling house over most of Western Asia for the next 400 years. Their ancestral seat was in Estakhr, a city located roughly 5 km north-east of Pārsa. Even though Sasanian rulers considered the Achaemenians their ancestors, we have ample evidence that their knowledge about their proclaimed ancestors was very limited, and it seems that already before the rise of the Sasanian dynasty comparably little was known about the Achaemenian Empire and its connection to the visible monuments.[6] Sasanian historiography heavily relied on jewish scholars and their Talmudic sources to substantiate what little they knew about Achaemenian rule from the Avestan tradition (Hämeen-Anttila 2018: 223). Nonetheless, the appropriation and recontextualization of Achaemenian monuments were fundamental to the multimodal narrative of the new state.

The salience of Pārsa's materiality attracted Sasanian rulers and high-ranking members of the political and religious elites to move architectural elements as building material for their palaces in Estakhr. The monument itself was used to celebrate festivities, as in case of the fourth century Sasanian Prince Šāhbūr Sākānšāh, governor of the eastern provinces,

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[6] This is sometimes forgotten by non-archaeologists, e.g. Mozaffari (2014: 2), which often results in the narrative that the knowledge regarding the site was forgotten following the Islamisation of the Iranian Highlands and the attribution of the sites to Solomon, who plays an important role in Islam. Stronach's (2010) thoughts on that matter are more convincing.

on which occasion graffiti artworks were incised into the walls (Huff 2008: 32–34). A related Middle Persian inscription in one of the rooms mentions the site being called 'ststwny' 'hundred pillars' (Frye 1966: 84). So, while Pārsa became central for the Sasanian elite, knowledge about Paϑragadā must have deteriorated within the last three centuries BCE (Canepa 2018: 68). There is no evidence that the site played any role whatsoever in Sasanian historiography and, while Appianus in the second century, names the site as the ancestral place of the Achaemenian rulers (Henkelman 2011: 90), there is no archaeological evidence for imperial activities associated with the site after the fall of the Achaemenid Empire. This is particularly interesting for the mausoleum of Kūruš and suggests that the belief that local villagers renamed the mausoleum in the wake of the Islamic conquest of the Sasanian Empire, assigning it to the mother of the Biblical King Solomon to protect it from destruction by the Islamic armies (Shahshahani 2014), is implausible. I believe it is more likely that its background was forgotten already.[7]

The Sasanian rulers' ambitions to appropriate Achaemenian sites were related to the attempted and eventually successive obfuscation of their direct predecessors on the one hand and to give their own political and religious innovations the authority of an earlier era (Canepa 2010) on the other. This went hand in hand with the appropriation and harmonisation of political and religious terms and concepts, as in the case of Middle Persian terms like 'ērānšahr' (Iranian state) and 'ērānwez' (Iranian expanse), or the connection of 'šāhān šāh' (king of kings) to the terms 'ērān' – 'Iran' and 'anērān' – 'Not-Iran' (McKenzie 2011; Canepa 2018: 3). Even though we do not have a good understanding of the identity concepts of the commoners within the realm, it seems that the Sasanian state endeavoured to engrain the aforementioned harmonisation and recontextualisation of the multimodal narrative of Iran and Iranian culture, as defined by political and religious authorities, into their subjects. Hints come from the role of the Mazdayesnian state religion, which permeated all areas of everyday life, particularly the judicial system but also the reformulation of publicly visual expressions, e.g. the peculiar circular shape of newly founded cities. It is therefore safe to say that Iranian culture at that time showed a political dimension when it came to questions of sovereignty and religion from the Sasanian period onwards (Gnoli 2012).

Following the disintegration of the Sasanian state after the lost war against the Muslim armies[8] in 653 CE, and the subsequent Islamization of the population, it grew relatively silent around Pārsa. There is evidence that the site played some role for the rulers of the Būyid emirate in their desire to build an Iranian narrative of local descendance; distinction from the Abbasid califs in the west played an important role for them. Several inscriptions by 'Adud ad-Dawla (936–983 CE) found at Pārsa show that the site was still visited, even though these were most likely more related to the Sasanian inscriptions.

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[7] Considering the evidence and circumstances, this seems unlikely. I would ask the question whether it might have been transformed into a sanctuary in Sasanian times, perhaps related to a female deity, similar to what Boyce (1967) presented in detail for the site of Bībī Šahrbānū.

[8] I prefer not to talk of 'Arab armies'. The evidence shows that numerous Sasanian nobles voluntarily switched sides and converted during the course of the war (see Pourshariati 2009). Speaking of 'Arab armies', one risks following the narrative of Iranian nationalists and racist intellectuals.

To my knowledge, the site of Paϑragadā is mentioned for the first time in the *Fārs-Nāmah* of ibn al-Balk͟ī from the first quarter of the twelfth century, where it is called 'the grave of the mother of Solomon', which he describes as a four-squared building made of stone, into which nobody dared to look, afraid to be turned blind by a magical spell which was considered to have been placed upon it (Balk͟ī 2016: 154–155). The first European who visited the monument in the third quarter of the 15th century and recorded the site was the Venetian merchant Giosafat Barbaro, confirming that local legends had it that the site was considered to be the grave of the mother of Solomon and that, in her honour, a shrine was constructed in its outskirts (Barbaro 1545: 47).

Pārsa, on the other hand, was presented to him as '*cilminar*' (Barbaro 1545: 46), which translates to 'forty towers', or 'forty minarets', referring to the columns visible at the site. A roughly synchronous account of the site comes from Jalāl ad-Din Davāni's chronicle *Arẕ Nāmah*, in which he recounts a large parade held by a local ruler, Soltan Khalil, close to a site he calls 'hazār sotūn', or 'thousand pillars' (Minorsky 1940). The choice of the site was not a coincidence, as Khalil's ancestry was traced back to Jamshīd, a mythical king from the Shahnameh,[9] who was considered to have similar powers to Solomon. Both were frequently juxtaposed as each wielded the power to command demons (Mousavi 2012: 84). At times the site around Pārsa was called the 'land of Solomon', the site itself was also called 'tak͟t-e Soleymān' – 'throne of Solomon or 'tak͟t-e Jamshīd' – 'throne of Jamshīd' (Shahbazi 1977: 205).

To this point, I have tried to show how Pārsa and Paϑragadā, two sites which at their founding were closely related, drifted apart within a short amount of time after the fall of the Achaemenian Empire. This does not come as a surprise and is most likely linked to Pārsa's monumentality and durability. The major aspect might have been related to the powerful iconographies of larger-than-life-sized rulers, the sheer monumentality and the general *mise-en-scène*. As a result, the site was recurrently visited by nobles, princes and rulers in attempts to connect themselves with a distant, but local, past glory, using it for staged self-presentations within propagandistic schemes, including the creation of invented heritage and narratives of ancestry and inheritance. I argue that the reasons for the appropriation of Pārsa remained within the general framework of its principal authorities' intent until the mid-nineteenth century, namely the overall glorification of an absolutist monarchic rulership.

The situation at Paϑragadā changed drastically. After the end of the Achaemenian Empire, it no longer played any important role, and the site's original background, as well as the name of the grave's eternal resident, fell into oblivion. What might have remained in the memory of following generations was the fact that it used to play a role in cultic activities. This reasoning lies in the fact that the palaces did not depict the same monumental and

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[9] The 'book of kings' is an epic poem written between 977 and 1010 CE by Abul-Qāsem Ferdowsi Tūsī. The poet's sources seem to have been both oral and written sources in Iranian and Arabian languages (Hämeen-Anttila 2018: 2–6). The poet describes both mythical and historical times, naming rulers, their champions, nobles, and so on. There is no clear evidence of the Achaemenian dynasty, while the Sasanian dynasty is depicted in detail. Nonetheless, he mentions the palace of 'sad sotūn'– 'hundred pillars' as the palace of Jamshīd (Shahbazi 1977: 202–203).

iconographic qualities known from Pārsa. Walking up the majestic platform of Pārsa, particularly between the colossal columns of the Apadana below the imperial iconographies, was certainly, and in fact still is, awe-inspiring. The site allows long walks inside the monument, which makes a phenomenological difference.

Paϑragadā did not have the same qualities: the palaces were not built on a terrace and were smaller in dimension, probably 'hidden' within large gardens. Most importantly, neither the palaces nor the graves displayed the impressive iconography we know from Pārsa. It does not come as a surprise that the site was soon recontextualised as a sanctuary and, within the folklore related to the Achaemenian monuments to Solomon's abilities (Stronach 2010), the grave might have been recontextualised as 'the grave of the mother of Solomon'. Over time, the majority of the older monuments of Paϑragadā fell into obscurity and only the grave of Kūruš (Kyros II) was appropriated, recontextualised and transformed into a local shrine. Pārsa, on the other hand, remained in the attention of local rulers and was constantly tied into discourses about tradition, superiority and the inherited right to exert power.

Re-splicing the Monuments in the Wake of Nationalism

During the Safavid period (1501–1736), the monuments of Pārsa were not forgotten, but for the new dynasty they had no deeper identificatory meaning. Stemming from the Azerbaijan region in the North-West it seems that the rulers' orientation was much more towards Central and North-Western Iran than to the South. Nevertheless, concepts of Iranian cultural identity paired with Shi'a sectarianism were propagated to underline opposition to the Ottoman Empire. Geopolitically, it was at the time of their rule that Iran became an interregional super-power and major player in West Asia. Nonetheless, by the end of the sixteenth century, the power of the Safavid rulers started to wither. After a short period of stabilisation, the subsequent Qajar dynasty (1779–1925) oversaw a period of political demise from the mid-nineteenth century onwards.

The appropriation of pre-Islamic art and architecture came to play a bigger role from the early years of the Qajar period (Grigor 2010: 60), though in two very different contexts. From Fath Ali Shah onwards, Qajar rulers found interest in pre-Islamic monuments. Unlike in the aforementioned periods, they did not use Pārsa to stage their authority and claim an invented inheritance, though Fath Ali Shah knew the site from his visits as the governor of the province of Fars (Dezhamkhooy & Papoli-Yazdi 2018: 78). Instead they were largely focussing on sites located in the North and West, ordering the application of bas-reliefs next to pre-Islamic, mostly Sasanian monuments.

The Achaemenian monuments and their figurative and ornamental vocabulary, on the other hand, served as blueprints for decorative elements in the context of palace architectures. It is rather loosely, if at all, connected to the socio-political dimension of *Iranianness*, and much more closely associated with traditions of a *translatio imperii*, in which the following dynasts would always be in the process of appropriating former monuments

in search of legitimacy and the connection to the long tradition of 'indigenous' Iranian rulership (Tavakoli-Targhi 2001: 100; Grigor 2015: 223), thus confirming their righteous claim to absolute power.

The arena of appropriating and recontextualising the past was dominated by rulers and their associates through the ages. It was in the 19th century that new actors, namely intellectuals, oftentimes coming from the urban elites, entered the discursive arena. To understand their motivations, it is important to keep in mind that, unlike most countries in West and South Asia, Iran did not have a colonial history in the proper sense. Nonetheless, diplomatic and military conflicts with both Czarist Russia and the British Empire led to major territorial losses (Kazemzadeh 1991: 337) and heavy political and economic interference by all major European powers (Greaves 1991: 395). The relationship between the Qajar states and European states can be best described as a form of crypto-colonialism; officially the state kept its political independence, but steadily slipped into massive cultural and economic dependence (Herzfeld 2002: 900–901).

Concessions and monopolies granted by Qajar rulers to foreign states and companies were meant to fill the cash-strapped state treasury and to help modernise the country institutionally and infrastructurally (Amanat 1997: 127), but ironically played a detrimental role in this process. A concession granted to the Russian state, for example, allowed them to form a Cossack brigade to serve as household troops of the ruler, though naturally the brigade was under the command of Russian senior officers (Ettehadieh 2011). Naser ad-Din shah went so far to grant a concession to Paul Julius Reuter to, among other things, a monopoly over the extraction of literally all available natural resources, as well as the construction and operation of telegraphic and railroad infrastructure. However, in this case, the massive pressure of the administrative, economic and religious elite soon led to the nullification of the concession (Lambton 1987: 223). The Belgian state was granted a concession to take over the customs affairs of the country (Stebbins 2016: 107). In a similar context, the concession to excavate archaeologically relevant sites was granted to the French in 1895 for an unlimited time period (Mousavi 2012: 155; Grigor 2015: 247, n. 5).

At the same time, sons of the societal elite were sent overseas to be educated at European universities, where they eventually became familiar with political concepts such as constitutionalism and nationalism, alongside their education in the sciences and humanities, e.g. anthropology, archaeology and philology (Abdi 2001: 53), which were themselves heavily involved in European imperialist and colonialist endeavours and therefore infused with social Darwinist, chauvinist and racist concepts (Marchand 2009: 292–386, see also Lorcin 2014: 118-166). It is no coincidence that this was the same period in which European scholars' interests in pre-Islamic archaeological and linguistic remains from Iran played an important role in the context of the European romantic project of Aryanism (Poliakov 1993; Arvidsson 2000: 122–126).

A plethora of texts written from the beginning of the nineteenth century onwards by intellectuals, often times referred to as '*rowšanfekr*' – 'enlightened thinkers' (Zia-Ebrahimi

2016: 63) – dealt with the actual social, economic and political problems (Tabari 1983: 53). Oftentimes, the open mystification of pre-Islamic Iran in the texts went hand in hand with anti-clerical and strong anti-Arab sentiments.[10] Very influential writings came from Mirza Fath Ali Akhundzadeh (1812–1878) and Mirza Agha Khan Kermani (1854–1896/97). The works of both are heavily infused with glorifications of the pre-Islamic past, openly racist dichotomies between putatively pure, Aryan Iranians and the dirty, Semitic Arabs, explaining the political situation under the Qajar with the hegemony of the latter over the former (Algar 2011). It is rather interesting to note that obviously the site of Pārsa was well known to Akhundzadeh, who considered it of such importance to propose its depiction as the iconic symbol of a newly founded, reformist newspaper in 1866 (Tavakoli-Targhi 2001: 101). This suggests that not only written sources, but also monumental sites, must have been part of internal discourses by this time. It seems likely that, as the rulers' interests in these monuments dwindled, 'enlightened' intellectuals started to discover and appropriate them; their ideas fell on fertile soil among those searching for easy explanations for the apparent political, cultural and societal misery at the time (Tavakoli-Targhi 2001: 102).[11]

Figure 3. Lithograph from Forsat ad-Dowla's *Asār-e Ajam*, showing the Gate of All Nations around 1881/95. With friendly permission of the University of Pennsylvania Libraries.

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[10] As early as the mid-19th century, letters and books appeared that criticised the Qajar rulers and proposed how to ameliorate problems (Kashani-Sabet 1999: 80). Amanat (2017: 317–323) elaborates on the role and heterogeneity of intellectuals and administrative employees and their discursive arenas, in which the constant contrast between Qajar Iran, European states and pre-Islamic Iran played an important role.

[11] From personal experience, I can verify that unfortunately such ideas still serve as the basis for ultra-nationalists' racist narratives both within the country and within the exile communities worldwide.

A third, and less known, line of influence came with the personal and literary contacts of Iranians to the Parsi communities in the British Raj. Within this group, ideas related to Aryanism and concepts of cultural and racial purity and superiority played an important role (Luhrmann 1994). These multiple contacts stirred revivalism within literate circles (Marashi 2008: 61). This also led to ideational and financial support by Parsi patrons, namely Maneckji Limji Hataria, for Mohammad Naser Forsat ad-Dowla's endeavour to compile his work *Āsār-e Ajam* in the years between 1881 and 1895, which was ultimately published in Bombay in 1896 (Grigor 2016). This book is another clear indication of a revived interest to appropriate the monumental sites, as it provides detailed descriptions and lithographic depictions of Pārsa, among other locales (Fig. 3).

All these elements played a major part in forming the different modes in which nationalism moulded and was shaped by different individuals. In this view, the pre-Islamic and particularly Achaemenian monuments[12] were referred to as icons of a glorious past (Tavakoli-Targhi 2001: 101), which, according to the narrative, was abruptly ended by Arabian invaders. It is this melting pot from which the concept of political Iranianness (Sharifi 2013: 83) arose, mostly within elite circles. A major transformation was happening: while Qajar rulers still saw their subjects in the traditional relationship, consisting of the '*malek*' (the ruler) and his '*bandegān*' (servants), their servants started to see themselves and the country with different eyes (Sharifi 2013: 31).

The beginning of the twentieth century saw the rise of political movements in Iran, struggling with each other and against the arbitrary rule of the Shah, eventually culminating in the *Constitutional Revolution* of 1905–1906, in which a plethora of diverse groups operated partly together and partly against each other (Foran 1991: 795–796). The Revolution led to the expression of formerly hidden political views and profound changes within the societal and political structures of the country. The political system was, for a short period of time, turned into a constitutional monarchy with the legislative power placed in the hands of the newly formed Majles (parliament).

The enterprise of nation building, which its proponents considered an 'awakening of Iranianness', was rooted within the already mentioned elite circles of intellectuals, academics and state officials, who pushed to speed up the consciousness of a pre-Islamic past. This is particularly traceable from around the Constitutional Revolution onwards, indicated by the establishment of the Antiquities Service (Nasiri-Moghaddam 2014: 124) and the National Museum of Iran in Tehran in 1910 (Abdi 2001: 54). What was taking shape in the wake of the revolution at the beginning of the twentieth century is the beginning of a change in the way *Iranianness* and an ever-growing influence of the material legacy of the Achaemenian period are understood. These appear and reappear in the writings of the small groups of the elite in the nineteenth century, who launched secret societies, oftentimes in close relationship to European freemason lodges. Here they openly discussed the past and future of the country. One of these was the 'Lož-e bīdārī-e

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[12] Very influential was the famous Shahnameh (Tavakoli-Targhi 2001: 98), which ironically knows little of the Achaemenian dynasty (Kashani-Sabet 1999: 165).

Īrānīān' which can be translated as 'Lodge of the awakening of the Iranian populace' (Grigor 2010: 58); it was founded during the Constitutional Revolution (Algar 2012). What was going hand in hand within these groups was the veneration of the pre-Islamic rulers alongside the veneration for places connected with them.

The ongoing weakness of the state internally and externally (Ghani 1998: 15) led to a coup d'état in 1921 by a small group of powerful men, including the commander of the Cossack brigade Reza Khan (Ghani 1998: 161-163). His influence, power and standing grew in the course of subsequent events, leading to his usurpation of the Peacock throne in 1926. Though Reza Shah was the iconic figurehead of nation building, he was not necessarily the main strategist. It was no coincidence that in 1922 several influential statesmen founded the Anjoman-e Āsār-e Melli (AAM), the 'Society of National Heritage' (Nasiri-Moghaddam 2014: 129–130), some of whom knew each other previously from the 'Lož-e bīdārī-e Īrānīān'. The main aim of the society and its members was to create a homogenised, coherent and polished narrative of the past[13] that created a seamless line to the present, an enterprise which they understood as a civilising mission to 'awaken Iranianness'.

The story would be only half told without mentioning another important figure: a foreigner who came to Iran and came to serve as the nexus between the narratives of the pre-Islamic past and their monumental remains. From 1905 to 1906, Ernst Herzfeld, a young German archaeologist writing his doctoral thesis on the topic Paϑragadā, came to the province of Fars to study the visible Teispian and Achaemenian remains (Herzfeld 1908). His thesis was a meticulous source-critical work, convincingly weaving together observations drawn from archaeological and philological work. His work made him an excellent candidate to start research on one of the sites which must have been on the radar of the lodge members as an anchor point to connect their conception of the past with the present. Indeed, according to Herzfeld's own notes, it was Prince Farman Farma who approached him in 1923 with the plan to excavate and restore the sites of Paϑragadā and Pārsa, indicating that the idea must have been circulating before that time (Jenkins 2012: 11).

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[13] Along with this revival of past monumental glory came the attempt at linguistic purification. In 1935, Reza Shah ordered the establishment of the Farhangestān, the Iranian Academy of Language (Paul 2010: 78–81), with the mission to replace words with Turkish or Arabian etymology with those of Iranian origin (Gheissari 1998: 46).

Figure 4. Front façade of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; pay attention to the details on the façade of the staircase. Credits: siposoft 2010, Wikimedia Commons (CC BY 2.0).

In 1925, Herzfeld was invited by the AAM to give an open lecture at the Ministry of Culture and Art, accompanied by a talk given by Mohammad-Ali Foroughi, in which he praised Iran's history over Greek and Roman history, and underlined the value of the monuments in the context of nation building (Grigor 2007: 572; Mousavi 2010: 450–458). The following year it was one of the members of the AAM, Firuz Mirza Nosrat ad-Dawla, who in 1926 supported Herzfeld[14] in his ambitions to start scientific excavations at Pārsa (Grigor 2004: 21). Though hypothetical, it does not seem unlikely that a plan to topple the very problematic monopole of the French was at hand before, as Herzfeld was directly involved in the act of outlining which monuments should be incorporated in a canon of national heritage and thus was directly involved in the appropriation of monuments (Grigor 2004: 29–30; Mousavi 2010: 450). Even if Herzfeld himself was not involved in the abolition of the French monopoly, his work and presence in the country helped Iranian officials to come to terms with the French government in this matter (Mousavi 2010: 456). After diverse initial problems, Herzfeld initiated his work at Pārsa in 1931. In 1933, Reza Shah and the crown prince visited the monuments and were visibly impressed by the outcomes of Herzfeld's work (Mousavi 2010: 465). Beyond the excavations at the site itself, it seems that Reza Shah and the court were seeking to continue the Qajar idea to bring Pārsa to Tehran, and to merge past and future.

The 1930s saw the emergence of an architectural style that was meant to obscure the former Qajar traditions. Stylistic elements known from Pārsa were merged with modern

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[14] In the meantime, Herzfeld became an archaeological consultant to the Iranian government (Mousavi 2010: 454).

traits in a sort of neo-Achaemenian style. Monuments in their own right, the constructions included several monumental buildings in Tehran, including the police headquarters in the National Gardens built in 1933 (today the building of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) (Fig. 4), a police station in Darband, north of Tehran, built in 1935, the National Bank of Iran, built in 1935 and the courthouse and Ministry of Justice, built between 1936 and 1948 (Grigor 2017: 1097). All buildings borrow salient elements known from Achaemenid monuments, including distinctive porticoes, the shape of columns, the particular multiple volutes, bull-headed capitals, the frequent depiction of a *fravaši* centrally placed over the entrances, reliefs of guardian soldiers and typical stepped crenelations on stairways and along the roof of the building.

From the nineteenth to the twentieth century, we can therefore mark the following change in the appropriation of Achaemenian and, to a lesser extent, Sasanian monumental materiality: in the Qajar period we see a very common appropriation in the sense that, from the rulers' view, it was mostly in the context of a *translatio imperii* and annexed the connection to former imperial magnitude. At the same time, the political reality in combination with influences from Europe and the British Raj, and particularly the Parsi communities there, led to the emergence of a class of educated men voicing their dissatisfaction with the political and social situation inside the country. One way to deal with that was the adoption of the Zoroastrian narrative of the cultural destruction brought to the country of Iran as a result of the Arab invasion. The logical consequence was the projection of their own dreams of a better future on the past, which included the veneration of the visible traces of this past, still in the memory of the society. This explains why Pārsa came into their field of vision so quickly, while Paϑragadā with its local tradition as an Islamic sanctuary took longer to play an important role.

If we reduce the picture to a view of two discursive fields, these seem to have stayed relatively separate from each other. The situation changed after the seizure of power by Reza Khan, the founder of the short-lived Pahlavid dynasty. Reza Khan was surrounded by the same men and, in an act to separate himself from the traditions of the foregoing Qajars, we can see a negotiation process between the discursive field of the ruler and those attempting to influence him. Reza Pahlavi understood the twofold benefit of the connection to pre-Islamic traditions: internally it would help to cut any formerly close linkage to the influence of the ulama and imagined un-Iranian and Arabic traditions, allowing for the homogenisation of regional identities subsumed under one Iranian identity. The second direction was to foreign countries, to illustrate the newly gained phoenix-like rise of a neo-Achaemenid Iranian – and therefore European – nation, symbolising a rejuvenation and resurgence of Iranian regional power on the international stage.

As already mentioned, Paϑragadā slowly grew as a subject of interest to Iranian scholars. It was then Ali Sami, who destroyed the traces of the later sanctuary, imposing his idea of a pure Achaemenian architecture onto the site, as well as the people annually visiting the

shrine. All traces of the shrine were smoothed away with very little documentation, and access to the monument was limited by a wall surrounding the area (Sami 1956: 41–42). The climax of appropriation was reached under Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, to whom the Majles had granted the illustrious yet freshly invented title 'Āryāmehr' – 'Light of the Aryans'.[15] He was one of the major propagators of the celebrations of '2,500 years of Persian monarchy' in which a distant past, present and future were juxtaposed (Grigor 2018: 131). According to Afkhami (2009: 404), plans for the celebrations went back to a proposal by then cultural counsel to the imperial throne, Shoja'addin Shafa, and were originally scheduled for 1961 but not finally realised in 1971.

In preparation for the celebrations, the two monuments and areas close by were restored and heavily reshaped, at least in part: villagers were resettled to make space for asphalt roads and parade grounds (Fig. 5).[16] A total number of sixty state guests, including several rulers of monarchic countries as well as presidents and prime ministers, were invited to attend the show, which lasted several days (Abdi 2001: 68). Similar to what was assumed to have taken place during the Achaemenian period in the case of emissaries of the different satrapies and affiliated territories, the guests camped in front of the main terrace of Pārsa. The choreography followed the chronology of sites, beginning at Paϑragadā with Mohammad Reza Shah's speech in front of the mausoleum of Kūruš, then moving to the site of Pārsa, the illustrious guests took up quarters in a luxurious tent city in front of the terrace of Pārsa (Grigor 2018). Following an event on the terrace itself in the evening, the guests were invited to watch a parade of military history, and on the next day the illustrious spectators sat on grandstand seats to watch a long parade of amateur actors recruited from the armed forces mimicking armies from 2,500 years prior.
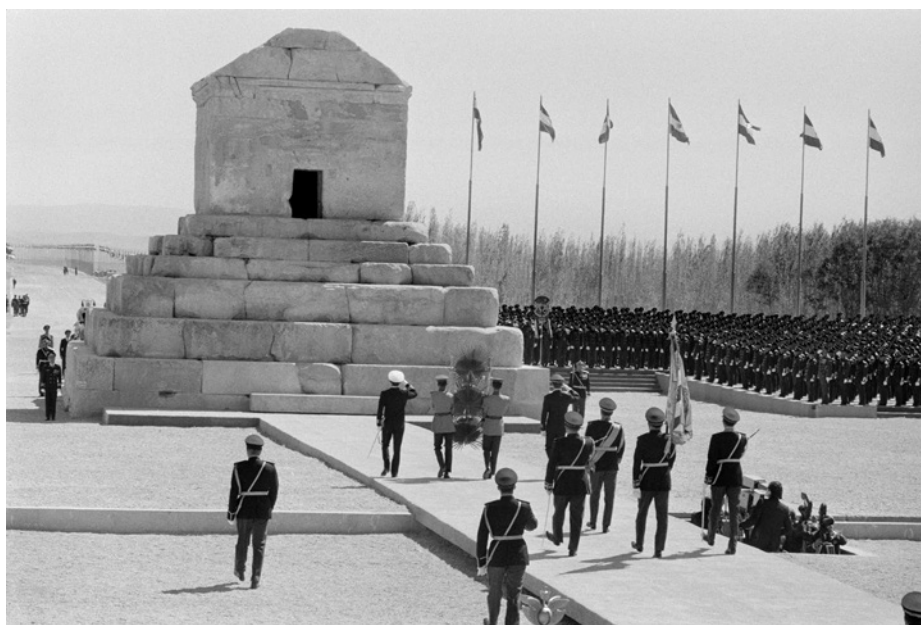

Figure 5. The photo was taken from west to east and gives a good view on the levelling works carried out in the closer surrounding of the mausoleum, on the occasion of the '2,500 years of Persian monarchy' celebrations. Credits: Abbas 1971/ Magnum Photos/ Agentur Focus.

[15] The exact roles of Rezazadeh Shafagh, a philologist, and Mohammad-Reza Pahlavi in the course of name-finding remain obscure, although Amanat (2017) assumes that it was due to the instigation of the ruler himself.
[16] See Taylor (2014: 95) for a drawing of what Herzfeld still could see at the beginning of the 20th century.

Most likely it was the first time that both Paϑragadā and Pārsa were turned into stages of official self-representation, though with a completely different concept of the state itself. As opposed to the heterogeneous Teispian-Achaemenian state, which did not care greatly about ethnic differences, the modern Pahlavid state followed the tradition of the AAM with an elitist and chauvinist top-down policy focussed on the homogenisation of the inhabitants. In this case, the state made great use of radio and television to broadcast the propagandistic staging to each and every household who could afford radio or television. The festivities of 1971 were therefore meant to show both the inhabitants of Iran and the world that despite the losses of recent centuries, the old grandeur had survived and found its reawakening in the present, furthermore promising completion in the near future (Grigor 2018: 137).

Post-Revolution Iran

The final outcome of the revolution of 1978 put an end to the centuries' old tradition of monarchy, quite ironically turning the monarchy into a theocracy. This meant also a change in the way monuments were considered focal points of the state's memory spaces. During this period, their materiality was rearranged into a type of negative memory spaces symbolising governmental imposition and oppression, onto which dissidents and members of different social movements, as well as religious fundamentalists, projected their hatred. Dezhamkhooy and Papoli discuss the accounts of eyewitnesses to the bulldozers lined up by revolutionary fanatics ready to destroy the site of Pārsa (2018: 88). Allegedly it was the intervention by locals that prevented their destruction. In the following decade, the site was ignored and did not play a major role in the context of the war years of the 1980s.

Pārsa was brought back into the political discourse in an attempt to revive national sentiments by President Hashemi Rafsanjani, who, while visiting the site in 1997, called it a site provoking 'considerable national pride in every individual' (Abdi 2001). It was also at this time that national revivalism reintegrated the Achaemenian monument of Pārsa as a political stage for discourses about the nation and politics. The political processes visible within Iranian society within the last 30 years have been fundamental. Several authors describe how, from the 1990s onwards, the political landscape among elites in Iran, as well as participation in political affairs, has been drastically changing, which was further fostered by moderate politicians and decision makers during the presidency of Mohammad Khatami (Michaelsen 2013: 16). This culminated in the appearance of a vital civil society, e.g. the re-emergence of women's right movements, ecological movements and many more (Dabashi 2016: 14). In fact, Khatami paid a media-staged visit to the site in 2001. At the same time, Paϑragadā stayed in the shadow of its more impressive sister. In the aftermath, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad seems to have attempted to capitalise on these events, trying to merge Iranian nationalism and political Islam (Dezhamkhooy & Papoli-Yazdi 2018: 91), most likely in an attempt to minimise the power of the theocrats in favour of a reinterpretation of the state's political foundations. As early as April 2007, Ahmadinejad visited the monuments of Pārsa (Milani 2011), and photos in newspapers

showed him in between the colossal lamassu of the Gate of All Nations. This was by no means a coincidence.

The same year, after a state visit of the Russian President Vladimir Putin in Tehran, the departing ceremony was held in front of the building of the Foreign Ministry, residing in the formerly mentioned building of the building of Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the National Garden, built in neo-Achaemenian style in 1933 (Fig. 6). The spectacle was staged in a way that cameras could easily follow the scene: both presidents would approach from left to right, walking the red carpet, approaching a set stage: in front of the main entrance the staircase shows five soldiers from the left and another five soldiers from the right, positioned antithetically, recreating the staircase of the back part of the Apadana. In front of the relief, the stage consisted of a two-stepped carpet-covered dais. The dais itself was covered with a baldachin in the colours green and yellow, colours intimately connected to different political, militant and terrorist Shi'a groups from Lebanon to Iraq,[17] and the frontal part displaying the emblem of the Islamic Republic of Iran, with the commander of the Presidential Ceremonial Guard standing behind the scene. A red carpet led from the left towards the dais, and a second red carpet then led from the dais into the direction of the soldiers of the Presidential Ceremonial Guard[18] passing in front of them (AP Archive 2015). The event with its multiple dependences to the Achaemenian iconography known by many from travels to Pārsa, from books, and reliefs on display in the National Museum in Tehran did not aim towards the international press. It was orchestrated and projected towards the national audience in an attempt to generate sympathies for the government of Ahmadinejad, who was known to have a preference for such allegories.

As opposed to the events around Pārsa, Paϑragadā did not play any role in the new regime's media staging, and instead was and still is a focal point of civil societal opposition of official institutions and their dominant discourses. Around 2007, the site was at the centre of a controversy involving heritage activists and different institutions of the state. Contemporaneous with the endeavours of the Iranian Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organisation (ICHTTO) to grant the site UNESCO World Heritage status (UNESCO 2020), the Ministry of Energy planned to finalise work at the Bolaghi gorge to dam the Sivand River, ca. 11 km south-west of Paϑragadā (Shahmoradi & Abdollahzadeh 2014: 231).[19] Rumours[20] that this project would actually pose a direct and serious threat to both Pārsa and Paϑragadā (Shahmoradi and Abdollahzadeh 2014: 235–236) mobilised a mass of people and led to a revival of Achaemenian fanhood. The appropriation of the sites meant to resist the state and its different institutions.

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[17] Militias, parties and other groups using these colours include Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq and the Iranian Revolutionary Guards in some of their flags.

[18] The honorary guard was called the *Immortal Guard of the Iranian Empire*, with reference to the Achaemenian Imperial Court Guard 'Gārd-e Jāvedān-e Shāhānshāhi-e Irān', again re-enacting an assumed pre-Islamic *topos*.

[19] Work commenced as early as 1992 during the presidency of Hashemi Rafsanjani, with resistance beginning around 2005, when Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was voted into the presidential office (Shahmoradi & Abdollahzadeh 2014: 232).

[20] In some cases, activists were at the fringe and propagating fake news stories to dramatize the situation further and stir emotions in their audience in the www, as in the case of processed images showing the site of Paϑragadā drowning in a lake (Unknown 2009; Ashkan 2011; Shahmoradi & Abdollahzadeh 2014: 250).

Figure 6. President Mahmud Ahmadinejad and President Vladimir Putin standing on the dais in front of the staircase of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Credits: Mohammad Kheyrkhah, 2007, UPI Alamy Stock.

In their meticulous analysis of the events, Jones, Mozaffari and Jasper (2017) show how many diverse groups were interacting in the context of the events, including different individuals, associations and institutions. They demonstrate that a project remotely connected to the two sites would eventually lead to the self-organisation of social movements. The site, so far only used by the state as a stage for self-representation, was appropriated and turned into something similar to a pilgrimage site (Shahmoradi & Abdollahzadeh 2014: 240) in a move to resist the official narrative of government authorities, which also lead to a subsequent revival of romantic and glorified ideas of monarchy, reverence for the pre-Islamic past and renewed discussions about Aryanism (Shahmoradi & Abdollahzadeh 2014: 248). Yet again, these political and cultural movements show the receptivity for sometimes subtle, sometimes blatant racist and anti-Arab tendencies.

In recent years, the monument at Paϑragadā saw the emergence of an unofficial festival on 29 October under the name of 'rūz-e Kūroš-e bozorg' – 'Cyrus the Great Day'. The date is thought to commemorate the day on which Kūruš captured the city of Babylon in 539 BCE. Merhavy (2017) describes how the day is used by young Iranians to voice their dissent with the current political system. The case shows how the evocation of dissent against the ruling elite in Iran at the feet of the monument happens within the old paths of nationalism and related concepts of antagonism to Islam and connected anti-Arab sentiments, picking up the threads coming from nineteenth century nationalism. The reasons are at least twofold: first and foremost, it is the identification of the site with a ruler from a pre-Islamic past, who on many occasions had been mystified. The second

aspect might be related to its spatial effect and the pronounced visibility the monument has from all over the surrounding plain (Fig. 7).[21]

Figure 7. View from south-east in direction of the mausoleum on the evening of the 7 Aban/29 October. Credits: Varaste900, 2015, Wikimedia Commons (CC BY-SA 4.0).

Conclusion

Coming full circle, it should by now be clear that the role of Pārsa and Pathragada today are not comparable to their meaning 2,500 years ago. Their meaning today would have been impossible without two interrelated events: the advent of archaeology as a research project going beyond the antiquarian interest for a single artistic find and, second, the advent of a politically conceptualised Iranianness, which was developed largely in opposition to Turkish and Arabian language and culture. Nevertheless, I would find it inappropriate to speak of an 'illegitimate' political instrumentalisation imposed on 'politically innocent' sites. Both sites were built as expressions of Teispian and Achaemenian imperial power and strength and meant to be stages in political plays from the moment of their inception onwards.

While the monumentality of Pārsa was constantly related to royal legitimation through the connection to (supposed) ancestors, and self-representation in the context of ceremonies, parades and feasting events, the relative modesty of the (surviving parts) mausoleum of Kūruš led to its use as a site of veneration, most likely from pre-Islamic times, by local people and seasonally passing groups. The situation of both sites changed with the emergence of modern nationalism, which in its many facets came to influence the

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[21] I wonder if any modern civic movement should build on the mystification of an absolutist monarch, who ultimately saw war and deportation as an appropriate mode to gain power, thus considering the death, crippling, pain and suffering of others as an inevitable evil. From a scientific point of view, another problem emerges in the wake of the ongoing reassessment of processes and events as a result of new information regarding the past.

perception of such sites, especially with the emergence of modern archaeology in the wake of Herzfeld's work, very similar to what was happening in Europe around the same time. The sites were now focal points of socio-political interest, appropriation and recontextualisation, which changed the view on both profoundly.

Therefore, what happened in the Pahlawid period is very much different than what happened before, even though self-glorification was still an important element: the realm of the ruler was bound to the country and the inhabitants in a politically new fashion. Connected to the mission to civilise the inhabitants of the country, and in the context of a nation building approach, both sites have so far been palimpsests of 2,500 of ongoing usage. They were then, in the context of modern appropriation and recontextualisation, stripped of any trace that was thought to be non-Achaemenian, and turned into 'clean' monuments: focal points of national attention and prowess. Both were used as political stages again. The Paϑragadā is yet again a site of veneration of the mystified first ruler of the Teispid dynasty.

Following the revolution, the sites disappeared from the radar of political utilisation due to their identification as negative heritage sites. The utilisation of Pārsa as an official stage almost ten years later was connected to a reanimation and possibly a harmonisation of the revolutionary period with the period before, in a time of smaller and larger changes within Iranian society, including the emergence of elements of a civil society. The reason that focus was recentred on Pārsa must be sought in the particular affordances the architecture and the rich iconography offer to visual media-makers. On the other hand, Paϑragadā's ideal affordance, being the resting place of a mythologised pre-Islamic ruler, combined with its physical affordances, namely its visibility from afar and the large open space around the mausoleum, played an important role for groups rallying against the dominant discourses of the state.

The developments in the recent past show how, in a relatively short time, the image and perception of monuments could change, with a shifting of a site's meaning between positive and negative heritage. It also shows how traditions that are seemingly age-old can in fact be very young recontextualisations following recent appropriations.

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