

Darooqeh Historical House demonstrating Mashhad's rich heritage



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Historical monuments serve as a testament to the authenticity of each city, showcasing its history, culture, and civilization. While some of these ancient structures have succumbed to the ravages of time, many have been painstakingly restored and preserved by cultural heritage organizations and other institutions. In Mashhad, the capital of Khorasan Razavi Province, and home to the holy shrine of Imam Reza (PBUH), numerous restored old houses offer a glimpse into the city's rich past. Among these, the Darooqeh Historical House stands out as a prominent tourist attraction, drawing visitors with its exquisite and distinctive architecture. Situated on Navvab Safavi Street, approximately four kilometers from the city center, this historical house was commissioned by the last sheriff (referred to as *darooqehi* in Persian) of the city during the late Qajar period. Yusef Khan Harati oversaw the construction of the house, intending that it serve as both his personal residence and a venue for official receptions. After several years

of residence, the house passed down through his descendants. Since 1987, the house, acquired by the rural council of a village in Yazd, was utilized for religious ceremonies for a number of years. Over time, however, the house fell into disrepair and was on the brink of destruction. Recognizing its historical significance, the house was designated as one of Iran's national monuments in 2002. Subsequently, in 2012, the municipality purchased the property and embarked on a comprehensive restoration and reconstruction effort, ensuring the preservation of this architectural gem for future generations to appreciate. Throughout the various stages of the restoration process, the architects and restoration experts were dedicated to fully preserving the house's identity in terms of both its structure and appearance. They utilized high-quality, modern materials, while also incorporating materials from demolished old houses in the area to maintain its old and authentic appearance. New sections were integrated into the house during the restoration, creating a

distinct contrast from the original parts, making them easily recognizable to visitors. The restoration project benefited from the expertise of professionals in architecture, archaeology, documentation, and historical preservation. The restoration of Darooqeh House was executed with such beauty and professionalism that it was honored with the Asia-Pacific Award from UNESCO in 2016. Among 13 projects for the preservation of historical and cultural heritage in countries such as Australia, India, China, Japan, and Pakistan, Darooqeh House proudly received this award, becoming a source of pride for Iran. Today, Darooqeh House, with its administrative spaces and museum, eagerly awaits visitors and enthusiasts of historical artifacts. The historical house is situated on a 1,100 square meter plot of land and features a unique blend of Iranian and Russian architectural styles. The house is positioned at the beginning of a street, with its entrance door located on the southern side. Upon entering the courtyard, one immediately notices that the house is approximately 75 centimeters

lower than the street level. Within the courtyard, a striking pool and two small gardens capture one's attention. The two-story house façade encompasses the northern, eastern, and western sides of the courtyard. The design of the terrace and the stairs on both sides of the Darooqeh House is influenced by Russian architecture. Noteworthy decorations in the house include seven-color tile work on the facade, wooden embellishments on the ceilings, as well as statues in the form of winged lions and angels all reflecting Russian architectural influences. In the northern section of Darooqeh House, an *ivan* (portico) with four columns is prominently featured, extending forward and reaching the courtyard floor. These columns boast exquisite brickwork. Flanking the northern *ivan*, two inclined staircases with delicate metal railings are visible. Additionally, the western part of the house showcases a columned *ivan* adorned with octagonal and oval tiles featuring floral and plant motifs. The house is designed to meet the needs of its residents by utilizing natural re-

sources such as wind, water, and solar energy. It is divided into two sections, one for summer and one for winter, each tailored for use during different seasons. The winter section is strategically positioned to make the most of sunlight and solar energy during colder months. It also houses the kitchen and features double-paned windows and a fireplace, representing some of the earliest design elements of the house. Conversely, the summer section is positioned away from direct sunlight. It includes wind-catching rooms and a traditional water basin, ensuring a cool and pleasant environment during the warmer months. The first private bathroom is also located in this section, a notable feature given that public baths were commonly used during that era. Additionally, the historical Darooqeh House includes two bakeries, a traditional water basin, a kitchen, and a cellar. The kitchen is currently serving as a traditional coffee house, while another part has been transformed into a photography studio. Visitors also have the opportunity to select handicrafts or silverware as souvenirs.

Roman and Sassanid empires' negotiation of the past

The preservation and manipulation of cultural memory were a constant and much-contested preoccupation for the two self-described ancient and universal empires, Roman and Sassanid. Despite both regimes' claims to be ageless and changeless, a relentless series of transformations marked every era of their existence. Internal transfers of subject or captive peoples augmented the population pressures caused by massive influxes of nomadic peoples who swept over the Danube or Caspian Gates. To make sense of the tension between the two regimes' steadfast adherence to myths of monolithic stability and the volatility of the Mediterranean and Near East during this period, it is fruitful to concentrate on the means by which the two empires negotiated these changes. An important segment of Roman and Sassanid imperial ritual and artistic activity sought to apprehend and shape the past as a method of forming the regimes' identities. That a regime would associate itself with a prestigious past appears rather obvious. However, because this practice is widespread throughout history, its particular consequences for the Ro-

man and Sassanid empires' relations with one another are easy to misunderstand. The Roman and Sassanid empires did maintain a remarkable degree of cultural continuity throughout the four hundred years under study, and if one concentrates only on the imperial elites, this continuity appears even more pronounced. However, by 630 many changes had swept both empires. At this point in time, the two states bore a greater resemblance to each other than to the empires of Severus Alexander and Ardashir I, which preceded them, and even less similarity to the Rome of Augustus or the Persian empire of Darius I. It is tempting to concentrate solely on the changes and continuities themselves in explaining the two empires' cultural identity; yet focusing on just the continuities or discontinuities does not take us very far in understanding Roman or Sassanid cultural stability or identity construction. A more fruitful approach is to consider the motivations and methods of such assiduous preservation or creative reenlivenment. The Roman and Sassanid emperors

sought to engage with, and define themselves in relation to, various pasts at different points in their histories. In addition to the eminent kings of their own dynasty, the Sassanid included as their ancestors the historical, yet imperfectly understood Achaemenids, legendary kings and heroes such as Jamshid and Freydoun, and mythical dynasties such as the Kaynids. The Romans had a much different sense of the past, which was articulated by a sustained historical literary tradition. Christianity introduced a new concept of history, grafting the religion's Old Testament scriptural tradition and the history of the church itself onto the Roman past. A sovereign could select among a variety of pasts according to how he wished to define his identity. This was partially dictated by the potential audience an emperor wanted to impress or convince. Different audiences required different identities thus presenting a different past over which an emperor needed to gain control. In the face of all these changes, how did the two realms engage their pasts, and what purpose did their engagement with the past serve?



The Maison Carrée, one of the best-preserved Roman temples in France

First, the past was a source of power. The Roman's and Sassanid's techniques of creating and shaping memory were a means of ensuring that they gained or retained ownership not only of their own venerable pasts but also of prestigious mythological or foreign pasts out of which (external or internal) elites might fashion rival claims to territory, privileges, or the throne,

or that the oppressed masses could potentially use to combat their subjection and agitate for, in today's parlance, human rights. However, the two realms' engagement with the past was not just focused on establishing dominance or prestige. In these two very conservative cultures, control of the past was also a useful way to present and enact new visions of culture.

The above is a lightly edited version of part of a chapter entitled, "The Lure of the Other and the Limits of the Past", from a book entitled, "The Two Eyes of the Earth", written by Matthew P. Vanepa, published by University of California Press.