

# Ramdani House reveals layers of Sari's history

## Iranica Desk

Amid the old alleyways of Sari, the capital city of Mazandaran Province, some houses still preserve traces of the lifestyle and architectural traditions of past generations. Ramdani House is one such historic building, showcasing aspects of the city's traditional architecture through its distinctive structure, wooden elements and Orsi windows — traditional Persian lattice windows. The house offers a glimpse into the domestic architecture and everyday life of a bygone era.

The house's location is significant, as historic residences were once part of an interconnected urban landscape. Together with bazaars, mosques, cisterns and other public spaces, these buildings helped shape the rhythm of everyday life in the city, according to IRNA. Ramdani House is recognized as a building dating back to the Qajar era and was inscribed on Iran's National Heritage List. Its national registration signifies more than its age; it also reflects the building's architectural and historical importance and underscores the need to preserve such heritage sites.

One of the notable features of Ramdani House is its architectural layout. The complex consists of two buildings arranged around a central courtyard. The front building has two floors, and its entrance portal is one of the structure's most distinctive features. In traditional historic houses,



the entrance served a purpose beyond simply providing access to the building. Its design helped regulate the transition between the public space of the alley and the private space of the home. At Ramdani House, the front building served as the entrance and vestibule. This space was used to accommodate visitors and conduct certain activities without requiring direct access to the main living areas of the house. The central courtyard is another key feature of traditional Iranian houses. Rather than serving merely as an open space between buildings, it formed an integral part of the family's daily life. Such courtyards provided natural light to the rooms, created an open space within the residential complex and connected different sections of the house. Perhaps one of the most appeal-

ing aspects of Ramdani House for visitors is its architectural detailing. The upper floor of the front building features rooms adorned with wooden decorations, Orsi windows — traditional Persian lattice windows — and plaster skylights that allow natural light to filter into the interior. Orsi windows are a distinctive feature of traditional Iranian architecture. Designed to slide vertically within their frames, these windows provided natural light and ventilation while enhancing the beauty of interior spaces in many historic homes. Their presence at Ramdani House reflects the attention its builders paid to architectural detail and the quality of the interior environment. Plaster skylights are another architectural feature that stands out in descriptions of Ramdani House. The combination of wood, plaster

and other building materials gave the interiors a distinctive character and helped define the house's architectural identity. According to available information about the building, the rooms on the upper floor of the front building were used to accommodate guests. This arrangement offers insight into how large historic houses were organized. In traditional homes, spaces were typically divided according to their intended use, with separate areas designated for guests, family members and other visitors.



At Ramdani House, the entrance and vestibule in the front section, along with the guest rooms on the upper floor, suggest that the building's design was shaped, to some extent, by the lifestyle and social relationships of the family who lived there. In this sense, the house was more than a collection

of walls and rooms; it also reflected how people used and experienced domestic spaces in the past. Although Ramdani House is primarily recognized as a building dating back to the Qajar era, its history extends beyond that period. The second building, located behind the main structure, underwent major alterations in the early Pahlavi period. These alterations make Ramdani House a notable example of a historic building that evolved over time to meet the changing needs of its occupants. Indeed, many

and urban development can all damage buildings constructed using traditional materials and techniques. Ramdani House has also undergone restoration and conservation work aimed at preserving the structure and improving its condition. Reported restoration work at Ramdani House has included repairs to the roof's timber framework, restoration of the building's walls, removal of later additions, replacement of deteriorated mortar joints, and repair and removal of the cement render on the southern façade. During some restoration operations, the interior plasterwork of the second building was also removed, revealing arched recesses dating back to the Qajar period. This highlights the importance of proper restoration practices for historic buildings. Layers added in later periods can sometimes conceal elements of a structure's original architecture, while restoration work can reveal further details about its original design. For many travelers, Sari is a destination for exploring the natural beauty of Mazandaran Province. However, the city also has a rich historical and architectural heritage. Ramdani House is one example of how a city's history is preserved not only in religious buildings, palaces and major monuments, but also in the historic homes that reflect the everyday lives of past generations.

## Reading Room

### Exploring changing city through Tehran in Travelogues

#### Iranica Desk

Tehran is a city that has breathed between grandeur and turmoil throughout its history. Its streets tell stories of an ancient civilization and deeply rooted traditions, while its bazaars reflect the dynamism of its people. Yet the history of Iran's capital cannot be understood solely through official records, political events and the lives of kings. Much of the city's past lies hidden in its alleyways, markets, homes and the details of everyday life — details that were sometimes recorded by travelers and foreign observers.

Tehran in Travelogues, by Mehrshad Kazemi, a researcher and cultural tourism professional, is a book that seeks to uncover lesser-known layers of the capital's history. Drawing on approximately 200 travel accounts written by Iranian and foreign travelers, diplomats and religious missionaries, the book traces Tehran's physical, social and cultural transformations from earlier periods through the first Pahlavi era. Published by Saless Publication, the book received a positive response upon the release of its first edition and has since reached a second edition, according to IBNA.

One of the most important features of travelogues is their ability to offer an outside perspective on a city. According to Kazemi, Tehran cannot be fully understood through official and domestic sources alone. Travelers arriving with different cultural, social and political backgrounds sometimes noticed details that

local residents of the time considered so commonplace that they saw little reason to record them. Descriptions of streets, bazaars, houses, clothing, modes of transportation, social customs, public health, education and religious ceremonies can all provide a more tangible picture of life in Tehran in earlier times.

From this perspective, travelogues do not replace domestic sources; they complement them. While official records tend to focus on government, politics and major events, travel accounts also make it possible to explore social history and everyday life. A brief description of a market or neighborhood may reveal aspects of social relationships and people's lifestyles that are rarely documented in official records. Nevertheless, these historical sources must be approached with caution. Travel writers were not necessarily impartial observers. Each arrived in Iran with a particular cultural, political and religious background, and some were engaged in diplomatic, military, commercial or religious missions. It is therefore important to distinguish between what they actually observed, how they interpreted their observations and the judgments they formed through the lens of their own cultural assumptions.

The length of a traveler's stay in Iran, their familiarity with Persian and the nature of their interactions with Iranian society also influenced their accounts. However, not every error or misunderstanding should be attributed to deliberate bias; cultural differences and limited information



may also have shaped some narratives. Comparing travelogues with one another and examining them alongside documents, maps, memoirs, newspapers, photographs and architectural evidence is therefore essential to developing a more reliable picture of Tehran's past. Travelogues are, in effect, a two-way mirror: they provide information about Tehran while also

revealing how foreign observers perceived Iranian society. A description of a neighborhood, bazaar, historic building or religious ceremony not only illuminates the subject itself but also reflects the writer's values and assumptions. In this sense, travelogues are not merely sources for the history of Tehran; they are also part of the history of how the city came to be perceived around the world.

Although many travelers focused on the royal court, prominent figures, embassies and affluent social groups, their accounts also contain valuable information about ordinary people. Shopkeepers and artisans, markets, neighborhoods, public bathhouses, food, clothing, transportation and everyday social interactions all form part of Tehran's social landscape that can be reconstructed through these writings. Descriptions of women and family life are equally significant.

However, many foreign travelers had limited access to the private quarters of Iranian households, known as the Andaruni. Their accounts, therefore, cannot be regarded as complete or definitive representations of women's lives during that period.

Travelogues also make it possible to trace Tehran's transformation over time. Once a small settlement, the city gradually developed into a major capital and a metropolis moving toward modernity. Changes in the city's walls and gates, streets, bazaars, palaces, schools, embassies, public buildings, transportation systems and public health can be followed through accounts from different historical periods. Tehran's history thus emerges not as a collection of isolated events, but as a continuous process of urban and social transformation. Travel writers from different countries also approached Tehran from different perspectives.

Some British accounts placed greater emphasis on political and economic affairs and Iran's relationship with India. French writers often showed an interest in cultural studies, Iranian studies and archaeology, while certain Russian accounts focused more heavily on military and geopolitical concerns. Some Japanese travelers, meanwhile, viewed Iranian society from a different cultural perspective. These distinctions, however, should not be generalized to all writers from a particular country.

The publication of travelogues in the writers' home countries also influenced how foreign audiences came to understand Iran. Intended for politicians, merchants, scholars and general readers, these accounts helped shape perceptions of Tehran and Iranian society. Yet the images they presented were not always complete or free from error and must be examined within their historical and cultural contexts. By bringing together and comparing these diverse accounts, Tehran in Travelogues seeks to offer a multilayered portrait of Iran's capital, placing official history alongside social history and the everyday experiences of its residents. The value of this research lies in its exploration of Tehran's past not only through palaces, prominent monuments and political events, but also through the alleyways, bazaars and lives of the people who have shaped the city's identity over generations.

Seen through the eyes of travelers, Tehran emerges not merely as a city with a turbulent past, but as a place whose many stories continue to deepen our understanding of its history and cultural identity.