فصلنامه مدیریت شهری
(ضمیمه لاتین)
Urban management
No.**44** Automn **2016**
137 - 146
**Received** *4 Mar 2015*; **Accepted** *11 Aug 2016*

# Exploring the Historical Status of Tehran Citadel and its Appellation

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**Abstract**
The how and why of Tehran development and construction of its Citadel has always been of interest to researchers. At the same time, Issues such as its time of obtaining importance and prosperity on the one hand, and establishing and appellation of its Citadel as the most important official complex of the Qajar period on the other, are among the concerns mostly ignored by the scholars. Addressing the above- raised questions, the present study has been analyzing the development time of the city as well as construction and name of its Citadel by checking reliable historical references and also scrutinizing the related assumptions regarding them.

**Key Words:** *Tehran, Tehran Citadel, Golestan Palace, Qajar Period*

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*The present paper has been extracted from a Research Project at the Arak University by the same name and No. 13469/93.*

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## Introduction

Golestan palace complex has been one of the most important official and historical buildings of the Qajar period. There is no consensus on the timing of construction of the buildings. Some trace it back to Shah Tahmasb I of the Safavids and some others relate it to Karim Khan Zand. Yet prosperity of Tehran and its Citadel began with the establishment of the Qajar dynasty. On the other hand, different names have been used by different authors and foreign travelers to the complex, including "Golestan" as the most common of them.

There has been much speculation about the appellation of the Golestan Palace. Some have considered Aj Palace, one of the buildings in the complex as the reason behind its appellation. It should be noted that in the Turkish language, aj means "hungry: and they have argued that the Persian equivalent, i.e. :Gorosnegan" (the hungers) later renamed to :Golestan". Some assume the colorful flowers of the tiles in the palace as the reason for its appellation (Golestan means garden) and still others relate it to the gardens and park within the complex as its origin. The present study seeks to establish the reasons for the appellation and the time of construction of Tehran Citadel.

## History of Tehran

There are some facts about Tehran in history books, but the books by Muslim geographers, especially in the first centuries of Islam; there is no mention of this city. For example, such geographers and historians as Ibn Huqal, Ibn Rasta, Mas'udi, Ibn Khurdadbih, etc. have not mentioned it at all. At the same time, some geographers including Yaqut Hamawi (1957: 51-52) have described Tehran and its fruits and Mustawafi (1957: 59) has mentioned it as a prosperous village having nice weather.

Being known as one of the villages of Rey until the Safavids period, Tehran developed (Rumlu 2005: 1253) and gained strategic importance (Hosseini-Astarabadi 1987: 81-82) in this period, according to some references. Even a rampart was built around it by Shah Tahmasb I (Torkaman 1971: 123) which has a certain long length (Hosseini-Hayeri 1595).

In addition to the Persian writers and historians, some of travelogue writers and explorers visiting Tehran have pointed to some useful facts about Tehran. Perhaps the first European traveloguer naming Tehran is Clavijo (2005: 264) who has described it a big, pleasant, and enclosed city. Della Valle (2005: 229) also stressed the development of Tehran during the reign of Shah Tahmasb I and pointed to the gardens and tall sycamore trees. Visiting Tehran in 1627, Herbert (1928: 194) has referred to the Tehran bazaars and introduced the city's best monuments belonging to the bazaars as well as the governor. This indicates no Citadel in Tehran because if there were such a building, the authors would certainly point to it.

However, it was in the Safavids period that Tehran developed. This development was partly due to its vicinity to the shrine of Abd Al-Azim which had gained particular importance in this period, according to Vahid-Qazvini (2004: 554), and also its strategic situation as the main troops resort (ibid.:754). In addition to Vahid-Qazvini, other references including Ahsan Al-Tavarikh (Rumlu 2005: 1253) have noted the fact as well.

According to Hakim (1987: 436-457), Tehran's name has also been set out in some books like Asaar Al-Bilad and the city has been introduced as a vast village of Rey with residents living in the basements for the protection against enemy. According to him, in the late Safavids era it was added to the importance of Tehran, such that at the time of Shah Sultan Hussein, Ambassador of the Ottoman Empire, Dari Effendi appeared before the king in this city.

Tehran was also important and retained its strategic status after the Safavids. During the riots after the death of Nadir, Uzbeks led by Allahyar Khan invaded Iran and looted many



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areas but could not conquer and destroy the Tehran Citadel (Assef 1977: 229). This suggests there is a strong fort at the time of Nadir. In some references, importance of Tehran is assumed for its central location on the way to Azerbaijan, Fars, Khorasan and Mazandaran provinces (Mussavi Naami Esfahani 1987: 75). According to E'temad Al-Saltana (1985: 1157-1158), Tehran was the battlefield for the conflict between Mohammad Hassan Khan Qajar and Karim Khan. When Karim Khan sent Sheikh Ali Khan to Mazandaran in order to suppress Mohammad Hassan Khan Qajar, Tehran was the host venue for the troops (Ghaffari Kashani 1990: 508). When Karim Khan who came to Tehran to control the situation, resided in Shemiran and then arrived in Tehran and built a construction (ibid. 135-136). Some contemporary scholars believe that Karim Khan wanted to make Tehran the capital for the first time, but despite the construction of some new buildings within the Citadel, stayed in Shiraz (Adl and Hourcarde 1996: 36-37). In Shirvani (1919), Karim Khan has been introduced the developer of Tehran and Mo'tamed Al-Dowla (1892) has considered the city as having economic prosperity. According to the references, it can be concluded that the construction of Tehran Citadel was begun at the time of Karim Khan Zand. The purpose for the building might be having a permanent base for easy access and proximity to the residence of the Qajar in order to have easy access to the northern parts and countering their influence in the central parts of Iran.

After Karim Khan and during the reign of Ali Morad Khan, Tehran became more important than Rey (Shirazi 1986: 39-41). Although some believe that the fence was gone in Tehran after the Safavids, it should be said that in the era of Agha Mohammad Khan the fence was still present. According to Olivier's itinerary (1992: 66), Tehran was enclosed with walls and had gates with free entry but conditioned exit with the permission of the governor.

After escaping from Shiraz and repressing his opponents in the Qajar tribe, Agha Mohammad Khan was southbound to fight who Zandis and seized Tehran because the city has a strategic importance, such that the takeover of the city surprised Ja'far Khan Zand (Kalantar 1983: 86). This could represent the Zandis influence and suggest a base and a strong Citadel in Tehran. Agha Mohammad Khan after being in conflict with the Zandis and the seizure of Tehran decided to stay around it, because he did not trust its people (Maftoon-Donboli 2004:51). They had fortified castles and were for the Zandis (Saravi 1992: 122).

Construction of Tehran Citadel

Some (Kateb 2012: 78) believe that the construction of Tehran Citadel began by Shah Suleyman Safavi and some (Zoka 1970: 5) assume it to be during the Zandis era. According to Ghaffari Kashani (1990: 135) Karim Khan founded some establishments like a two-faced building for his court and constructs a garden around it. In addition, he repaired the Citadel, using various architects (ibid: 136). Thus, Tehran fence can be attributed to the Safavids and the initial construction of its Citadel to Karim Khan.

After the Qajar dynasty was established by Agha Muhammad Khan, some new buildings were constructed in the Golestan garden, Royal Citadel, and adjacent neighborhoods (Hedayat 1994: 18). In 1822 Agha Muhammad Khan took possession of the Citadel and began the construction within it until his murder that made it unfinished (Maftoon-Donboli, ibid: 52).

Also according to Olivier (ibid: 68), Agha Muhammad Khan is responsible for the prosperity of Tehran through various buildings, although the Golestan palace has not been named. As the traveloguers (Bosworth and Hillenbrand 1992: 333) write the master builder Gholamreza Tabrizi rebuilt the city wall of Tehran and construct an administrative private building within the Citadel which later became the basis for Golestan palace of



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Fat'h Ali Shah and his successors. The long lasting reign of Fat'h Ali Shah and Nasser Al-Din Shah allowed them to make Tehran palaces and constructions therein.

In the era of Fat'h Ali Shah some developments were done in the Citadel. Wilber (1962: 14) recounts that the reason behind these developments was his extended family including children and grandchildren. The period is characterized by increasing importance of Tehran, yet the main resort of Shah was the Negarestan garden in the suburban area Shemiran (Sepehr 1998: 225 and 516). The fact is also stressed in Hedayat (2001: 8290). However, Satck (2007: 160) writes that Fat'h Ali Shah's summer resort was the Narenjestan palace.

Given that Fat'h Ali Shah and Muhammad Shah mostly stayed in the Negarestan garden (in Shemiran) when they decided to stay in Tehran, it can be inferred that the Golestan palace had not been so prosperous before Nasser Al-Din Shah. According to Yves Porter and Arthur Thevenart (2003: 132), in their book Palaces and Gardens of Persia, the only monument since Fat'h Ali Shah's era being still original was Takht-e Marmar with its old shape.

The first US ambassador to Persia, Greene Wheeler Benjamin (1984: 126) introduces the Tehran Citadel as a barrier against revolts, having armory, Department of State and government building for the king to reside and also the court masque. Special doctor of Nasser Al-Din Shah, Edward Pollack (1989: 71) describes the Citadel perimeter as having over ten thousand and eight hundred meters.

The development of Tehran and the Royal Citadel accelerated in the reign of Nasser Al-Din Shah when the Tehran Citadel was equipped with carved stone paved streets and new buildings were added to it (Amin Al-Dowla 1991: 15). After his third trip to Europe, Nasser Al-Din Shah (1994: 150) ordered some extensive repairs in the Citadel to be done. According to Porter and Thevenart (2003) the windward mansion that had been built by Fat'h Ali Shah was rebuilt by Nasser Al-Din Shah.

E'temad Al-Saltana (1985: 1898-1899) writes that the mansion Shams Al-Emara was finished in 1867 and the New Year's feast took place there. Saray-e Golshan, another mansion was added to the place in the same era (Sepehr 1998: 1512). The buildings within the Citadel were as follow:

1. Takht-e Marmar Mansion and Garden;
2. Golestan Mansion and Garden including luxury halls such as AjHall, Bolur Hall, Narenjestan Hall, and Museum Hall;
3. Karim Khani Mansion;
4. Dorm Mansion;
5. Takye Dolat;
6. Treasury houses;
7. Shams Al-Emara;
8. Abyaz place;
9. Brelian palace (Atabay, 1977: 20)

The construction and development of Tehran Citadel attracted some foreigners, as Curzon (1892: 311) writes the Citadel was the most interesting part of the city with its one quarter mile square size in the south of Toopkhane (Artillery) Square.

As the references suggest, Tehran Citadel begun during Karim Khan's reign, developed in the reign of Agha Muhammad Shah and Fat'h Ali Shah, and became prosperous in Nasser Al-Din Shah era; however "Golestan" is a later name for the Citadel.

**Golestan Palace**

The lavish Golestan Palace is a masterpiece of the Qajar era, embodying the successful integration of earlier Persian crafts and architecture with Western influences. The walled Palace, one of the oldest groups of buildings in Teheran, became the seat of government of the Qajar family, which came into power in 1779 and made Teheran the capital of the country. Built around a garden featuring pools as well as planted areas, the Palace's most characteristic features and rich ornaments date from the 19th century. It became a centre



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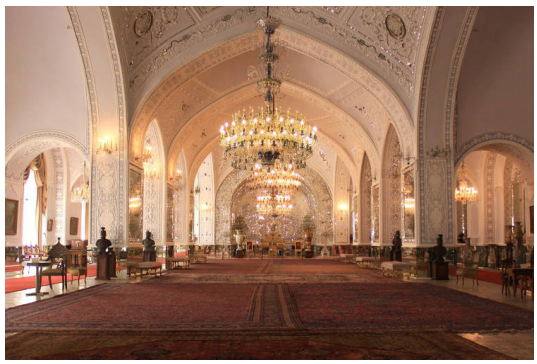


Fig 1. Golestan Palace (Iran (Islamic Republic of)) © Sorush Angabini

of Qajari arts and architecture of which it is an outstanding example and has remained a source of inspiration for Iranian artists and architects to this day. It represents a new style incorporating traditional Persian arts and crafts and elements of 18th century architecture and technology.

The Golestan Palace (Kāx e Golestān), literally the Roseland Palace, is the former royal Qajar complex in Iran's capital city, Tehran. The oldest of the historic monuments in Tehran, and of world heritage status, the Golestan Palace belongs to a group of royal buildings that were once enclosed within the mud-thatched walls of Tehran's Historic Arg (citadel). It is a masterpiece of beautiful garden and buildings consist of collection of Iranian crafts and European presents from 18th and 19th century.

Tehran's Historic Arg was built during the reign of Tahmasp I (r. 1524-1576) of the Safavid dynasty (1502–1736), and was later renovated by Karim Khan of Zand (r. 1750-1779). Agha Mohammad Khan of Qajar (1742–1797) chose Tehran as his capital. The Arg became the site of the Qajar (1794–1925). The Court and the Golestan Palace became the official residence of the royal Qajar family. The palace was rebuilt to its current form in 1865 by Haji Ab ol Hasan Mimar Navai.

During the Pahlavi era (1925–1979), Golestan Palace was used for formal royal receptions, and the Pahlavi dynasty built their own palace at Niavaran (Niavaran Palace Complex). The most important ceremonies, held in the palace during the Pahlavi era, were the coronation of Reza Shah (r. 1925-1941) on the Marble Throne and the coronation of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (r. 1941-deposed 1979) in the Museum Hall.

In between 1925 and 1945, a large portion of the buildings of the palace were destroyed on the orders of Reza Shah. He believed that the centuries-old Qajar palace should not hinder the growth of a modern city. In the place of the old buildings, commercial buildings with the modern style of 1950s and 1960s were erected.

Golestan Palace Complex consists of 17 structures including palaces, museums, and halls. Almost this entire complex was built during the 200 years ruling of Qajarian kings. These palaces were used for many different occasions such as coronation and other important celebrations. It also consists of three main archives as the royal photographic archive collection 'Album khane', the royal library of manuscripts 'Ketabkhane Nosakhe khati' and the archive of documents 'Markaze asnad'.

Karim Khani Nook (Khalvat e Karim Khani)

Dating back to 1759, this building was a part of the interior residence of Karim Khan of Zand. The basic structure of the Karim Khani Nook is similar to the Marble Throne. Like the latter, it is a terrace. There is a small marble throne inside the terrace. The structure is much smaller than the Marble Throne and it has much less ornamentation. There was once a small pond with a fountain in the middle of this terrace. Water from a subterranean stream (the king's qanat) flowed from the fountain into the pond and was later used to irrigate the palace grounds.

Works of European painters presented to the Qajar court are housed in the Pond House.

The Pond House was used as a summer chamber during the Qajar era. A special cooling system pumped water from a subterranean system of streams, into small ponds inside the chambers. The system was designed to pass



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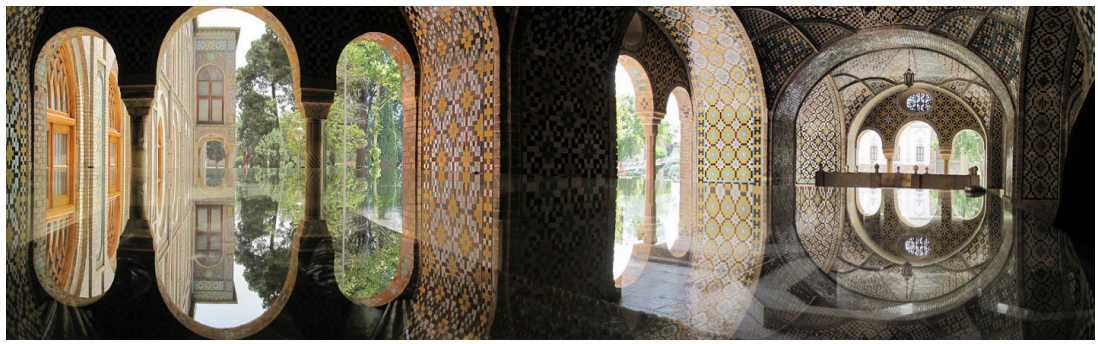


Fig 2. Panoramic view of the Karim Khani Nook;

through as many summer rooms as was necessary. The water was then channeled outside to irrigate the royal gardens. Due to the harmful effects of humidity, this system is no longer in use.

Picture House/Gallery (Negar Khaneh)

Nasser-alDin Shah was very impressed by the exhibition of artifacts and valuable objects at European museums during his second European tour around 1872. He arrived back in Tehran intent on building a museum hall to exhibit paintings, royal jewels, and other royal artifacts. The original collection of the Museum Hall is now scattered among Tehran's many museums. However, the paintings of the royal court are now kept at the Golestan Palace, with the European paints housed in the Pond House and the works of Iranian painters housed in the Picture House.

Brilliant Hall (Talar e Brelian)

Brilliant Hall was named so for it is adorned by the brilliant mirror work of Iranian artisans. The hall was built by the order of Nasser ol Din Shah to replace another hall called Talar e Bolour (Crystal Hall). Built by Fath Ali Shah, the Crystal Hall had been laid waste by the damp. The Brilliant Hall is famous for its mirror work and chandeliers. An oil painting by Yahya Khan (Sani ol Molk Ghafari), showing the decorations of this hall before renovations carried out by Mozafar ol Din Shah (r. 1896-1907), exists in the Golestan Palace. In the ethnography gallery in Horsham Museum of Horsham in the United Kingdom, an Iranian tile is displayed. The tile, according to Dr. Mehdittodjat (the former Deputy Minister of Culture and Higher Education of Iran), comes from the Golestan Palace. It comes from the entrance to the Brilliant Hall and was probably a reject (or may have been retrieved) from the rebuilding of the palace in the period 1867-92. It was found, smashed beneath a gatepost in Shipley by Mr. and Mrs. Ayling, who kindly donated it to the Museum. The plaque has been set in plaster, and unfortunately not all the glazed decoration survived.

Abyaz Palace

The Ottoman king, Sultan Abd ol Hamid, sent precious gifts to Nasser ol Din Shah. Reportedly, these gifts were copious and enough to fill a castle. The Qajar monarch decided to build an exhibit hall worthy of these gifts within the confines of the Golestan Palace. It is believed that Nasser-ol Din Shah, he, designed the structure, with a central hall large enough to house the carpet which was sent by Sultan Abd ol Hamid. Completed in 1883, the Abyaz (White) Palace now houses one of the most interesting ethological museums in Iran. There is a colorful exhibition of traditional Iranian costumes, as well as a folk art exhibition.

**Suggestions about appellation of Tehran Citadel**

Arg (Citadel) has been assumed by some to be derived from Trkish Arak meaning royal Citadel and by some to be related to Durka with the meaning castle (Hosseini Balaghi, 2007: 5). Benjamin (ibid) believes that it is related to English arc, with the intended meaning security tools. The Royal palaces of Tehran Citadel



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Fig 3. Abyaz Palace

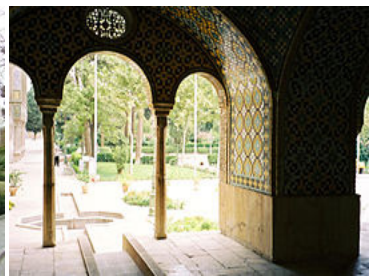


Fig 4. Garden of the Golestan Palace, seen from the Karim Khani Nook



Fig 5. Edifice of the Sun



Fig 6. Mirror Hall, painted by Kamal ol Molk

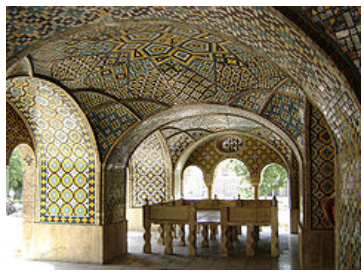


Fig 7. The Karim Khani Nook



Fig 8. Orosi windows in the palace

are called with various names as Negarestan, Narenjestan, Emarat-e Bagh (Garden Mansion), Arg-e Shahi, Aj Mansion, Bagh-e Arg, Bagh-e Homayuni, Bagh-e Mobarak, Arg-e Soltani, Arg-e Saltanati, Kakh-e Now, Begh-e Soltani, Eyva-e Golestan, Emarat-e Golestan, Bagh-e Golestan, Kakh-e Golestan, among others.

Jahangir Mirza (2011: 198) mentions Negarestan which was outside the Citadel, yet due to its vicinity to it has been referred to the while complex. It is still different from Ghasr-e Ghajar which is another name for the same place in Shemiran.

Mostofi (1998: 457) mentions Narenjestan which was originally a resort for the servants and Wales (1989: 87) cites some orange (in Persian Narenj) trees at the court feast that might be a clue to its appellation.

E'temad Al-Saltana (ibid: 1669) mentions Emarat-e Bagh and Emarat-e Bagh-e Mobarak the names of Tehran Citadel during Mohammad Shah period (1843) and Sepehr (ibid: 1512) believes that Emarat-e Bagh was constructed for the Chancellor.

Ghaffari Kashani (1865: 4) calls it Bagh-e Soltani and Bagh-e Arg (E'temad Al-Saltana: 1996), Bagh-e Homayuni (ibid: 1995), Arg-e Soltani (Sepehr: 967), and Kakh-e Now are among other names of the Citadel (Maurie, 2007:1996).

Golestan is of common names to refer to the Citadel and is still used. Emarat-e Golestan has been cited in Hedayat ibid: 361) and Sepehr (ibid: 1511) mentions Emarat-e Golestan to refer to the Citadel and Eyvan-e Golestan to one of its buildings. According to him (1343), the ceremony of presentation was held in Emarat-e Golestan. Serna (1983: 214) has cited the name Golestan for the Citadel without any comment on the appellation. Yet, some have mentioned some reasons for that. E'temad Al-Saltana (ibid: 1971) uses the name "Aj" for the complex. The name had been originally used for one of its buildings dedicated to dining of the courts men. Some (ibid.) refer to the Turkish word aj meaning the hungry men (gorosnegan in Persian) for the appellation. However the idea is very rare.

On the other hand, some contemporary scholars (Zoka and Semsar: 25) believe that the name refers to the Mirror Hall and its colorful tiles with paintings all over the complex. The idea, nevertheless, has not been confirmed in



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historical references. Still some believe that a building under the name of Golestan established by Agha Mohammad Khan and finished by Fat'h Ali Shah is the reason behind the appellation. The building has been described by Mirza Saadegh (undated: 8). Also according to D'allemagne (1999: 361) the name Golestan is used for the trees and flowers of a garden surrounding the palace. As Mostofi (ibid: 58 & 380) notes the garden Golestan was a small garden within the Citadel but later generalized to the whole complex. Maurie (2007:247) writes about a special ceremony before Fat'h Ali Shah in 1808 in a room within a square yard called Golestan in the Citadel. Some contemporary scholars (Takmil-Homayun, 1998: 25) write about a garden called Golestan surrounding the complex.

**Conclusion**

It seems that Tehran had been a village outside Rey until Safavid era but then gained importance and developed due to Shi'ite shrines, especially Abd Al-Azeem's. A great wall was constructed for Tehran in Tahmasb I and became a strategic military location. Yet, no reference related to that period mentions the Citadel. After Nadir, because of the competition between the Zandis and the Qajars. Tehran became very significant such that Karim Khan initiated the Citadel in the city. In Agha Mohammad Khan's and Fat'h Ali Shah's era. Some more buildings were added to the Citadel; its development and prosperity was initiated in the Nasser Al-Din Shah's era. On the other hand, the reason behind the appellation has been attributed to the Turkish word aj (meaning the hungry men or gorosnegan in Persian), but the real reason may be a building called Golestan or even a garden existent even before the Citadel and later has been generalized to the whole complex.

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