

Interiority and the City Center: Locating the Gulistan Harem During Nasser al-Din Shah's Reign

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“A whole history remains to be written of spaces – which would at the same time be the history of powers... from the great strategies of geopolitics to the little tactics of the habitat.”

Michel Foucault¹

In “Of Other Spaces: Heterotopias,” one of Michel Foucault’s later works, he argued for the importance of the spatiality of social life: the place in which the actually lived and socially produced sites and the relations between them are negotiated.² Foucault offered great

¹Michel Foucault, “The Eye of Power” in *Power/Knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977* (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 149.

²Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias,” *Diacritics* 16, (Spring 1986): 22-27.

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insight into how we can interpret and produce knowledge based on human geographies, or as Edward Soja has noted, “how to see the ‘other spaces’ hidden in the more obvious and diverting multiplicity of real-world sights and situations.”³ This paper takes the Gulistan harem (*andarūn*) and its surrounding areas as a complex set of spaces, whose architectural and material configuration structured the gendered, domestic, and social lives of its inhabitants in a myriad of complementary and contradictory ways. Focusing on the spatial dimensions, as well as human geography of Nasser al-Din Shah’s harem, and its location at the heart of late-19th century Tehran, the paper will examine the historical development and expanding physical structure of Gulistan, and the intricate relationship between urban space, architecture, and practices of inhabitation that informed it.

I hope to disrupt the monolithic and narrow interpretations of Middle Eastern harems as deeply private spheres of forced and uncontested gender segregation, and instead, examine the ways in which the Gulistan harem along with the multiplicity of its residents, resisted the dichotomy between private/public domains – a modernist European dichotomy which has often been imposed onto this institution in its historiography, and instead forged unique communal practices of co-habitation (Figure1)

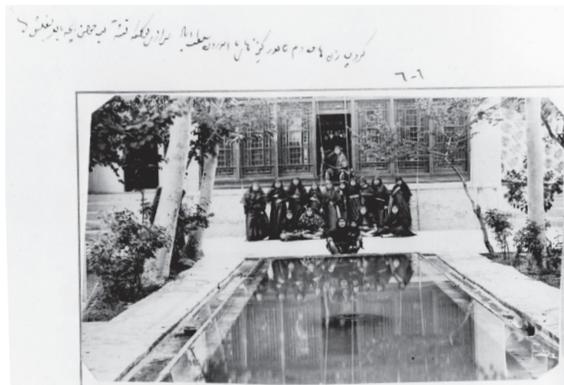


Fig. 1. Group of harem women and servant. Gulistan Palace Visual Document Center, Tehran, Iran. (210-6-1)

³Edward Soja, “History: Geography: Modernity” in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon Duing (New York, London: Routledge, 1999), 113-125.

Furthermore, the Gulistan harem was not only a space of domesticity, and distinctive familial formation, but also, a place where various kinds of social contact and collective cultural practices were realized alongside equally significant geopolitical and diplomatic affairs, as well as various registers of engagement with Persian modernity.

This paper begins with looking at the historical evolution and expanding physical structure of the Gulistan Palace, and situates it in the simultaneous history of the emergence of Tehran as an urban metropolis. I then move on to explore the physical and material organization of the Gulistan harem, and the ways in which it was controlled, lived in, and subverted. The final section interrogates the question of what constituted private, interior, and domestic spaces respectively, when speaking of the royal Qajar harem – a space composed of multiple homes, within a larger palace, which was the administrative center of Qajar rule.

The Simultaneous Development of Tehran and Gulistan Palace:

The Gulistan Palace, like Tehran, the city which houses it, was built over the course of three centuries beginning in the 16th century, and continuing into the early 20th century. During this period, the palace went through a number of renovations, expanding to cover a huge area of land within the urban core of Tehran by the second half of 19th century, and later, in the 20th century under the Pahlavis, contracting to a smaller complex.⁴ The historical formation and evolution of the palace was from the beginning intricately connected to the development of the urban metropolis that it was located within. Most notably, under Nasir al-Dīn's reign, the Gulistan harem, placed within the larger boundaries of the royal citadel (*arg*), grew both physically and in terms of the number of its residents to its largest scale as compared to the harem of his predecessors. When Nasser al-Din Shah began his reign in 1848, Gulistan was a much smaller, though still remarkable court, mostly built by his grandfather Fath-ʿAlī Shah, who reigned between 1797-

⁴While the Pahlavis still maintained Gulistan as a royal palace which they used for formal receptions during their reign, they moved their place of residence into the newly built Niavara House to the north of the city.

1834, and who developed Tehran into the true capital of Qajar rule.

While the establishment of both Tehran and Gulistan date back to the Safavid dynasty, the expansion of the *arg* and the growth of city into one of the largest urban metropolis in the region, both took proper form during the Qajar dynasty. Under the Safavids, Tehran emerged as a modest fortified town with four gates. Tehran's importance to the Safavids was mainly due to its location on the route from Esfehan, the Safavid capital, to Mashhad, the site of the shrine of the eighth imam, which is a significant destination for Shi'a people.⁵ Later, during the brief Zand period, Karim Khan further developed the town through building a palace and the government headquarters within the gates of the city, and promoted it to the status of a military base. It was not until 1786 that Tehran was established as a capital city by Agha Muhammad, the first Qajar ruler who went on to dispose the last Zand ruler Luft-Ali Khan, and claimed the throne in 1796. Agha Muhammad, the founder of the Qajar dynasty, began the establishment of full-scale royal court in Tehran upon claiming the throne, and in order to legitimate and expand the newly found capital city. He was responsible for setting up much of the initial infrastructure for what later became the elaborate Gulistan royal court (Figure 2).⁶

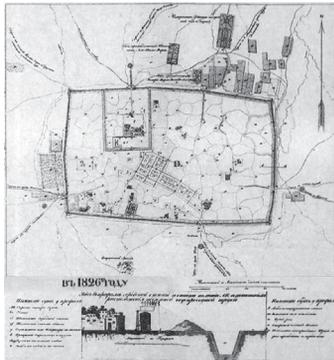


Fig. 2. Oldest Map of Tehran by Russian military officer Naskov, 1826. The square on the top left-hand corner depicts the borders of the developing Gulistan Palace. Source: <http://shahrefarang.com>.

⁵Fatema Soudavar Farmanfarmaian, "Politics and Patronage: The Evolution of the Sara-ye Amir in the Bazaar of Tehran" in *The Bazaar in the Islamic City: Design, Culture, and History*, ed. Mohammad Gharipour (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2012), 205. ⁶For a complete discussion of the different phases of development of Gulistan and Tehran prior to and during the early Qajar period, refer to Sadiqeh Golshan's "*Gulistan-i Bagh Gulistan: arg dar tarikhi-i Tehran*," *Soffeh Architectural Science and Research: The Journal of the School of Architecture and Urban Planning*, nos. 21-22 (1996).

The full realization of Gulistan into a grand palace, however, was accomplished only after Agha Muhammad's death and during the thirty-five-year reign of Fath- 'Alī Shah (1797-1834). Fath- 'Alī Shah was notorious for having one of the largest harems in Iranian history, with the number of wives estimated to reach over one thousand.⁷ Unlike his uncle, Fath- 'Alī Shah embraced a taste for luxury, reflected not only in the large number of wives and concubines in his harem, but also his love of extravagant ceremonies, which were a primary engine for the development of Gulistan Palace, beginning in 1806, less than a decade into his reign. This expansion phase included both the completion of structures which had been started by his uncle, and the initiation of new building projects, as well as the addition of large gardens, new barracks, and an extensive harem (*andarūn*) area to the north of the palace, which served as the residential quarter of the shah and his many wives. The most significant buildings constructed under his rule include the crystal building (*imārat-i bulūr*) on the north side of the court, the diamond hall (*tālār-i almās*) on the south, the wind tower (*imārat-i bādīgīr*) as well as the marble throne (*takht-i marmar*) which was placed on the porch (*tālār*) of the iconic audience chamber (*divān khānah*), which remains to this day. The architecture of Gulistan during this period incorporated many traditional Persian design elements as a means of legitimizing Qajar rule over Persian territory. Jennifer Scarce, in her study of the architectural details of the some of the buildings inside the *arg* from this period, notes:

The plan and decoration of the *dīvankhaneh* and the marble throne is a direct visual reference to Fath 'Ali Shah's royal status. The plan of a spacious open reception hall supported on columns stresses both the antiquity and continuity of Iranian monarchy as it is found in pre-Islamic Achaemenid and Sasanid architecture as well as in palaces of Safavid Isfahan and Zand Shiraz.⁸

⁷Abbas Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe: Nasir al-Din and the Iranian Monarchy* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2008), 19.

⁸Jennifer Scarce, "The Architecture and Decoration of the Gulistan Palace: The Aims and Achievements of Fath 'Ali Shah (1797-1834) and Nasir al-Din Shah (1848-1896)," *Iranian*

Within Iranian historiography, Fath-‘Alī Shah is considered the ruler who not only built the great *arg* which housed Gulistan Palace, but also developed Tehran as an urban center, and made it the core Qajar rule.⁹ Most notably, during his reign, the bazaar, located to the south of the *arg*, was greatly expanded and the central square adjacent to *arg*, which connected the court to the bazaar, also witnessed considerable development.¹⁰

Perhaps the most significant addition was the building of the Masjid Soltanī - the first large-scale and substantial architectural structure, as well as public building, outside of the *arg*. Built between 1808 and 1813, it was the largest and most important mosque built under Fath-‘Alī Shah’s reign, and was located near the northern entrance of the bazaar (Figure 3).



Fig. 3. Illustration of Masjid Soltanī by French Orientalist painter Eugène Flandin made during his travels to Persia between 1839-1841. Eugène Flandin, *Voyage en Perse, avec Flandin*, éd. Gide et Baudry, 1851, Vol. 2.

Studies, vol. 34 (2001): 110.

⁹Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe: Nasir al-Din and the Iranian Monarchy*, 12.

¹⁰For a complete discussion of the development of the Tehran Bazaar, which expanded to include many more structures, and its architectural details, refer to Fatema Soudavar Farmanfarman's "Politics and Patronage" in *The Bazaar in the Islamic City*.

This showcasing of the royal family's close relationship to both the merchant class and the *ulama*, through physical and structural proximity, were simultaneous endeavors undertaken and accomplished during Fath-‘Alī Shah's thirty-seven year reign.¹¹ As Ali Madanipour explains in his historiography of the development of Tehran, the structure of the city from the beginning had “a clear functional organization: a political authority (royal compound), an economic center (bazaar), a religious focus (Friday Mosque), and the living places of the towns people.”¹²

While Gulistan was developed to serve as the administrative center of the state and an assertion of its political authority, it was simultaneously the place of residence of the royal family and their large entourage, as well as the site of multiple forms of ceremonial gatherings and royal patronage (through the employment of various artists, craftsmen, tile workers, performers, servants and so on). While the walls and gates built around the citadel protected the court from outside intruders, the extensive structures on the inside of the court served as a gathering place for large audiences hosted by the royal family. In this sense, as I will discuss later, from the beginning, the boundaries between deeply private and hidden, and proudly public and social were constantly negotiated both inside and outside the *arg*, as well as its *andarūn*. This multi-functional dimension of Gulistan Palace, and the various political, social, cultural and familial affairs which took place within its boundaries, continued to define the development of the physical geography of the space in its various manifestations throughout the Qajar period.

However, despite the large scale development projects and new infrastructure that were set up in the city during the nearly four decades of Fath-‘Alī Shah's rule, Tehran's shape and size, number of gates,

¹¹In her study of the bazaar, Farmanfarmanian argues that the grand scale of the mosque served as a source of legitimacy for the new dynasty (206). Masoud Kamali, in his book *Revolutionary Iran, Civil Society and State in the Modernization Process* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 1998), also argues that the Qajar's desire to legitimate themselves as a faithful Shi'a dynasty was realized in this way

¹²Ali Madanipour, *Tehran, the Making of a Metropolis* (Chichester: John Wiley, 1998), 30.

and border-defining walls remained essentially the same as when they had been built three centuries earlier.¹³ During his short reign (1834-1848), Fath-‘Alī Shah’s successor, Muhammad Shah’s modest contribution to urban development mostly focused on improving the Royal Square (*miydan-i shāh*) which connected the bazar and the *arg*. He also added large gardens to the interior of both the eastern and western quarters inside the *arg*.¹⁴ It was, however, not until Nasser al-Dīn Shah’s reign that Tehran truly transformed into a 19th century cosmopolitan metropole, incorporating local, regional and Western ideas and aesthetics into a cityscape that was increasingly a destination point for both regional and international stakeholders.

Nasser al-Dīn Shah officially took the throne in October of 1848, appearing on the *takht-i marmar* in the *tālār* of the *divān khānah* built by his grandfather inside Gulistan Palace (Figure 4).¹⁵

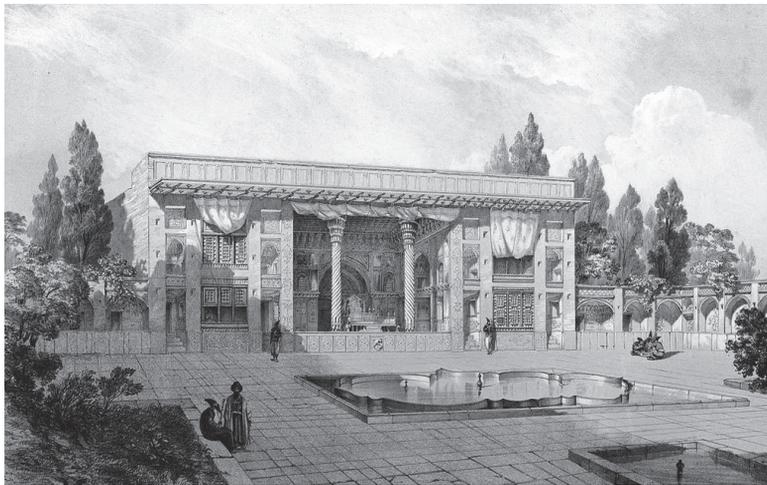


Fig. 4. Illustration of *divān khānah* and marble throne by French Orientalist painter Eugène Flandin made during his travels to Persia between 1839-1841. Eugène Flandin, *Voyage en Perse, avec Flandin*, éd. Gide et Baudry, 1851, Vol 2.

¹³John Gurney, “The Transformation of Tehran in the Later Nineteenth Century” in *Téhéran, Capitale Bicentenaire*, ed. B. Hourcade, S. Adle (Paris: Téhéran: Institut Français de Recherche en Iran, 1992), 51.

¹⁴Edmund Bosworth, *Historic Cities of The Islamic World* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007), 508.

¹⁵Abbas Amanat offers a detailed account of the ceremony in his section “Ascending the Throne” in *Pivot of the Universe: Nasser al-Din Shah and the Iranian Monarchy*, 89-108.

He continued the tradition of using the *divān khānah* for court ceremonies, receptions and festivities, though the number of such events, as well as the size of their audience increased steadily throughout his reign, as did the number of his wives and their entourage, leading to a number of different and significant phases of expansion of the Gulistan Palace.

The first phase of urban development under Nasser al-Din Shah began soon after he took the throne. Amīr Kabīr Mīrzā Taghī Khān (1807-52), the shah's reformist chief minister, during his short-lived three years appointment (1848-1851), made significant improvements to the urban infrastructure of Tehran. This included further expansion of the bazaar, the building of water canals throughout the city, and perhaps most significantly, in 1851, the construction of the *dār al-fanūn*, the first modern education institution in Tehran located on the most north-east corner of the *arg*, just above the harem (Figure 5).



Fig. 5. Dār al-Fanūn University, Tehran.

The building of the school marked a new era of development in the core zone of the city with Gulistan Palace at its epicenter. The school was primarily aimed at teaching modern sciences and its inauguration was the engine for bringing in a host of international scholars over the next few decades. In fact, much of Iranian historiography argues that *dār al-fanūn* was the primary engine for modernization project

in Iran. And yet, it is interesting to note that virtually no scholarship on either Gulistan or *Dār al-Fanūn* has made note of the proximity between this focal point of modernization, and the royal Qajar harem, which was literally steps away to its south.

During this same period, directly to the south of the Gulistan Palace, and outside the main entrance of the *arg*, a bustling public square was expanded and renamed *sabzi maydān*. The square became a crucial nodal point connecting the palace to the developing metropolis (Figure 6).¹⁶

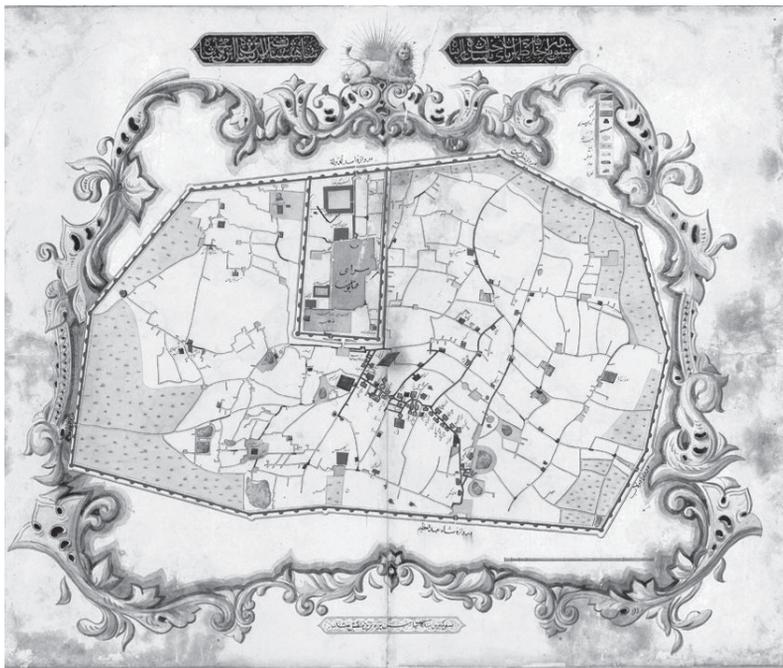


Fig. 6. Ilya Nikolaevich Berezin, Map of Tehran, 1952. Gulistan Palace Visual Document Center, Tehran, Iran.

Concurrently, a substantial rebuilding and revitalization of the bazaar quarter began and continued for over a decade, and in 1862, a major renovation project replaced the old bazaar structures with new modern buildings.¹⁷

¹⁶Gurney, “The Transformation of Tehran in the Late Nineteenth Century,” 52.

¹⁷Bosworth, *Historic Cities of The Islamic World*, 509.

A second phase of development began in 1867 and included the destruction of the old mud brick walls which made up the city border, and the enclosure of a much larger area with a wall designed by the French polytechnic engineer and teacher at *Dār al-Fanūn*, General Alexandre Buhler.¹⁸ Tehran expanded to four times its original size, as the area of the city grew from 3 square miles to 7.5 square miles, and the length of the border wall surrounding the city increased from 4 to 11 miles (Figures 7-9).¹⁹

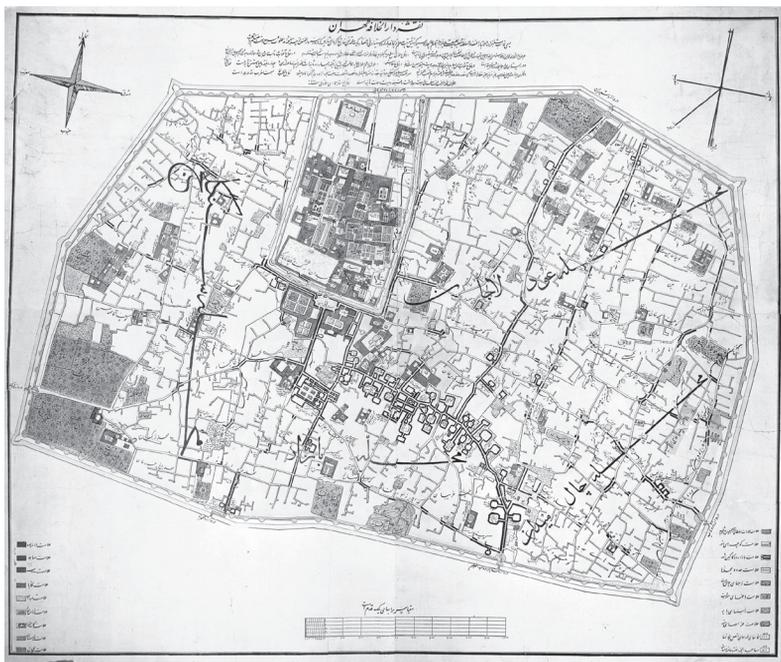


Fig. 7. Map of Tehran prepared by *dār al-fanūn* students in 1859 under supervision of Aligholi Mirza Etezadossaltaneh and technical guidance of Monsieur Kershish. Gulistan Palace Visual Document Center, Tehran, Iran.

¹⁸The Cambridge History of Iran, vol. 7, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 892.

¹⁹Gurney, "The Transformation of Tehran in the Late Nineteenth Century," 53.

This newly expanded octagonal shaped city parameter included significantly more space to the north, which was developed into an affluent residential area, and a total of twelve elaborately decorated gates.²⁰

Much like other major cities in the Middle East, the development of Tehran during this period coincided with accelerated global flows, which included increase contact with both regional neighbors and Europe. Many have read this period as the birth of modernization in Iran, arguing that modernity came through contact with Europe, and meant the application and adaptation of Western civilization to a traditional Persian Islamic culture.²¹ This is of course in line with how many European orientalists encountered Tehran in the second half of 19th century. British Member of Parliament, George Curzon, for example, during his 1889-1890 trip to Tehran, describes Tehran as a new and modern city. Yet for him, the city has certain deficiencies rooted in its Eastern elements. He states:

At every turn we meet in juxtaposition, sometimes in audacious harmony, at others in comical contrast, the influence and features of the East and the West... European Tehran has certainly become, or is becoming; but yet, if the distinction can be made intelligible, it is being Europeanized upon Asiatic lines. No one could mistake it for anything but an Eastern capital.²²

This reading of Tehran takes it as a deficient emulation of a West model, with the inferiority squarely placed on the “Asiatic” elements of the city.

²⁰Reza Shirazi, “The Orient veneered in the Occident” in *The City in the Muslim World: Depictions by Western Travel Writers*, ed. Mohammad Gharipour and Nilay Özlü (Abington and New York: Routledge, 2015).

²¹Many historians of Iran have applied this simplistic definition of modernization as mimicry of the west, in particular in relation to the development of Tehran. For examples, refer to Hafez Farman Farmanian’s “The Forces of Modernization in Nineteenth Century Iran: A Historical Survey” in *Beginnings of Modernization in the Middle East, The Nineteenth Century*, ed. W.R. Polk and R. L. Chambers (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968); and Ervant Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982).

²²George Nathaniel Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question* (London and New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1892), 306.



In the historiography of both Tehran and Gulistan, the 1867 International Exhibition, which took place in Paris, has been read as amongst the most important vehicle for the intensification of European influenced urban development throughout the Middle East. Persian officials, along with representatives from other regional centers like Cairo and Istanbul, visited the exhibition and were profoundly moved by what they encountered. In particular, the Ottoman section of the exhibition featured a blended style of traditional Islamic and Western design motifs, and became a major inspiration for emerging architectural trends in the region. It is important to note however that the trend was in fact based in part on the European rediscovery of the medieval Spanish Islamic style of Alhambra, and thus showcased the transnational and reciprocal flow of design influences between the regions, which also predated the era of modernity.²³ It is precisely this reciprocal nature of global flows and influences that Eurocentric and orientalist depictions of modernization in the region fail to account for.

The 1867 exhibition's impact on municipal improvement plans in Tehran was also only one of several factors that influenced the ambitious expansion plan that were carried out in the city in the second half of the 19th century.²⁴ Other circumstances that contributed to the major development projects undertaken during this period were the accelerated rate of population growth and a catastrophic flood in May of 1867 which caused a great deal of damage in the north of the city and required a major rebuilding effort.²⁵ As such, European influence was one amongst the many factors that contributed to the intensified expansion and development of the city that took shape during his period.

The Gulistan Palace also went through a series of simultaneous and elaborate transformations. During his time as Prime Minister, Amīr

²³Ernest Tucker, *The Middle East in Modern World History* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 83.

²⁴Jennifer Scarce, *Domestic Culture in the Middle East: An Exploration of the Household Interior* (Edinburgh: National Museums of Scotland in association with Curzon Press, 1996), 21.

²⁵At the turn of the 19th century, during the summer months, the population of Tehran was estimated at 15 000. By 1867, during the same months, the population had increased to 100 000 (Bosworth, *Historic Cities of The Islamic World*, 510).

Kabīr had ordered the purchasing of a major area of land to the east of the palace - though the development and incorporation of this land into Gulistan only took place later, after his death.²⁶ From 1867 to 1892, the *arg*, located now in the central part of the newly expanded city borders, grew to cover an enormous area of land, surrounded by its own new high walls and secured gates which closed it off from its surrounding exterior. Inside Gulistan, the first phase of expansion concentrated on building a large scale residential building, named *Shams al-imārat*, in the east side of the *arg*.

Designed by *Dust ‘Ali Khan Nizam al-Dawla*, and completed in 1868, the five-story building, the tallest of its kind in Tehran at the time, looked over the city and served as the royal family’s residence. The building was the first recreational tower in Tehran, as well as the first royal building which was clearly exposed to the outside public through its height (Figure 10).²⁷



Fig. 10. *Shams al-imārah*. Gulistan Palace Visual Document Center, Tehran, Iran. (209-4).

²⁶Sadiqeh Golshan, “Gulistan-i Bagh Gulistan: arg dar tarikh-i Tehran,” *Soffeh Architectural Science and Research: The Journal of the School of Architecture and Urban Planning*, nos. 21-22, (Spring and Summer 1996): 45.

²⁷Iranian Cultural Heritage, Handcrafts, and Tourism Organization, “Nomination of Golestan Palace for Inscription on the World Heritage List Report (Tehran: UNESCO World Heritage Convention, 2012), 3.

Shams al-Imārah was built with the intention of giving its inhabitants a unique view of the ever-developing city, while maintaining the royal family's privacy. Significantly, the building also housed the first photo studio which was established by Nasser al-Din Shah in Iran.

European influence permeated the façade and architectural design of the building with features such as a large clock mounted on the central tower and a projected staircase that lead up to the multi-story building which was visible from outside of the *arg*.²⁸ At the same time, the interior architecture, which incorporated ceramic and tile-works with geometric Persian design and imagery, insured that residents were hidden from public view, thus maintaining Islamic tradition of *andarūn* privacy.²⁹ It is important to note that at the time, this was the most substantial building within the *arg*, and along with an expanded *andarūn*, located behind the *divān khānah*, it was the primary space in the *arg* occupied by the shah's many wives and children.³⁰ This point highlights the significance of space occupied by women, familial life and domestic culture within the Qajar court. *Shams al-Imārah* allowed its occupants to have a unique view from within the *arg* of the hustling urban center beyond its walls, while still remaining unseen. Significantly, it was also the first building to have direct access to the exterior with a gate which opened onto the bazaar. Combined, these features point to the ways in which residents within Gulistan Palace, including harem women, had multiple forms of access to the developing cosmopolitan life which was taking shape both inside and directly outside the *arg*, while still maintaining the Islamic principles of gender segregation.³¹

Another substantial building project during this period was the construction of Takkiya Dawlat to the south east of the palace - a

²⁸Sadiqeh Golshan, "The Influence of European Design on Bagh-e-Golestan: The Qajarid Garden," *The International Journal of the Arts in Society*, no. 5 (2010): 393.

²⁹For a discussion of European influence on the Palace structure during this phase, refer to Gurney, "The Transformation of Tehran in the Late Nineteenth Century," 64-65.

³⁰Scarce, *The Architecture and Decoration*, 114.

³¹Hassan Azad, *Posht-e Pardeh-ha-ye Haram-sara* (Oromiyeh: Anzali, 1985), 398.

permanent theatre erected between 1868-1873; the structure was built in the style of large amphitheataters, and could accommodate up to four thousand spectators (Figure 11).



Fig. 11. Takkiya Dawlat. Gulistan Palace Visual Document Center, Tehran, Iran (209-6).

Takkiya Dawlat was used primarily for the performance of *ta'zīyi* (passion plays) and *ruzih khūnī* (mourning rituals), and again, despite some European influence on its architectural shape, the building functioned to highlight the royal family's strong link to Shia' Islamic history, marking Gulistan as a public venue for the display of piety.³² In her description of Takkiya Dawlat, where she was invited to attend a *ta'zīyi* play, Lady Mary Sheil, wife of British Lieutenant Colonel Justin Sheil who served in Iran from 1844-1853, notes that the large audience of "several thousands" housed in the structure which "fulfilled all the purposes of a theatre," not only included the shah himself, his many ministers, wives and mother, as well as important foreign officials, but also "women of humble condition, who were great in numbers."³³ She gives a detailed account of the collective

³²Scarce, *The Architecture and Decoration*, 115.

³³Lady Mary Sheil, *Glimpses of Life and Manners in Persia* (London: John Murray, 1856), 127.

mourning ritual that took place amongst this motely crew of audience members, highlighting women's participation in public spectacles (Figure 12).

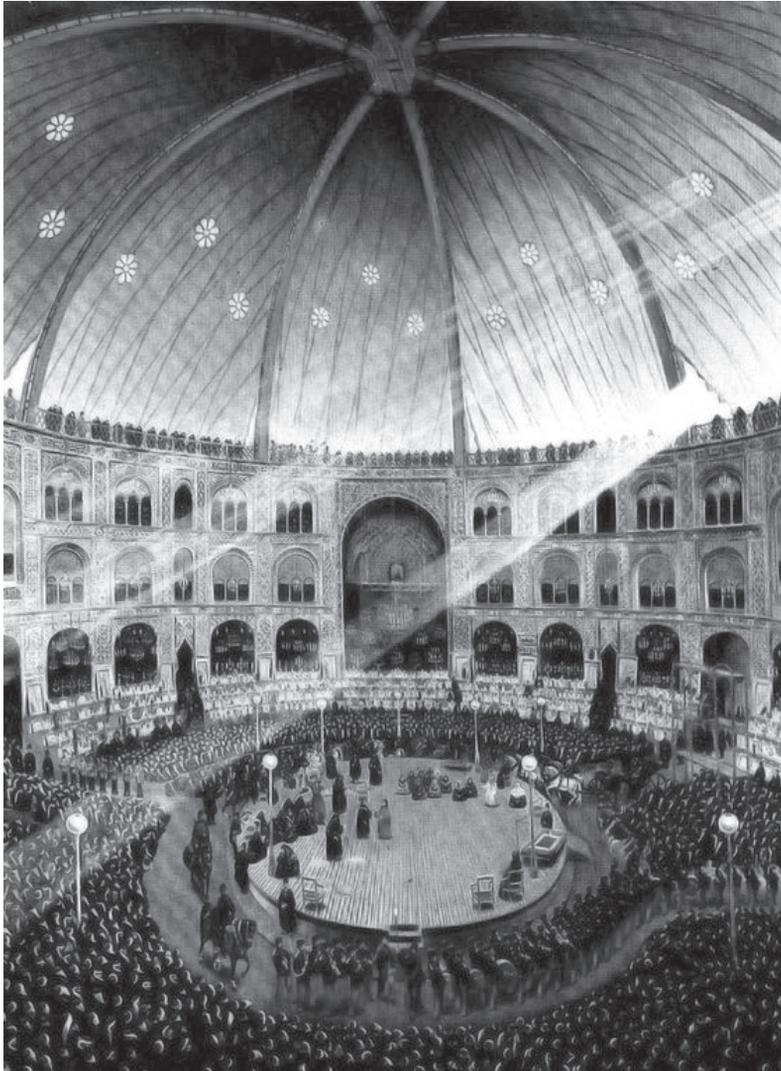


Fig. 12. *Ta'ziyi* play at Takkiya Dawlat, oil painting Kamāl-al-Molk. Gulistan Palace Museum, Tehran, Iran.

Both *Shams al-'imarat* and Takkiya Dawlat are noteworthy structures within the *arg* because they present us with architectural examples

that illuminate the intermingling of Islamic and European influences, and as I will argue in the second half of this paper, they also show the complex ways in which gender was negotiated both within the boundaries of *arg*, and beyond it through the spatial design, and the social and cultural practices which occupied them.

Gulistan harem's physical proximity to the neighboring buildings and spaces both inside the *arg*, and outside in the ever-developing city of Tehran, cannot be underestimated. Far from being secluded, the residents of the Nasser al-Din's harem were situated at the very heart of one of the largest metropolises in 19th century Middle East. There are many examples of the relationship between harem and bazaar. For example, in his diaries, Mu'ir al-Mamluk, the shah's grandson, makes reference to music played inside the harem announcing the different parts of the day for both court residents and those in the bazaar. He states:

At 2 in the afternoon, a drum roll would announce that it was time to start packing up the bazaar and at 3pm, a different sound would announce the bazaar closure. There was a curfew at night, so dinner would be served early inside the harem so that cooks and servants who did not reside inside could leave before the curfew.³⁴

These tangible connections between the bazaar and the harem illustrates that physical proximity had clear material implications. It also functions to demystify the understanding of the Qajar harem as a deeply private and isolated interior space and shows its intrinsic connection to the busy commercial quarter it neighbored.

The final and most drastic development phase of Gulistan under Nasser al-Din Shah reign took place after his first visits to Europe in 1873. The expansion of the court after this period was deeply influenced by the Shah's desire to assert Tehran's place within the increasingly global cosmopolitan culture. This is evident in the newly built *divān khānah* (built between 1873 and 1882) whose façade

³⁴Mu'ir al-Mamluk, *Dūst-Alī-Khān, Notes of Private Life of Nasserad-Din-Shah* (Tehran: Nashr-e-Tarikh-e-Iran, 1983), 21.

The newly developed living quarter covered approximately one third of the palace grounds and was located on the north side of the court, to the east of the new *divān khānah*, and south of *dār al-fanūn*I (Figure 14).



Fig. 14. New *andarūn* under construction. Gulistan Palace Visual Document Center, Tehran, Iran (343-4).

Its expansion was a bold statement by Nasser al-Din Shah that the Islamic domestic tradition of harems was not antithetical to Persian modernization efforts and could in fact, develop and evolve simultaneously with other large scale urban modernization efforts.

The newly built harem was accessible through two entrances, both of which were secured and guarded in order to shield harem women from the intrusion and gaze of non-relative males. They opened onto separate vestibules with long corridors which linked the *andarūn* to the court and the outside, respectively.³⁵ The first entrance was to *narinjistān*, an orangery located in the north-east quarter of the palace. This was the entrance most commonly used by both harem residents, as well as the shah himself, for entering and leaving the *andarūn*. According to Muīr al-Mamlīk, about 20 elder eunuchs guarded this

³⁵Scarce, *The Architecture and Decoration*, 116.

corridor.³⁶ The other entrance to the harem was the diamond door (*dar-i almas*) which opened onto the street, and was generally kept locked with a court eunuch also in charge of the keys.³⁷

Built around a massive courtyard, the new *andarūn* featured a series of smaller structures around a rectangular enclosure. The courtyard served as the heart of the harem, connecting all the buildings, and giving every house a clear view to the *andarūn* entrance, as well as all other houses. Each of the buildings was assigned to one of the shah's wives or *sighes*, though eventually, many of them were occupied by multiple wives and children as the number of residents in the harem steadily increased during this period (Figure 15).³⁸

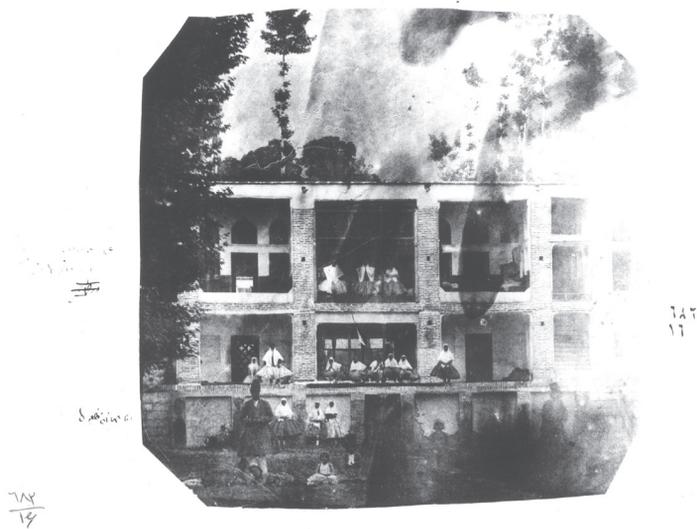


Fig. 15. View of harem women posing in *tālārs* of *andarūn* buildings. Gulistan Palace Visual Document Center, Tehran, Iran (682-16).

The buildings inside the new *andarūn* featured deep columned porches (*tālārs*) which had openings on one or three sides and served multiple

³⁶Muīr al-Mamlīk, Dūst-Alī-Khān, *Notes of Private Life of Nasserad-Din-Shah*, 18.

³⁷Joannes Fauvriér, *Three Years in Persia's Royal Court*, trans. Abass Eghbal (Tehran: Elm, 2006), 399.

³⁸Gholām Ali Aziz al-Sultān Malījak, *Ruz-nāma-ye kāṭerāt Gholām Ali Khān Aziz al-Sultān*, ed. Moḥsen Mirzā'i, vol. 1, Tehran, 1997, 373.

functions. The variously sized *tālārs* were used as an entrance, a small audience hall, a sleeping area in hot weather, or a balcony used for sitting and eating.³⁹ These versatile spaces could offer accommodation and hospitality to all members and relations of extended family, as well as royal guests, or be used for the everyday domestic and leisure activities of their residence. Their placement at the outer limit of each building also meant that they were both a part of the interior of their respective homes, and accessible and visible to the exterior courtyard – a design feature particular to the Qajar court that again complicates the assumed notion of a clear separation between interiority and exteriority.

The most architecturally significant building in the *andarūn*, situated in the middle of the enormous courtyard, was the Shah’s sleep quarters (*khāb gāh*) - an elaborate two-story building, whose design borrowed from Ottoman palaces (Figure 16).



Fig. 16. The *khāb gāh*. Gulistan Palace Visual Document Center, Tehran, Iran (209-2).

The majestic building was quarantined from the surrounding area by a large fence with an iron door.⁴⁰ While the placing of the *khāb gāh* in the middle of the *andarūn* can be read as an assertion of the centrality of

³⁹Scarce, *Domestic Culture in the Middle East*, 34.

⁴⁰Muīr al-Mamlīk, Dūst-Alī-Khān, *Notes of Private Life of Nasserad-Din-Shah*, 15-16.

patriarchal rule within this space, it is important to note that this space was most often an empty signifier since Nasser al-Din was frequently not physically present within the harem. The shah was notorious for going on long vacations and spent most summer months, with some, but not all of his wives and children, outside of Gulistan. As such, despite its location, and architectural weight, it would be a mistake to see the *khāb gāh* as the heart of the harem. In fact, as numerous sources attest, social life of the harem revolved most often around its female residence and eunuchs, and the power negotiations between them, and took place within various women's homes, *tālārs*, and gardens with the gated *khāb gāh* merely serving as a place holder for harem hierarchy.

For example, a note-worthy buildings in the new *andarūn*, which, unlike the *khāb gāh*, was frequently occupied by multiple residents and visitors, was the home belonging to the shah's favored wife, Anis al-Dowleh. The building looked out onto a private garden, *bāgh-i tabāni*, from the back, and housed a large reception hall on its upper level, which was the location of the many gatherings, often featuring visiting foreign women, hosted by the de-facto queen (Figure 17).



Fig. 17. Social gathering at Anis al-Dowleh's home. Gulistan Palace Visual Document Center, Tehran, Iran (2010-2-3).

Her house was amongst the few notable ones which also had a bathing room, though she still continued to frequent public baths with other harem women as a collective activity.⁴¹

Directly outside the bed chamber and facing its entrance was the residence of Amin Aghdas, another of the Shah's significant *sighehs*. This house was noteworthy both because of its larger size in comparison to most other harem buildings, and the fact that it served as the residence of important figures in Nasser al-Din's court including at different points, his beloved cat Bībī Khānūm, the young boy Malijak, who was the object of his obsession after the death of his cat, and Khānūm Bāshī who was a beautiful young recruit to the shah's harem in his final years, and one of his last *sighehs*.⁴²

As we've seen, at every step of development and expansion, both the *arg* and its harem paralleled shifts, advances and progress that Tehran was going through as it transformed into a modern metropolitan city. In fact, throughout Nasser al-Din Shah's reign, Gulistan, much like the city that surrounded it, was almost perpetually in a state of renovation and expansion. Far from being designated as a space which preserved and maintained tradition, Gulistan was in fact usually the first place of transformation and development in the city center. As such, both Tehran and Gulistan, in very material ways, were the epicenters of the Qajar's engagements with Persian modernity (recall the first photo studio appearing in *shams al emarat*).

Inside Out: Biruni, Andaroon and Movements within Gulistan

Throughout its history, and the various phases of renovation and expansion under Qajar rule, Gulistan Palace maintained the basic Islamic domestic principle of a division between an administrative and presumably male dominated exterior part (*bīrūmī*) and the private, familial and predominately woman dominated interior (*andarūn*).

⁴¹Cyrus Sadvandian, *Khāterat-i Mūnis al-Dowlih: Nadīmih' haramsarāy-i Nasser al-Din Shah* (Tehran: Zarrin Books, 2010), 237.

⁴²Azad, *Posht-e Pardeh-ha-ye Haram-sara*, 373.

This form of gender segregation was of course a normative practice of Islamic social and moral order and, as such, served as a source of legitimation for political authority of the Qajar rulers. The distinction between male and female space is more generally one of the most important defining characteristics of Islamic cities.⁴³

Within European accounts, gender segregated space in general, and the domestic space of the harem in particular, carried a particularly heavy symbolic burden, as a bordered space which was impenetrable by European male gaze, and represented Eastern patriarchy and imprisonment of Muslim women's bodies in its most material form.⁴⁴ While such orientalist assumptions about the Muslim world have by now been adequately critiqued, most notably by scholars such as Meyda Yegenoglu and Inderpal Grewal,⁴⁵ the basic premise that the harem, in its material form, represented an extreme form of private space occupied by women, and segregated from the male dominated public sphere, has continued to hold sway in the historiography of 19th century Iran.⁴⁶

Gender-segregated spaces within Islamic cultures however, do not correspond to the modern European divide between public and private spheres as easily or as neatly as many historiographers of the Islamic world have assumed. From the outset, for example, the notion of interior (*andarūn*) and exterior (*bīrūnī*), both refer to areas that constitute the domestic sphere of the home. That is to say, in the

⁴³For a discussion of the significance of spatial gender divisions in Islamic cities, refer to Janet Abu-Lughod's "The Islamic City: Historic Myths, Islamic Essence, and Contemporary Relevance," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol.19 (May 1987): 155-176.

⁴⁴For a discussion of European attitudes towards Middle Eastern harems, refer to Marilyn Booth's introduction to the 2011 edited book *Harem Histories: Envisioning Places and Living Spaces* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010).

⁴⁵Meyda Yegenoglu, *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Inderpal Grewal, *Home and Harem: Nation, Gender, Empire, and the Cultures of Travel* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996).

⁴⁶This is both true in European accounts of the city from the period (James Bailey Fraser, Mary Shiel, Lord Curzon, Carl Serena, Ferrier...) as well as historical scholarship (Amanat, Scarce...).

context of a traditional Iranian home, and in particular, one belonging to an elite member of Persian society, the house itself was divided into two sections: the *andarūn* ('inside' or 'innards,') was the space designated for women, religiously permitted men (*maḥram*), and in the case of very elite households, their servants and eunuchs, and the *bīrunī* ('outside' or 'public,') was reserved for the male head of the household, and the visitors he would receive.⁴⁷ This is in stark contrast to European understandings of private and public spheres where the former refers to the home and the latter to the social world outside of the home.

Habermas has famously argued that in Europe, the division between the private and public spheres began to emerge towards the end of the 18th century with the rise of bourgeois culture, and was a central feature of the modern European state. According to him, there was a set of historically specific and unprecedented circumstances that allowed for the emergence of this liberal bourgeois phenomenon in Europe which in turn changed the principles and nature of state power.⁴⁸ For Habermas, this notion of public sphere grew at the same time as ideas about the intimate and private sphere of the conjugal family. The private sphere was constituted as the necessary counterpoint to the public sphere, and in the industrial era, the divide became highly gendered as men dominated the public arenas of politics and work, while women were closely associated with family and home. The European bourgeois social order relied on this gendered separation of these spheres and led to the emergence of the nuclear family as the ideal social unit.⁴⁹ This form of conjugality is what in fact allowed citizens (read: male citizens) to have economic autonomy, play an

⁴⁷A. A. Bakhtiar and R. Hillenbrand, "Domestic Architecture in Nineteenth Century Iran: the Manzil-i Sartip Siddihi near Isfahan," in *Qajar Iran Political, Social and Cultural Change 1800-1925*, ed. E. Bosworth and C. Hillenbrand (Edinburgh: Mazda Publishers, 1982), 383-402.

⁴⁸Jürgen Habermas, "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article (1964)," trans. Sara Lennox and Frank Lennox, *New German Critique*, 3 (1974): 49-50.

⁴⁹Joan Scott, "Sexualism", *Ursula Hirschmann Annual Lecture on Gender and Europe, European University Institute*, Florence Robert Schuman Center for Advanced Studies Distinguished Lecture, 3 April 2009, 12.

active role in the market, and develop a liberal understanding of their rights which they could foster within the public sphere. Love and intimacy were relegated to the private realm of the home and were to play a central role in the formation of the conjugal family and as the premise of marriage, though notions of a union between two people from different parts of the social-ladder was still highly frowned upon.⁵⁰

By now, many feminist scholars, most notably, Nancy Fraser, have pointed out the gender blind bias of Habermas's understating of the different spheres, arguing that "public" and "private" are themselves categories that once subjected to historically rigorous scrutiny, don't adequately account for the nuanced ways that people divide up their intimate, social and political lives.⁵¹ Similarly, the notion of domestic interior and social exterior spaces as oppositional and gendered has its own complex legacy in the European context. In *The Emergence of the Interior*, Charles Rice argues that understandings of domestic space as interior and private space began to take shape in Europe beginning in the 19th century. According to Rice, "the interior emerged historically as the context for newly articulated desires for privacy and comfort, the consolidation of gendered and familial roles in life, and domestic practices of consumption and self-representation."⁵² Both as concept, and as material manifestation, the notion of a separate domestic space was a modernist European phenomenon which reflected the newly articulated and increasingly widespread desires for privacy and comfort, the consolidation of specific gendered and familial roles in life, as well as a newly emerging consumer culture which set specific rules for domestic arrangements. Rice argues that discourses about domesticity as a naturalized, stable and timeless

⁵⁰Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991).

⁵¹Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge: MIT press, 1992).

⁵²Charles Rice, *The Emergence of the Interior: Architecture, Modernity, Domesticity* (Abington and New York: Routledge, 2007), 1.

aspect of living, is a misconception, albeit a powerful one, which in fact only emerged in 19th century Europe.⁵³

Such understandings of family, conjugality, and civic life, and the rigid binaries that structured European societies in their idealized form, were not always present in other societies. In fact, family and conjugal relations in the royal Qajar harem were distinctly different than their European counterpart. The harem constituted a familial formation composed of multiple wives, with both permanent and various levels of temporary status, their relatives, as well as a large constellation of nannies, eunuchs and servants all co-habiting and collectively raising children in a communal setting. Multiple family portraits of harem women from the period attest to the complex nature of conjugality within this context (Figure 18).



Fig 18. Harem women, children and servants. Gulistan Palace Visual Document Center, Tehran, Iran (210-5-3).

Despite these glaring differences however, the Islamic architectural tendencies of royal courts and elite families, which were structured

⁵³Rice, *The Emergence of the Interior: Architecture, Modernity, Domesticity*, 4.

around the division between a *bīrūnī* and an *andarūn*, have generally been the site of cultural comparisons that regard such practices as material evidence for the severe gendered division between public and private life within Islamic societies. Both European accounts of the Gulistan court, and more contemporary analysis of this space found in the English language, tend to rely heavily on such presuppositions in their spatial accounts of the palace and its harem.

For example, Jennifer Scarce, a notable architectural historian of the Qajar period, has argued that despite the modernization plans for Tehran in mid to late 19th century, a central component of Nasser al-Din's expansion plans of Gulistan was the maintenance of the "traditional segregation of public and private areas" through the clear and gendered distinction between *bīrūnī* and *andarūn* of Gulistan, and the walls surrounding the complex which protected these elements from public.⁵⁴ Throughout her body of work on Qajar architecture, she argues that such division is in accordance with Islamic tradition, where "[p]ublic life takes place in the streets, the service and commercial sectors, while private life looks inwards to courtyard and rooms within wall."⁵⁵ She notes that while there was a visible attempt by the Qajars to modernize Gulistan, (and visibility for her is apparent through the gesture of incorporating European architectural details such as clock towers and columns), the presence of traditional Islamic social order continued to foil full-scale modernization efforts. She thus makes a clear distinction between modern forms and structures, and traditional practices which occupy them. However, Scarce fails to account for the fact that the notion of a clear division between public and private space, and in particular, domestic interiority and public civic life, was a decidedly 19th century European phenomenon associated with European modernity, which was quite distinct from the traditions and practices which defined

⁵⁴Jennifer Scarce, "The Royal Palaces of the Qajar Dynasty; a Survey" in *Qajar Iran: Political, Social, and Cultural Change 1800-1925*, ed. Edmond Bosworth and Carole Hillenbrand (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 1992), 339.

⁵⁵Scarce, *Domestic Culture in the Middle East*

the Qajar court – a space that was arguably the very focal point of 19th century Iranian modernity. In fact, most objects and practices associated with modernity, from fashion and technology, to arts and literature made their first appearance in Iran within the walls of Gulistan.

In reality, in the context of late Qajar elite culture, this form of gender segregation was not informed by a distinction between private and public realm, but was instead the product of Islamic ordering and enforcement of gender segregation in *both* public *and* private life, and one which was not deemed by many to be incompatible with modernization. Furthermore, far from being “secluded” in the *andarūn* of Gulistan, there is no shortage of references to harem women from the period moving through the bazaar and the streets of Tehran, visiting public shrines, or traveling throughout the country, within the archives of the period - spaces which clearly fall outside the harem or domestic sphere of the *arg* (Figure 19).



Fig. 19. Harem women traveling with court eunuchs. Gulistan Palace Visual Document Center, Tehran, Iran.

Within such accounts, the basic rules of gender segregation apply either through women covering themselves, or the various ways in which men were forbidden from public areas that harem women were passing through.

A noteworthy incident, which illustrates this point well, took place in the summer of 1883, when Samuel Benjamin, the first American ambassador to Iran, was traveling with his daughter from Tehran to Shimīrān to escape the heat of the city. On route, his caravan reached a coffee house where a number of horses and carriages were parked. They decided to stop and take a break, but almost immediately upon arrival, they were attacked by a group of court eunuchs and severely beaten. The reason for this attack, which caused some diplomatic tensions at the time, was that the coffee house was at the time occupied by harem women who were also on route from Tehran to their summer destination. In such instances, it was not permissible for men to enter public spaces occupied by harem women. The beating in fact only stopped when one of the shah's wives recognized Benjamin and his daughter, and ordered the guards to stop.⁵⁶

This is one of several examples of harem women occupying space outside the confines of the harem gates. In fact, these women spent most of their time socializing in various public gatherings, attending weekly public baths, and going on trips and pilgrimages collectively. During such outings, men were to stay clear of their paths and if they were to get a glimpse of harem women, it was men who would be punished.⁵⁷

Moonis al-Dowleh, one of Anis al-Dowleh's servants, in her memoirs, for example, gives a detailed account of harem women visiting *kūhi bībī shahrbānū*, a shrine located in the south east of Tehran. She states:

Men and women often visited shrines together with set rituals which they would follow. There was however, one shrine that no men and not even boys were allowed to visit—the *kūhi bībī shahrbānū* shrine. Legend had it that bībī shahrbānū was still alive and roaming the mountains and as such, no male visitors

⁵⁶S.G. W. Benjamin, *The Life and Adventures of a Freelance, being the observations of S.G.W. Benjamin* (Burlington: Free Press Company, 1914), 384-391.

⁵⁷Azad, *Posht-e Pardeh-ha-ye Haram-sara*, 233.

were allowed there. Because of this, women loved to visit this shrine where they did not have to cover themselves and could frolic freely.⁵⁸

She describes how differing classes of harem women made the journey with their eunuchs and would partake in collective leisure activities such as singing, eating meals and reading omens (*fāl khūndan*) for the duration of the trip.⁵⁹

Visits to the bath house is another example of public outings that harem women partook in, generally on a weekly basis. Shireen Mahdavi gives the following account of women's public bathing rituals:

For the women, the public baths (apart from their original purpose of a location for being cleansed) were a form of amusement and distraction from daily life. It was a social meeting place where the women would go with their extended family and arrange to meet their friends. They would usually spend a whole day there, having their hair and nails dyed with henna, eating sweetmeats and meals, telling stories and anecdotes, and smoking hookahs. There were also baths for special occasions, such as on the tenth day after giving birth to a son or prenuptial baths which would be preceded and proceeded by female musicians and dancers.⁶⁰

While such collective homosocial activities have been well documented in the historiography of Qajar women, most notably by Afsaneh Najmabadi, few scholars have paid adequate attention to the spatial manifestation of such activities –namely that they often took place in outdoor or public spaces throughout the city which the traditional historiography has deemed inaccessible to harem women.

Even within the *arg*, there was no shortage of large scale gatherings and social affairs in which women took part. Muir al-Mamluk, for

⁵⁸Sadvandian, *Khāterat-i Mūnis al-Dowlih: Nadīmih 'haramsarāy-i Nasser al-Din Shah*, 137.

⁵⁹Sadvandian, *Khāterat-i Mūnis al-Dowlih: Nadīmih 'haramsarāy-i Nasser al-Din Shah*, 138.

⁶⁰Shireen Mahdavi, "Amusements in Qajar Iran," *Iranian Studies*, vol.40 (September 2007): 494.

example reports in his memoirs that on a few nights each month, the entire *arg* (so not just its *andarūn*, but also its *bīruni*) would be closed off to visitors so that the shah and the residents of the harem could tour the grounds. They would spend time in the *dīvan khanih* and the garden, and musicians and entertainers would perform for large audiences. Harem women would often end the evening by sharing a collective dinner with the shah in the diamond hall building (*tālār-i bilirān*).⁶¹ Thus, even the *bīruni* section of the *arg* was regularly accessible to harem women and their servants.

Furthermore, the characterization of the royal *andarūn* as a private space in and of itself requires further interrogation. Understandings of the harem as a “private” sphere of domesticity ignore both the spatial configuration of it, as well as the ways in which the women living within it constituted a public in their own right, which was in constant contact with both the court and the many bodies and identities which surrounded and passed through it. In her description of harem life, Taj Saltaneh, the one of the shah’s daughter’s notes:

His Imperial Majesty, my father, had about eighty wives and concubines, each of whom had about ten or twenty maidservants and domestics. The number of women in the harem thus reached some five or six hundred. Moreover, every day the wives, concubines, or domestics received numerous relative and visitors, so that there was a constant flood of about eight or nine hundred women in the harem.⁶²

It would be hard to argue that a space occupied by 800 to 900 bodies should be considered a private domain. In fact, looking at accounts of the Qajar harem from the late 19th century, one is struck by the amount of sociality and communal practices that made up the day-to-day life of the resident even within the *andarūn*. Many of the

⁶¹Muīr al-Mamlīk, Dūst-Alī-Khān, *Notes of Private life of Nasserad-Din-Shah*, 25.

⁶²Taj al-Saltānān, *Crowning Anguish: Memoirs of a Persian Princess from the Harem to Modernity*, ed. Abbas Amanat, trans. Anna Vanzan and Amin Neshati (Washington DC: Mage Publishers, 2003), 88.

architectural details which were explained in the last section, were developed specifically for this purpose – let’s recall for example the large *tālārs* that were built into certain buildings, or Anis al-Dowleh’s guest room on the second floor of her home which is referenced in the many accounts from the period.

Conclusion

In a letter written to Nasser al-Din Shah, the writer informs the shah of a physical altercation which has taken place between harem servants and workers outside of the harem. Āghā Bāshī, the Shah’s loyal eunuch is mentioned as the arbitrator of the fight. According to the letter, Āghā Bāshī makes the harem servants promise not to “loiter on the street and pick fights.”⁶³ This letter is interesting in that it shows that while, in some sense, there was in fact a desire to keep a separation between the harem and its exterior, the boundaries between the interior and exterior were regularly crossed, in this case, by harem eunuchs who were perhaps the most mobile figures between these two realms.

Thinking through the material space of late 19th century Gulistan, its immediate surroundings, and its location in the heart of a fast-developing urban center, allows us to move beyond fetishizing the harem as a token of idealized Eastern patriarchal sexuality or denouncing it as a prison house of Muslim women, and instead, interrogate certain social relations in late Qajar Iran through their spatial manifestation at the very heart of the empire.

Both textual and photographic evidence point to the fact that the Gulistan *andarūn* was at once a space of domesticity within which, for example, children were raised in a collective environment, a space of sociality wherein a constant barrage of guests, both familial, local and transnational, were entertained, a host of rituals both secular and religious were performed, as well as a series of politics, both local, national and international interrogated and negotiated. This folding

⁶³The National Archives and Library in Tehran, document 295-2592.

in of deeply private and extremely public activities within the same space is perhaps the most unique and interesting feature of the royal court, and one which has been severely understudied. What was particularly unique about this space was that for the most part, the day-to-day affairs of the harem occurred outside of male control. Seen in this light, the Gulistan harem was a kind of heterotopic liminal zone where gender, ethnic and class differences intersected, and where the successive development of the space both formed and was informed by the domestic, leisure, cultural, and political practices that took shape within it.