
Talinn Grigor. Building Iran: Modernism, Architecture, and National Heritage under the Pahlavi Monarchs

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Talinn Grigor. Building Iran: Modernism, Architecture, and National Heritage under the Pahlavi Monarchs. New York, Periscope Publishing, distributed by Prestel, 2009, 237 p.

- 1 Grigor studies “the political underpinnings, pedagogical aims, racial schemas, and aesthetic ends of propaganda architecture” (p. 9) of the Society for National Heritage (1922-1979). The SNH decided which structures were worth preserving, built mausoleums to lionize and nationalize great men (such as Ferdowsī or Hāfeẓ), and ran museums and educational projects. Grigor argues that heritage was a key idea since “political struggles aimed at radical secular reforms, territorial integrity, and national unity. ... [It] was modern Iran’s political *raison d’être*” (p. 9). Sociologically, she also shows that the SNH started as a forum for the politically influential, modern educated elite in the 1920s, but became a larger apparatus in the 1960s and 1970s, with Farah Diba assuming a key role. Each of the six chapters analyzes one mausoleum from the perspective of art history; we thus detect the changing political, aesthetic ends pursued by the SNH. The author maintains that “when translated into architecture, modernization was characterized by the tension between destruction [of a site’s traditional character] and construction” (p. 106).

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