

Figure 59: An example of the beautified areas in Lalehzar



Author, 2022

Tehran's socio-spatial urban heritage assemblage

Reform-oriented players in Tehran advocated beautification and place-making projects and the creation of a network of pedestrian walkways linking tourist and cultural hubs in the city centre. These nodes include some 195 listed buildings spread across the area.¹³⁴ Some, such as the Mostofi-ol-mamalek House in Sangeladge and the Nasir-ol-molk House in Oudlajan, have been neglected due to lack of funding and irregular administration cycles. Nevertheless, some examples, such as the conversion of a historic house in Oudlajan into a cultural centre called *Khaneh-ye Ordibehesht*, show that the transfer of ownership to the private sector through the government's 'Build Operate Transfer' (BOT) programme has resulted in remarkable social and economic contributions to the neighbourhood.

An example of the municipality's attempt to include individual buildings to Tehran's urban heritage network is the museum-houses project. Tehran's museum-houses were established in under the national

134 According to the records of the Cultural Heritage Organization of Tehran, 32 objects are located in District 11 and 163 objects in District 12.

culture policy of the mid-2000s, which required public institutions to preserve and reuse their cultural assets, especially to promote historical figures of national significance. Museum-houses of figures of the Constitutional Movement and the 1979 Revolution such as Mostafa Chamran and Seyyed Hassan Modarres together with houses of popular anti-Pahlavi figures such as the poet Nima Yushij¹³⁵ and the writers Simin Daneshvar¹³⁶ and Jalal Al-e Ahmad¹³⁷ give a somewhat romantic and nostalgic impression of Tehran's revolutionary past. In the reuse and restoration projects of cases like the Ettehadiyeh House, priority has been given to the Qajar layers of the buildings, while memories of the place associated with a popular 1970s TV series faded out.¹³⁸ Similarly, in the case of the War University Museum (Teymourtash's Mansion), the personality of the historical owner¹³⁹ was overlooked, placing focus

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- 135 Moḥammad Ali Nuri Esfandiari (1897–1958) was a poet known for his pivotal role in shaping modern Persian poetry and his critical reflections on Iran's political environment in the 1940s and early 1950s.
- 136 Iranian academic and novelist, known for her highly popular novel *Suvashun* (1969). Some have seen implicit references in the novel to the socio-political situation that led to the coup d'état of 28 Mordad 1332 Sh./19 August 1953, planned by the British secret service and executed by the CIA. See: Mas'ud Ja'fari Jazi, 'SUVASHUN' (Encyclopædia Iranica, 2011), [https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/suvashun#prettyPhoto\[content\]/o/](https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/suvashun#prettyPhoto[content]/o/); Mark J. Gasiorowski, 'COUP D'ETAT OF 1332 Š./1953' (Encyclopædia Iranica, 1993).
- 137 Daneshvar's husband. He is best known for his work 'Charbzadegi', which has been translated into English as 'Weststruckness', where he makes a harsh critique of Western technology and civilization. His message was favourably received by Ayatollah Khomeini and later by others sympathetic to the 1979 Iranian Revolution. See: Iran Chamber Society, 'Persian Language & Literature Jalal Al Ahmad' (Iran Chamber Society, 2023 2001), https://www.iranchamber.com/literature/jalahmad/jalal_al_ahmad.php.
- 138 Due to its prominent appearance in the popular television series 'Daie Jan Napoleon', based on the novel by Iraj Pezeshkzad with the same name, the house has been given the nickname 'Daie-jan Napoleon's House' by the general public. See: Yadollahi, 'When Values-Based Conservation Theory Meets Planning Practice in Tehran'.
- 139 Abdolhossein Teymourtash (1883–1933), a modernist politician of the late Qajar and early Pahlavi period and Court Minister of Reza Shah.

instead on the belongings of the post-Revolutionary users of the house, who were martyrs of the Iran-Iraq War. In a series of public debates, policymakers argued that in such cases it is the physical monument that represents the heritage value, not the dark character of the historical figures associated with them.¹⁴⁰

However, my field research during several city tours in Tehran has shown that visitors do not necessarily follow the official discursive lines. Visitors often relate to places through their own perspectives on the near and distant past associated with those locations. And observing the reformist city administration's strategy of using boundary objects to soften tensions between official and non-official discourses, I have come to believe that heritage planners have recognized the autonomy of the public in interpreting cultural heritage.

Activities around Vali-e Asr Street (previously known as Pahlavi Street and Mosadeq Street in different political eras) also epitomize the efforts of Tehran's cultural policymakers to reconcile the memories of ordinary people with the values of the government.¹⁴¹ Minaee House or Vali-e Asr Street Museum located in a section of Vali-e Asr Street that crosses Qajar City in District 11 was an element of the preparation of the street for World Heritage nomination. The Tehran Beautification Organization initiated several pedestrian improvement projects along the street in 2011. At the city council's suggestion, the street was added to the National Heritage List and later to UNESCO's tentative list. The city administration has tried to present the street as a place associated with the memories of Tehranis, a garden street and a 17.2-kilometre-

140 For instance in: Cultural Spaces Development Company Municipality of Tehran et al., 'Webinar: Sevomin Webinar-e Barresi-e Tajarob-e Ehyay-e Khaneh-Moozeh-Ye Mashahir-e Tehran [The Third Webinar on the Experiences of Revitalising Houses of Famous Figures in Tehran]' (Instagram Live, 2 December 2020); Cultural Spaces Development Company Municipality of Tehran et al., 'Webinar: Barresi-Ye Tajarob-e Ehya Khaneh Moozeh Mashahir-e Tehran [Reflections on Revitalisation Experiences in the Famous Houses of Tehran]' (Instagram Live, 17 February 2021).

141 After the 1979 Revolution, the street was renamed as a tribute to the 12th Shia Imam.

long plane tree route connecting architectural landmarks from different eras.¹⁴²

I learned about this project through the Instagram livestream of professional workshops held at the Minaee House as a cooperation between the museum and the municipality's Beautification Organization and NGOs such as the Tehranology Association.¹⁴³ In the workshops, interdisciplinary groups of mostly young participants sought to trace and revisit—as Hanachi put it—the social, cultural, physical, and environmental values of the street.¹⁴⁴ Or, as the leader of the workshops wrote, they aimed to find fragments of stories here and there to create a present-day story of the street.¹⁴⁵

From the publications associated with the project,¹⁴⁶ the museum's Instagram account, and the exhibitions at Minaee House, it is clear that policymakers managed to navigate the uncomfortable fact that the street's founder was Reza Shah Pahlavi by placing the street's past

142 See: Mokhtari Taleghani et al., *Khiaban-e Vali-e Asr Miras-e Memari va Shahr-sazi-Ye Tehran [Vali E Asr Avenue Tehran's Architectural and Urban Heritage]*. And UNESCO's Tentative List: Submitted by: and Iranian Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization, 'Vali-e Asr Street' (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2019), <https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/6387/>.

143 The Tehranology Association [*Anjoman-e Tehran-shenasi*] was established in 2019 with the endorsement of the city council.

144 Pirooz Hanachi, 'Yaddasht-e Shrdar [Mayor's Note]', in *Khiaban-e Vali-e Asr (AJ)*; *Tarrahaneh Andishidan [Vali-e Asr (AS) Street; Thinking Designerly]*, ed. Vahid Ghasemi, Bahra Aqil, and Syyedeh Pegah Hashemi Dogaheh (Tehran: Guya Culture & Art House, 2021), 7.

145 Vahid Ghasemi, 'Molaghat Ba Khiaban (an-e) Dramatik-e Shahr [A Visit to the Street from a Dramatic Angel]', in *Khiaban-e Vali-e Asr (AJ)*; *Tarrahaneh Andishidan [Vali-e Asr (AS) Street; Thinking Designerly]*, ed. Vahid Ghasemi, Aghil Bahra, and Syyedeh Pegah Hashemi Dogaheh (Tehran: Guya Culture & Art House, 2021), 9–10.

146 Mokhtari Taleghani et al., *Khiaban-e Vali-e Asr Miras-e Memari va Shahr-sazi-Ye Tehran [Vali E Asr Avenue Tehran's Architectural and Urban Heritage]*; Eskandar Mokhtari Taleghani, *Bonyan-Ha-Ye Khiaban-e Vali-e Asr (AJ) [Foundations of the Vali-e Asr (SA) Street]* (Tehran: Cultural Research Bureau-Tehran Municipality, 2020); Ghasemi, 'Molaghat Ba Khiaban (an-e) Dramatik-e Shahr [A Visit to the Street from a Dramatic Angel]'.

in the broader context of urban life over the last 90 years. As Mokhtari Taleghani, a senior heritage advisor to the municipality wrote: "Although the street was established on the basis of the authority of an individual [Reza Shah], it was the agency of the city and its inhabitants that gave it permanence, and the street became a container of memory".¹⁴⁷ The street was presented as an "exceptional example of the Iranian urban spaces of the Islamic period".¹⁴⁸ In short, by locating historical moments and sites of modern Iranian politics along the street, heritage planners of Tehran linked the Qajar period to the era of the Islamic Republic.

I first visited the Minaee House in October 2021. At the entrance of the permanent exhibition, I was pleasantly surprised to see pictures of unveiled poet Forough Farrokhzad, painter Iran Darroudi, and figures such as Reza Shah's first modernist minister, Mohammad Ali Foroughi. The exhibition blended traces of Tehran's pre-Revolutionary past with a thick Qajar accent, together with innocuous memories of ordinary people in confectioneries, cafes, cinemas, and photographer's studios over the previous nine decades. Without a doubt, the memories of residents and the participation of professionals had passed through the bureaucratic and discursive filter of the reformist city administration. But, for someone familiar with the official cultural context of the Islamic Republic, the technological, spatial, and discursive assemblage of the urban heritage of Vali-e Asr Street felt closer to the everyday experience of the ordinary public to an unprecedented degree.

In June 2022, I visited the house again to see if I could spot any traces of the then recent political changes in the museum. As expected, images of Forough Farrokhzad and Iran Darroudi wore headscarves and politically uncomfortable figures were smaller in size and nearly hidden by a set of recently added post-Revolutionary pictures. Also, the museum's Instagram activity had declined and was more conservative in

147 Mokhtari Taleghani, *Bonyan-Ha-Ye Khiaban-e Vali-e Asr (A)* [Foundations of the Vali-e Asr (SA) Street], 118.

148 Mokhtari Taleghani et al., *Khiaban-e Vali-e Asr Miras-e Memari va Shahrsazi-Ye Tehran* [Vali E Asr Avenue Tehran's Architectural and Urban Heritage], 118.

quality. A staff member of the municipality told me the museum's activities have been slowed down due to ideological opposition by the current government and Tehran's city administration on the museum's function. It was no surprise to see that after a political shift at the national level, urban heritage assemblage was being disassembled—from the macro level of administrative arrangements in the city council and municipality, to the micro layers of the composition of the pictures exhibited at Minaee House.

With the end of the reformist city administration in August 2021, the conservative factions took over the seats in the city council and the municipality. On Twitter, supporters and critics of Zakani, Tehran's new mayor depicted him on his way to Tehran in a war tank. Some said he had come to overturn the corrupt system of the reformists. Recalling the previous conservative government of the mid-2000s, others said he was coming to destroy gardens and historic neighbourhoods of Tehran.

Figure 60: 'The tank in the city', an illustration of Khabaronline News Agency showing Zakani with the logo of the municipality and a tank.



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Figure 61: A cognitive map¹⁴⁹ of Vali-e Asr Street created by a participant (Fatemeh Mahmoudi Panah) in the Minaee House workshops, exemplifying the discussed attempts to blend Tehran's official and popular heritage.¹⁵⁰



- 149 Following the conceptual framework introduced by Kevin Lynch: Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City*, vol. 11 (Massachusetts: MIT press, 1960).
- 150 Vahid Ghasemi, *Khiaban-e Vali-e Asr Dar Khial-e Man [Vali-e Asr Street in My Mind]* (Tehran: Nashr-e Shahr (Municipality of Tehran), 2021), 116.

