

Original Research Article

# Landscape Tourism of Iranian Palace

## Description and Explanation of Qasr-e Qajar at Tehran with Landscape Approach

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**Abstract** | The palace is the hallmark of civilization and power of a government and an element influencing the structure of the city and the social, political, and cultural aspects of historical periods. Today, palace tourism is done not only to observe a historical body but also as a symbolic element of the thoughts and beliefs of power groups. The failure of specificity approach to achieve the core of the palace's tourism culture requires the adoption of holistic approaches to understanding the identity of the building. The purpose of this article is to explain the concept of the palace and to examine how to move from partial approaches to holistic attitudes in palace tourism. For this purpose, the content analysis method with two descriptive and explanatory approaches has been used in analyzing Iranian palaces and the case of Qasr-e Qajar in Tehran. According to the research findings, adopting a landscape approach in tourism due to the nature of holistic and comprehensive perception leads to reading and explaining the identity of the whole palace as a text in the city. The explanation of Qasr-e Qajar also shows that this palace has affected and has been influenced by the social, political, historical, and natural structures of the city, both physically, functionally, and semantically, at the micro, meso and macro levels.

**Keywords** | *Palace Landscape, Palace Tourism, Landscape Approach, Tehran Qasr-e Qajar.*

**Introduction** | Referring to the values of architectural and urban heritage in tourism development can reveal the main essence of heritage resources in the face of tourism (Abbaszadeh, Mohammad Moradi, Soltanahmadi, 2015). The historical heritage is tangible capital discourse related to collective continuity and identity (Macdonald, 2006) and the symbolic heritage is intangible spiritual incarnations (Bandyopadhyay, Morais & Chick, 2008; Pretes, 2003).

Therefore, the historical monuments in tourism as a socio-identity heritage should be studied by considering all their dimensions and reasons (Park, 2010); Memorial buildings and elements such as palaces, neighborhoods, squares, streets, mosques, bazaars, bridges, etc. that shape the identity of the city (Taghvaei & Safarabadi, 2012; Behzadfar, 2013; Rahnamaei, 2011). Cultural-heritage tourism study of palaces is very important because these buildings had the most coherent designs and the

most magnificent decorations to show the power of kings in physical structure and represented architecture, art, social and political relations, and the culture of the society in general.

There are three main landscapes in tourism of urban spaces and its elements such as palaces: 1) A landscape in which buildings are inflexible masses and destinations for travel and the abilities and capabilities of the place are affected by economic factors (Papoli Yazdi & Saghayei, 2006; Gospodini, 2002). 2) In another landscape, the nature of the city is considered as a text that the sum of tangible and intangible elements are components of culture and the tourist's goal is to see the cultural effects of a destination (Kazemi, 2006; Stevenson, 2003; Dexter, 1999). 3) Recent approaches also emphasize the recreation of culture and creative tourism and consider public open spaces related to historical monuments, natural and indigenous monuments, and participatory

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and social activities as influential cultural tourism components (Hosseini, 2014). Palace tourism in Iran is mainly done by focusing on physical specific features and observing historical monuments. Therefore, its management and planning are focused on creating facilities for tourists, physical restoration and introducing various uses into buildings, economic and investment discussions, tourism development plans etc. (Zare Ashkezari, Saghaei, Mousavi & Mokhtari Malekabadi, 2016; Kazemian & Azadi, 2011; Farajirad & Seyed Nassiri, 2010).

Paying attention to the formation of the palace by considering the background changes as a whole is a missing link in understanding the identity of the palaces. This study seeks to answer this question; which approach has been used for this topic and how to understand a generality in the palace tourism.

## Research Methods

The purpose of this study is to express how the palace is integrated by understanding its landscape. The research method is content analysis with two descriptive and explanatory approaches. First, the description of the palace is examined in terms of physical, functional, and semantic at three micro, meso and macro levels. Then, landscape paradigm of palace- city-event has been explained. The case study of Qasr-e Qajar in Tehran is described and explained based on this model. The analysis was done based on functional-image features and physical relationship with the palace from descriptive- specificity approach and heritage-cultural tourism study based on historical, social, and political developments and transformation of place through the explanatory-holistic approach.

The components of this analysis are extracted referring articles and written sources. Also, the data was collected through the literature review in the fields of cultural tourism, landscape approach, and history of Iranian palaces and cities based on articles, books, travelogues, visual documents, and paintings.

## Theoretical Foundations

### • Describe the palace from a specificity approach and explain it from a holistic approach

Monuments need to be interpreted through integrated approaches (Grefe, 1990; Benhamou, 1996). There are two main approaches to interpreting this structure: the descriptive approach and the explanatory approach. Representation of feature and objects is done when encountering the phenomenon on the area, as soon as the relations between the events are established and

the reasons are become clear. (Moftakhari, 2010; Freund, 1983; Sarukhani, 1996).

The explanation is one of the most fundamental methods of studying historical subjects (Moftakhari, 2008), a set of signs and causal propositions of the relationship of phenomena with each other (Mardiha, 2003) and understanding the generality of the phenomenon. The combination of descriptive (specificity) and explanatory (holistic) approaches provides a methodological framework for revealing various meanings, landscapes, and interpretations of historical heritage (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Huberman & Miles, 1994) that can provide an understanding of the identity and generality of the palace concept. The partial descriptions of the palace can be examined at three levels: micro, meso, and macro:

### • Micro-level

includes the definition of the word palace in literature and language and the description of the body, function, and landscape of the palace. Palace, pavilion, citadel or palace, in different languages, refers to tall or large buildings that are the residence of the royal family, high-ranking officials, and nobles and has a pavilion-like space with magnificent decorations and is built in the meso of the garden (Dehkhoda, 1994; Moein, 2007; American Heritage Dictionary, 2006). Palaces are considered as a physical element of the city and a manifestation of architectural progress. In Iran, the palace in its most complete form is a collection of residential parts, inner courtyards, and service buildings, and in its simplest form, a single building (pavilion) in combination with the landscape.

Before Islam, the palace had a combined government-residential-religious application due to its size and importance and was known as a temple and religious shrine, defensive fortress, and a place for the rulers to live as well as a place for public ceremonies and ceremonies (Tahmasbi, 2013). After Islam, government-residential application continued, but a kind of social reform occurred with the construction of public buildings and utilities, especially in the Safavid era. This led to separating some part of government from residential application and in some cases palaces gardens were opened to the public (Motedayen, 2010). Recreational functions to create a refreshing environment such as the hunting palace and surveillance-security functions to dominate and monitor the ruling areas have been other uses of the palace.

### • Meso level

At this level, the tourism ratio of the palace with the city (bed) is considered. The set of elements that make up the structure of any city (including palaces) and their

location are important indicators for understanding the currents of activity, developments, and historical milestones (Soltanzadeh, 1988, 253). Before Islam, the palace was located in the center of the city and did not necessarily correspond to the geographical center of the city and was a function of the characteristics and shape of the city, especially the natural state of the earth (Ghirshman, 2008). An important feature of these palaces was the combination of architectural mass with the surrounding landscape and context. However, after the arrival of Islam in Iran and with the change of religious, social, and political concepts, new paradigms occurred in the structure of the Iranian city (Yousefifar, 2005). With the expansion of social justice, the palace became an element of greater connection with society.

Macro-level: At this level, palace tourism is done in semantic areas and the study of physical and non-physical aspects. As a centralized base of power, the palaces symbolically represented the glory and progress of a government. Symbolically, the word palace is the subject of literary writings and court artworks and in addition to describing the landscape and appearance of the palace-garden pattern, it expresses the royal glory in various ways:

Privacy garden around the palace;

Palace-garden associated with palaces and mansions with sacred and semantic features; The palace is a material element between the king (the holy person) and the immaterial world;

The palace symbolizes imperial glory, power and luxury. The use of the word palace in the form of compound expressions in Persian literature, such as Kakhneshin, meaning affluent and wealthy person, indicates a semantic breadth in the language. In art and miniature paintings, the image of the palace is depicted as a luxurious building in combination with a landscape (Fig. 1). So the palace is not a body but a culture.

### Landscape Approach and Explanation of the Palace

A landscape approach is a tool for interpreting the meaning of the environment concerning its physics; Landscape is not merely the world we see, but a structure, a perception of that world, and a way of seeing the world (Cosgrove, 1984). The landscape approach considers the interaction between man and the environment in the temporal-spatial context (Zonneveld, 1990; Hägerstrand, 1993; Samuels, 1979; Fairclough, 2006). New approaches to tourism also consider the historical context as a social phenomenon with mobility and dynamism and a kind of space-time comparison (Gospodini, 2002) that is closely related to the concepts of landscape.

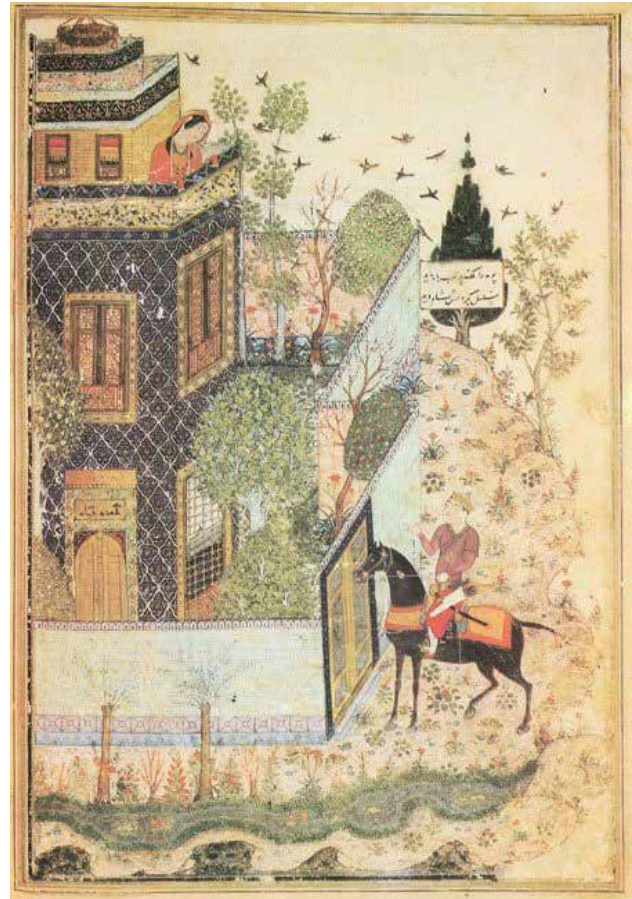


Fig. 1. Palace (multi-story pavilion) surrounded by an Iranian garden, which is drawn to tell the story of Homa and Homayoun. Source: Khwaju Kermani, 2016.

In understanding the tourism of the palace, it is important to study these buildings without relying only on details and paying attention to the unique interpretation of each audience. The specificity approach provides superficial descriptions of the palace's past and present based on historical documents and evidence while explaining the concept of the palace through a landscape approach can examine the comprehensive dimensions of the palace landscape in human-environmental relations and perceive the palace as a text. Understanding this issue affects the change of management methods, planning, body-centered interventions and deepening spiritual and mental relations and identity to the city (Daneshpour & Shiri, 2015).

The result of the interaction of natural and human factors is the creation of landscape identity (Council of Europe, 2000; Arts et al, 2017). The palace is also a human structure in the natural environment, so in the tourism of the palace, the landscape of the palace and the identity of its landscapes are important. This identity is defined as the palace-city (bed) interaction; the spatial bed of the palace is part of the whole city and the palace itself is a living architecture and a sign of the city's identity.

On the other hand, the body palace is a representation



of politics-culture which, while creating strong effects on the structure and ossification of the city, has a bilateral relationship with social and historical structures and shapes the palace-event interaction. Therefore, reading the city space and the set of current events in it is a necessity in interpreting the palace. Recognition of historical, social, political, cultural, natural layers, infrastructures, activities, and events will be important criteria for this identification. The synthesis of the cognitive layers of the palace and its dependent territory as a whole and the recognizing the connections between the components of the territory (functional, physical, semantic) indicate the characteristics, nature, and identity of the palace landscape in the general form of a palace-bed-event.

### The landscape of Qasr-e Qajar in Tehran

Qasr-e-Qajar landscape can be studied with two descriptive and holistic explanatory approaches based on the palace-bed-event paradigm: at the micro-level, the palace is introduced with a set of basic data and historical information, at the meso level the palace-bed relationship is analyzed and at the macro level, the landscape of the palace is an interpretation of the Qasr-e Qajar building in the context of historical, geographical, social and ... developments.

Micro-level: Qasr-e Qajar is a typical example of an Iranian throne garden under the influence of the slope of the land as terraces following the dominant landscapes south of Tehran, which has been used for summer living and hunting (Serena, 1984; Parna, 2006; Shahcheraghi, 2012; Benjamin, 2015; Danbali, 2004; Farahmand, 2006) (Fig. 2). This palace included the entrance sections, green terraces, the first terrace building, the main palace and the secluded garden, the artificial lake, and the central pavilion (Flandin, 1945; Irani Behbahani & Soltani, 2003; Wilber, 1969) (Fig. 3).

This palace, with its picturesque and baroque facades and components, was in an eclectic style of Iranian and Western architecture and delicate industries such as plastering, mirror work, and tiling were used in it. Functionally, this palace was initially outside the city limits, but in later periods it was located inside the city wall (Wilber, 1969) and after becoming a military fortress in the Nasserite period, it became an abandoned place in the late Qajar period. In general, three functions: 1) Qasr-e Qajar and mansion, 2) Qasr prison of the first Pahlavi period, 3) Palace museum of the present period, are being studied in the process of historical developments of the palace.

Meso level: Qasr-e Qajar near Shemiran Road (current Dr. Shariati Street) has been parts of Tehran's garden



Fig. 2. Qasr-e Qajar as a suburban palace with a recreational function and overlooking the nature of Tehran. Source: Wilber, 1969.

complex (Fig. 4). Shemiran Road, the axis connecting the city center to the summer area north of Tehran, in addition to agricultural activities around the area, is also a hunting and recreational destination for the Qajar kings. Due to the changes and transformations that have taken place throughout history in the structure of the city, the position of this palace concerning other places and elements of the city has undergone a spatial and natural change.

Macro-level: The description of Qasr-e Qajar has been mentioned in several travelogues and many poets have written poems about Qasr prison in literature. The proverb of drinking cold water, referring to someone who goes to prison, is derived from the cold water of the aqueducts that passed through this prison. Each of the physical changes and functions of the Qasr-e Qajar has taken place in three historical periods due to environmental, cultural, political, and social reasons.

Qasr-e Qajar and Mansion: The landscape overlooking Tehran and being located in the meso of the green axis of Shemiran introduced Qasr-e Qajar as a sign and a turning point with a kind of mental connection that was a place for social-leisure for the people. This palace, as a government-recreational building, has had magnificent plans and decorations (Saadati Khamseh, 2016). In Qasr-e Qajar, in addition to imitating Persian-style decorations, the general structure of the garden-palace, unlike other Iranian gardens, is close to the pattern of nature.

This can be seen in the dominance of geometry, order, and symmetry of the palace body over the garden, unlike the organic system of natural bed (Etemadipour & Bahramian, 2012) and infinite landscape (urban elements, agricultural landscape, and mountain landscape) has replaced the enclosed landscape of Iranian gardens. Other details such as forest planting, the existence of a longitudinal axis of water, the use of grass, flower pots, the use of decorative elements such

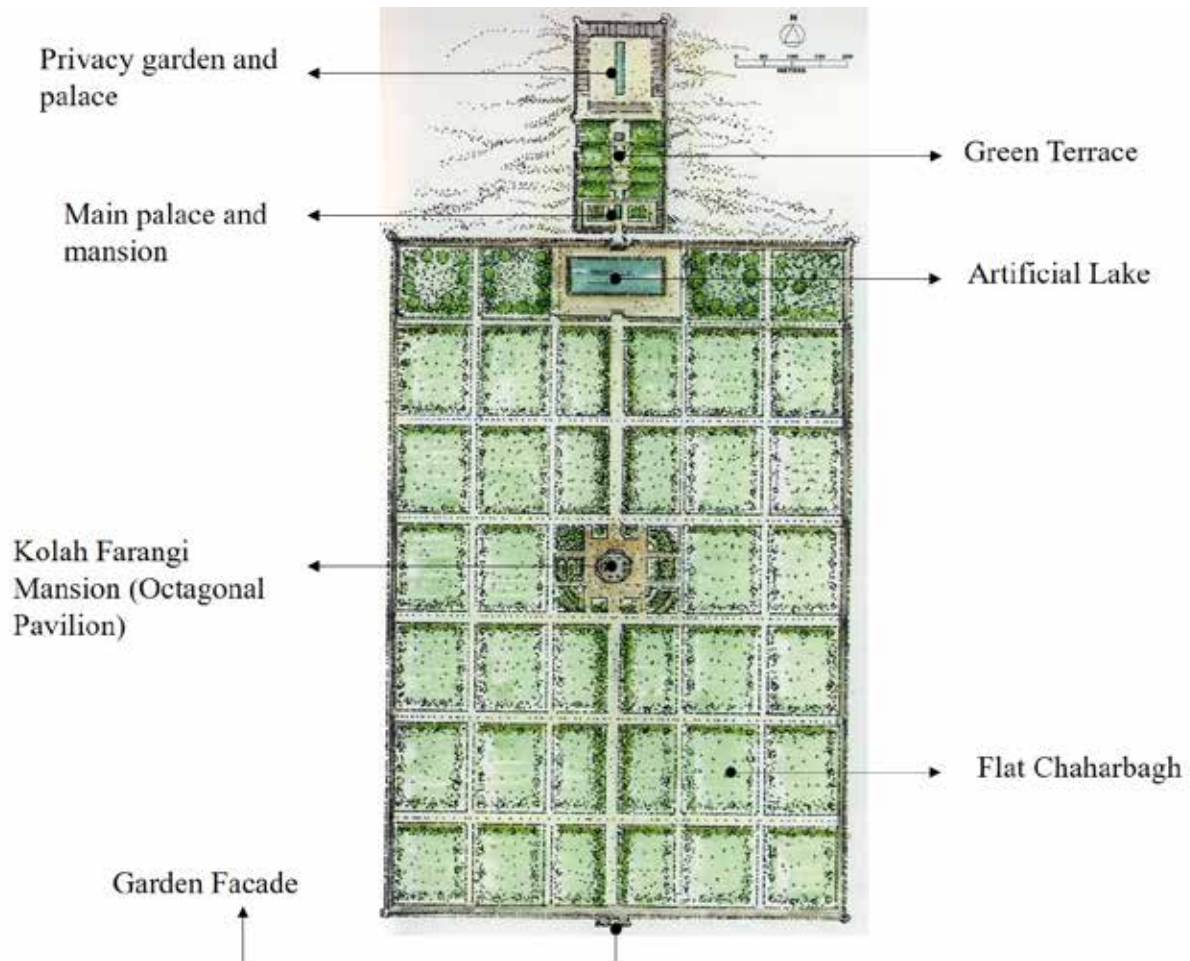


Fig. 3. The main parts of the garden-palace of Qasr-e Qajar. Source: Khansari et al., 2004.



Fig. 4. Location of Qasr-e Qajar outside the city wall and in the meso of Shemiran road. Source: Khansari et al., 2004

as statues, columns, bridges, pergolas (pergola mansion) and ... (Irani Behbahani & Soltani, 2003) are other signs of imitation patterns. This period is a symbol of the modernity of the Qajar kings.

Qasr Prison of the First Pahlavi Period: After the demolition of the Qasr-e Qajar in the late Qajar period, with the expansion of the city of Tehran, the bed of this area became

a place for government functions (prison and barracks). This change of use coincided with a change in the political and legal structure, and Qasr Prison was built as a modern prison on the site of the former Qasr-e Qajar (due to outside the city limits) (Shams, Karimian & Zarini, 2005). The prison structure was in the form of a large garden around the main building of the prison and the garden was surrounded by high prison walls that separated it from the outside (Jahanshahlu Afshar, 2001). The constructed building was an example of the large-scale modern Iranian government and administration elements and a symbol of power and discipline, law and order (Fig. 5).

Qasr Prison Museum of the current period: The environmental and social role of the prison has been weakened by the infiltration of the city fabric into this area. The expansion of communication networks and extensive developments of Shemiran Road have eliminated the inner and outer borders of the city and changed the nature of this whole from a large spot to a collection of fine-grained components (Saboonchi, Abarghouyifard & Motedayen, 2018). Currently, the Qajar pavilion is a single building in the meso of the Qasr prison compound and has become an element





Fig. 5. Transformation of Qasr-e Qajar into a prison in the first Pahlavi period. Source: Sputnik news, 2019.



Fig. 6. Top: Lithography belonging to 1840 AD. Kolah Farangi Mansion. Source: Khansari et al., 2004.

Down: The pavilion left from Qasr-e Qajar in Qasr Prison. Source: <https://fa.wikipedia.org>.

separate from the city structure, and there is still a strong boundary between the building and the city bed (Fig. 6).

### Landscape of Qasr-e Qajar

Qasr-e Qajar contains the history of the period when the city is known as its manifestation. In explaining this

palace, the analysis of changes in the city of Tehran and the factors influencing social, political, cultural, etc. on the form and concept of the buildings formed in it is an important point to achieve deep layers of meaning. Qasr-e Qajar is a symbol of a government building in all eras; In one period it was a manifestation of royal power and in other periods it was a demonstration of a government authority. This authority was sometimes manifested in the luxuries and splendor of the palace and the domination of nature, and sometimes it was meant in the establishment of maximum law and order.

The structure of a setting has always been a separate building from its surroundings with strong boundaries. Qasr al-Qajar is semantically a governmental landscape in the hands of authorities. The surroundings have changed in nature in different eras. These changes were shown in the gardens that indicate a common collective memory for the public and create the territory and mental connection between the city center and the summer as well as the urban network and its texture and the present age which is an important cultural and economic point of the city.

### Conclusion

The landscape approach provides the possibility of explaining the palace based on historical, social, political, cultural, etc. changes along with the initial descriptions, and mediates for synthesizing various influential components in the concept of the palace from micro to macro level and passing from partisan attitudes to general landscapes. In tourism, the palace aims to have a deep understanding of the tangible and intangible layers. Partial descriptions are made concerning physical-functional characteristics and physical communication with the substrate. The explanation of the whole art is also focused on why the palace was formed in the form of the whole landscape through the lens of social and political events, historical milestones, environmental factors and geography of the place, etc., and how it is interpreted by the audience. Combining these two levels results in a generality in the palace landscape as a palace-bed-event paradigm that interprets the concept of the palace based on the consideration of mental layers and objective bodies. This paradigm can be applied to the study of tourism of historic buildings by turning unmeaning descriptions into deep multidimensional aspects.

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