Critical Reviews
No. 8
September 2026
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Iranian Studies and the Problem of de-Iranization in the Architectural History of the Caucasia

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[DOI: 10.22034/2.8.74]

Introduction: An Epistemological Problem

Despite more than a century of research, the political issues related to de-Iranization have largely been overlooked by Iranistics scholars. This situation calls for critique from two perspectives: the meaning and sense of Iran in the history of Iranian architecture and the reflection of the concept and idea of Iranian culture in the architectural works of historical-cultural frontiers of Iran. The present author's critique addresses the problem of Caucasia through these lenses.

For instance, M. Y. Kiani, and M. K. Pirnia, in their works, discussed the historical process of Iranian architecture within the political borders of modern Iran, detached from Transoxiana and Caucasia. In such a sense, de-Iranization process has unfolded in two historical stages both of them illustrate the cultural, social, and historical disconnection of Caucasia from Iran.

Soviet Stage

Among the early authors contributed to the de-Iranization of the architectural history of the Republic of Azerbaijan are remarkable: A. Salamzadeh's work, which first classified and introduced Islamic architectural monuments in Nakhichevan under the title of the ‘Nakhichevan architectural style’, dose not explore the historical and architectural background of Nakhichevan in medieval Iranian historical resources as well as overlooked the Persian poetic inscription

DOI: 10.22034/2.8.74
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of Momena Khatun's tower tomb. And R. Efendizade has exposured the history of either pre-Islamic and medieval period architectural works of the Republic of Azerbaijan, without paying attention to the history of Iranian architecture. The book titles as *Die Kunst Aserbaidschans* by Bretanizki, published in the former E. Germany on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the establishment of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Azerbaijan (1988) is another noteworthy example of the narrative presents the architectural history of Caucasia disconnected from Iranian civilization. Such a de-historized historiography echoes the approach of colonial historiography identified by R. Matthews that the process of Arab nation-building in the post-Ottoman Near East required a new historical narration!

Post Soviet Stage

By this interlude, the history and stylistics of Islamic architecture in the Muslim republics of the former USSR is deconstructed and reformulated based on the doctrine of Turkish-Islamic art. The common character of authors from this second stage is to present ahistorical narrations that deliberately disregard previous studies linking the architectural stylistics of the Caucasia and Transoxiana to pre-Islamic & Islamic Iranian architecture. Meanwhile the Zionist work *Borders and Brethren: Iran and the Challenge of Azerbaijani Identity* is the latest example of such post-USSR fake books have sought to keep the theater of the Caucasian historical-cultural disconnection from Iran playing on the scene. Furthermore, by the collapse of the USSR the reality of de-Iranization, carried out through the process of stylistic and historical cleansing, became increasingly evident: In the post WWI established Republic of Armenia, only two Iranian architectural heritage sites, the Blue Mosque of Yerevan and the tower tomb of Amir Pir Hussein, were released from the process of cleansing.

Conclusion

From the author's view point, understanding the historical geography and historical-cultural frontiers of Iran as well as the cultural history of Iranian peoples are essentials for either methodological prerequisite and epistemological framework for any discussion or research concerning the history and stylistic analysis of Iranian historic architecture. According to the *Nuzhat-al-Qulub*, Iran extended from the Tigris River to the Oxus River, and from Caucasian Derbent to the Persian Gulf, encompassing the three present-day republics of the Caucasia not long ago.

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