Chapter 5

Byron and Persian Architecture: Embodiment of Power

There are but two strong conquerors of the forgetfulness of men, Poetry and Architecture; and the latter in some sort includes the former, and is mightier in its reality: it is well to have, not only what men have thought and felt, but what their hands have handled, and their strength, and their eyes beheld, all the days of their life.[1] John Ruskin

Architecture is "built" meaning. It fatefully expresses who we are.[2] Charles Jencks

Architecture is always dream and function, expression of a utopia and instrument of a convenience.[3] Roland Barthes

5. 1. Introduction

Scott Wilson considers history, as a "discourse, consisting of realist narratives, [a] master signifier"[4]; and in Clifford Geertz's words, history is fundamentally "semiotic [...] web of significance"[5] that is essentially a narrative account, the product of a national heritage written by and through a culture. The architecture, relics and monuments of a land, which depict the past as well as the present, are its constitutive elements and, as Geertz argues, the "people's ethos—the tone, character, quality of their life, worldview, its moral and aesthetic style and mood"[6] is the outcome of this narration. When these signs (in Wilson's terms, the "cultural products shaped by a particular knowledge or discourse"[7]) are deciphered, traced and recounted by a travel writer—who like an ethnographer, as Geertz argues, is "establishing rapport, selecting informants, transcribing texts, taking genealogies, mapping fields, keeping a diary, and so on,"[8]—they convey the narration of a nation, the cultural vicissitudes, a nation's history and its life in continuum. The reading of these monuments illustrates the process of constructing the past. They, implicitly, give some intelligible account of the objectives and intentionality that are forged and fused into them at their time of creation; at the same time, they reveal their interrelationship with the social order.

Ross Murfin and Supryia M. Ray believe that within each culture there are "the interlocking conventions or discourses that caused a production or event to have a particular meaning or meanings for people within [such] a given culture."[9] Even though the tyrants try to write on the body of the societies subjectively, history records the events as they happened rather than ought to happen, and narrates the narration of the nations and the tyrants. It has a significant narrative form. Similarly, Hayden White, in *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (1973), declares that history combines "a certain amount of 'data,' theoretical concepts for 'explaining' these data, and a narrative structure for their presentation as an icon of sets of events presumed to have occurred in times past."[10] He tends to maintain that history contains "a deep structural content which is generally poetic, and specifically linguistic, in nature, and which serves as the precritically accepted paradigm of what a distinctively 'historical' explanation should be."[11] History is the organizer and definer of documents, and a mass of relevant elements, which form totalities.

The buildings, monuments, signs, customs, etc., which exist in every social and cultural structure reveal their underlying meanings and thoughts, as Wilson argues, being "political and politically analysable,"[12] since, I believe, they are "historical and historicizable."[13] With an eye on Michel Foucault, one can see that Byron gazes at these signs from "behind or beyond [...] for a hidden meaning," and searches for the "mentality of the civilization,"[14] while establishing a system of relations and the possibility of significations in the master signs. In *The Byzantine Achievement: An Historical Perspective, A.D. 330-1453* (1929), Byron argues that from the moment of man's "divergence from the lesser forms of creation, [he tries to] maintain not only his social organisations, tribal, municipal or imperial, but also, on occasion, the less concrete principles of religion, honour and mental freedom" (*BA*: 3). Architecture is one of the artistic ways through which man finds opportunity to express such principles and translates an "inward meaning into visible form."[15] John Ruskin had already stated, "architecture is the art which so disposes and adorns the edifices raised by man, for whatsoever uses, that the sight of them may contribute to his mental health, power, and pleasure."[16] Like Roland Barthes who is the lover of "both the city and signs,"[17] Byron is interested in architecture as "being the most functional of the arts, [and] essentially the art

of the mass. [Byron believes] it is in architecture that this tradition must find life again or prove itself sterile and the culture of the Revolution sterile with it" (*RT*: 55-6). Alternately, in *The Appreciation of Architecture* (1932), he asserts that "architecture is the most universal of the arts. It enshrines the past in a form more extensive, more varied, and more easily apprehensible than any other form of culture" (*AA*: 9); it "is a visual art" (*AA*: 13).

Clifford Geertz, in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (2000), claims that man is "a symbolizing, conceptualizing, meaning-seeking animal."[18] In addition to this view Jeremy Hawthorn states, "the use of signs [...] is a central part of being human,"[19] and to quote Barthes, "[meaning] sticks to man: even when he wants to create non-meaning or extra-meaning, he ends by producing the very meaning of non-meaning or of extra-meaning."[20] From another vantage point of discussion, man through encountering the cultural systems is perpetually in search of approaching, decoding, analysing, highlighting and rendering the interrelationships, significances, and values of the signs and their meaning in a social and cultural context. Moreover, culture, in Geertz's words, is "purely a symbolic system,"[21] whose meaning is "'stored' in symbols."[22] It is through analysing the cultural patterns and "ordered clusters of significant symbols, that man makes sense of the events through which he lives."[23] Accordingly, to quote Geertz, "in the study of culture the signifiers are not symptoms or clusters of symptoms, but symbolic acts or clusters of symbolic acts, and the aim is not therapy but the analysis of social discourse."[24] Based on Geertz's and Barthes's statements, one can argue that Byron, like an architectural critic, reads and traces the implied and encoded significances of the architectural constructions, unlike those whom he considers as mere blind tourists or "public opinion" (*AA*: 9). My understanding is that if these package tourists, to quote Barthes, "(because of cultural differences), have the impression of 'understanding nothing' in front" of an artistic creation, "it is because they want meaning and because" the artistic creation "(they think) does not give it to them."[25]

The expression of power has always been one of the functions of architecture, as Arthur Upham Pope argues, "the great buildings [in Persia, for instance] were personal monuments, demonstration of power, personality, rivalries, taste and status,"[26] and their extremely huge "size tells the imperial story."[27] In a similar way, John Ruskin argues that

"all building, therefore, shows man either as gathering or governing; and the secrets of his success are his knowing what to gather, and how to rule. These are the two great intellectual Lamps of Architecture; the one consisting in a just and humble veneration for the works of God upon the earth, and the other in an understanding of the dominion over those works which has been vested in man."[28] One can also refer to Foucault who adumbrates that, at the end of the eighteenth century, architecture becomes political and it functions as the "aims and techniques of the government of societies."[29] This function, Foucault believes, is in accordance with the order of things in the social strata, that is to say, "what a city should be [in order to provide] the requirements of the maintenance of order."[30]

In addition, Ruskin argues that "every form of noble architecture is in some sort the embodiment of the Polity, Life, History, and Religious Faith of nations"[31]; apart from the aesthetics of the buildings, they convey the underlying power that ordered them to be constructed, more precisely, power is inherent in architecture. It symbolises the desire, ambition, nature, ideal, weakness, strength and the (hi)story of a nation and State. Ibn Khaldun makes a similar claim and confirms that architecture is the first and oldest of the sedentary crafts; the conditions and results of a building—apart from various methods, climate and wealth—indicate the quality of architects, which depends upon the power of dynasties; in other words, architecture is the "expression of living authority and power."[32] Ibn Khaldun's comment on the interrelationship between architecture, monuments and the original power of a dynasty are very pertinent when applied to the quality and size of the structures erected in Persia during the Achaemenid, Sasanian, Saljuq, Gaznavid, Moghol, Timurid, and Safavid periods. For instance, at Firuzabad, Byron encounters the enormous dimensions of the palace of Ardeshir, which degrade the smallness of two Qashgai "tents encamped on a lawn below it" (*RO*: 166).

What Ibn Khaldun, Ruskin, Byron and Foucault remark on, concerning architecture, indicates the construction of a city and its architecture in relation to power; i.e., the cities "serve as the models for the governmental rationality that [is] to apply to the whole of the territory."[33] Moreover, it accords with the "system of policing"[34] in controlling and ordering the urbane life. It is "an element of support, to ensure a certain allocation of

people in space, a *canalization* of their circulation, as well as the coding of their reciprocal relations."[35] In short, the "built environment reflects the social system and the ways in which that system is expressed, reproduced, and experienced."[36] From another vantage point of discussion, the monuments of a country illustrate the attempts of the rulers at eternalizing themselves. As a result, each State tries to shape and reshape the architecture and introduces a new method into the architectural constructions, so that, one can, for instance, refer to the changes that occurred from the Achaemenid to Safavid periods in Persia.

Through Persian architecture, Byron writes Persian national narration, which is a cultural elaboration, and considers architecture as a communicational system of signs, analysing it with the stress upon power relations, since he believes that "art cannot flourish without political, or at least civic stability" (*RO*: 255). The history of architecture depends on the changes of the States and each tyrant engraves his will upon the body of a country. Accordingly, understanding these monuments takes place in a continuous dependence upon the States as well as the natural environment; without understanding the power relations and environmental factors there is no understanding of them. More to the point, architecture has a referential, aesthetic and expressive function, so does a culture as a multidimensional phenomenon; in this regard, as a traveller having a Barthesian gaze *avant la lettre*, Byron traces these dimensions, and the power, which are common in all of them, like a spirit permeating into different bodies.

My argument in this chapter is to show Byron's aesthetic analysis of the "splendour of design[s]" in architecture, and the way through which he illustrates the power relations by means of thickly described, and clipped "photographic illustrations,"[37] of Persian pre-Islamic and Islamic architecture. In Geertz's words, Byron determines the "social ground and import"[38] of Persian architecture and monuments. Regarding this point, for Byron, the substantial factor in dealing with architecture is to study the "building's historical antecedents" in relation to the objectives in its construction. More precisely, the "type of men who commissioned it, with the religious, social, and political thought of the time—with, in fact, all the extraneous factors that contributed to and reinforced the personal impulse of the architect" (*AA*: 16). As a result, each architectural design conveys the substantial factors in the process of its construction in relation to the intention of the ruler

who orders it to be built. Byron claims, "there are occasions when architecture resolves into history. The emotions, aesthetic and historical, refuse to be disentangled" (*AA*: 17).

My understanding is that, to quote Manfred Pfister, *The Road to Oxiana* carries the burden of Persian and Islamic architecture in the historical descriptions as well as in "the photographic illustrations of the travelogue that takes us from one building to the next."[39] For Byron, the "stones of the Orient" function as the "symbols and symptoms of the moral and intellectual health or pathology of the society that produced them."[40] Quintessentially, these monuments are an archive by means of which Byron traces the archaeology of the nation, and through a "diagnostic method" concerning Persian architecture, he "links the architecture with the political themes [...] and turns the aesthetic appreciation of buildings, ornament and sculpture into Ideologiekritik."[41] Byron illustrates that Persian architecture is encapsulated by both political and religious ideologies. What he is concerned with referring to the external world reflects his "states of consciousness"[42]; in other words, for Byron, architecture—as the most imperative cultural code worthy of his attention—functions as a master sign, which dips into his own inner world.

Moreover, I believe, both the myth of Persian architecture and Byron's *The Road to Oxiana* mythologize each other, since Persian architecture appears to be a "system of communication, [...] a message, [and it is] conveyed by a discourse."[43] Consequently, Byron's quest to find the character and origin of Islamic architecture transforms such monuments "from a closed, silent existence to an oral state, open to appropriation"[44] by the art critics. To what Barthes states about a picture, namely that it is a kind of writing and is "more imperative than writing, [and] impose[s] meaning at one stroke, without analyzing or diluting it," I can add this point that architecture also has such a momentous significance, since it imparts meaning immediately; it is a "kind of speech."[45] For instance, Persian architecture is tied to the general history of Persia, to a totality concerning the tyrannical power in the world, to the dominance of ideologies in the Persians' life, to the vicissitudes of Persian culture and art, to the Persians' worldview, to the Persian aestheticism, and to the mass of concepts of Persian pre-Islamic and Islamic worlds, and Byron by visiting the world of Persian architecture illustrates these principles.

5. 2. Byron and Persian Monuments and Mosques as Cultural Myths

The Orient has been traversed, studied, described, glorified and denigrated, mythologized, photographed, excavated and analysed by Europeans throughout history. Such enterprises foreground the antiquity and ancient monuments as well as the large quantity of human and natural resources of the Orient. These attempts illustrate the historical background of the Orient, which goes back to pre-history, far into the heart of history and life. The Europeans' interest in such phenomena shows their desire to add something to their knowledge concerning the Orient, and has a peculiar importance for those who invest time in studying the Orient, scientifically, historically, economically and politically. For instance, Persian architecture (which "has a continuous history of more than 6,000 years, from at least 5000 B.C. to the present, with characteristic examples distributed over a vast area from Syria to North India and the border of China, from the Caucasus to Zanzibar"[46]) attracts many Europeans to undertake a journey to this country.

Being a critic of architecture, albeit a self-taught one, which gives his writings an authority particular to himself, Byron is concerned with tracing two essential monuments in Persia, first, the per-Islamic architecture, and second, the origin and character of Islamic architecture. In each case, what is of special importance for him is the construction of monuments by the rulers as well as those buildings commemorating the religious leaders in Persia, which find meaning in power relations. His visits of Persian monuments and architecture are a way of entering into contact with and participate in the history of Persia. From the Persian panorama, two great eras immediately leap into his vision. The first is that of the pre-Islamic era; Persia was under the rule of the Achaemenids, the Parthians and thereafter the Sasanians, three classical Persian tyrannies, and there emerged Persepolis, Pasargad, and Susa. The second, which lies before him, is the Islamic era, when Persia was under the rule of Islamic dynasties, from which emerged the prodigious Islamic monuments and architecture. Byron's quest faces Persian architecture and history from 5000 B.C. to the Pahlavi regime, which covers a vast area. His descriptions that move from one piece of architecture to the next one illustrate not only the history of Persian architecture but also the rise and fall of dynasties in the history of Persia.

Even though *The Road to Oxiana* does not represent a precise chronological history of Persia, one can see the Persian renaissances in architecture created by great dynasties, from the Achaemenids, the Sasanians, the Saljuqs, the Gaznavids, the Mongols, the Timurids, and eventually, to the Safavids. The latter made Persia famous to the world as the country of blue domes. Byron acknowledges the "aesthetic ideal, [the] masculinist aesthetics of unadorned and energetic hardness," which Pfister compares with "a central masculinist strain in Modernist aesthetics from Yeats and Wyndham Lewis to Pound," and the "Persian renaissances that followed the great violent invasions from Central Asia"[47] in architecture are monuments of these dynasties. Pfister argues that *The Road to Oxiana* expresses predominantly a

> quest for greatness and the origins of greatness. The origins are located in the East, in Central Asia, in Oxiana, and from there they have radiated into Islamic, Byzantine and Western art. This comes to him as a 'revelation' [...] at the palace of Ardeshir, from which 'derive two primary architectural styles, in the wake of two religions: medieval Persian, branching into Mesopotamia, the Levant, and India; and Byzantine Romanesque, spreading to the confines of northern Europe' [...].[48]

Barthes believes that "there is a clear need for a more sophisticated model of meaning when confronting the numerous myths that make up a national culture. Such a model would need to be able to explain how an image, a building can sustain and indeed propagate different and often conflicting levels of meaning. Such a model would need to explain how something can at one and the same time be literally itself and the medium through which ideology propagates itself."[49] The architecture, sign, object, and the people's behaviour, all in all, one reads about and takes for granted have histories, and these histories are related to the specific discourses. These discourses promote definite kinds of power relations. Moreover, the architecture of a country, like a statement or a literary text, is "ideologically marked"[50] and "cannot be examined 'in itself' in terms of a self-identical meaning, but must be understood to produce a meaning through its relations to 'institutions, economic and social processes, behavioural patterns, systems of norms, techniques, types of classification, modes of characterization'"[51]; hence, they can be approached in the same manner as a literary text is analysed. Accordingly, the monuments and architecture of a dynasty are proportionate to their original power, illustrating the birth and decline of the

dynasties. Like a Barthesian critic *avant la lettre* who reads and analyses a text, Byron reads and analyses the architecture of the exotic lands from different perspectives. At Kazerun, encountering the ruins of the palace of Shapur, he writes:

> The place was named after its founder, Shapur I, whose relations with the gods, numerous victories, and capture of the Roman Emperor Valerian are depicted on the walls of a miniature gorge. As documents, these reliefs give a detailed picture of Sasanian fashions in harness, hats, trousers, shoes, and weapons. As monuments, they are an interesting survival of that uncouth impulse which prompted the early monarchies of Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Iran to hew themselves immortality out of the living rock. As works of art, they have borrowed from Rome, possibly through Roman prisoners, and mask their barbarous ostentation under a veneer of Mediterranean stateliness and opulence. (*RO*: 176)

For Byron, the architectural style not merely *does* illustrate the rise and fall of the tyrannies but it also functions as a symptom of a large cultural unity, a public expression of national genius and the spirit of a people, a master sign, and an important link between past and present; for instance, in Persia the Sasanian architecture and monuments "document an obscure passage of history at the junction of the ancient and modern worlds" (*RO*: 165). Specifically, he traces the momentous impacts on Persian architecture—both aesthetically and politically—from ancient time until it reaches the Safavid period during which the Persian Islamic architecture reaches its apex of glory.

5. 3. Byron's Quest: Oxus or the Character and Origin of Islamic Architecture

Byron's quest in Persia is twofold, the first refers to his ambition in studying Mongol architecture, which is to find out the origins of complicated façades of Islamic architecture; consequently, having met Arthur Upham Pope,[52] an expert on Persian art, Byron saw photographs of Saljuq tomb-towers that motivated him to go to Oxiana to find the answer. Christopher Sykes, Paul Fussell, Bruce Chatwin, Manfred Pfister, and Christoph Bode put stress upon Byron's quest for the origin and character of Islamic architecture. Apart from "Diez's picture" (*RO*: 227) of the tower of Gunbad-i-Qabus, which stimulated Byron to travel to Persia, or his desire to have "a sight of [Oxus]," (*RO*: 291) one can trace how Byron encounters and searches for a variety of monuments and mosques throughout Persia, and aesthetically describes the monuments, architecture and signs in power relations. Byron reads the language of architecture, a language that

produces complex patterns of codes and meanings; i.e., his architectural interpretations are in relation to previous architectural designs and the dominant power. Byron's second objective is stated in his parodic and satiric letter of application to get a visa, in which he glorifies Oxus with a political point referring to Matthew Arnold's poem. He wants "to behold, with [his] own eyes, the waters of the Amu Darya, famed in history and romance as the river Oxus, and the theme of a celebrated English poem from the sacred pen of Matthew Arnold" (*RO*: 290). Once more, he repeats his quest, "all we desire is a sight of the River" (*RO*: 291); eventually, the letter "has at least provoked an answer. Refusal" (*RO*: 292). Even though the title of his book is *The Road to Oxiana*, he gives also a few fragmented descriptions of the Oxus really and its significance, and in spite of the title "there is for a long time no mention at all"[53] concerning the river. Byron "never makes it to Oxiana, to Oxiana proper, i.e. Transoxiana north of the Oxus river, the cradle of the Timurid Renascence, as that region lies in the Soviet Union and as even the river itself is inaccessible to Western travellers for military reasons"; rather, the *route* of his journey takes another direction to "the Silk or Golden Road, [...] to the mythic Oxiana of Alexander the Great and Marco Polo, [...] the *road* to Oxiana, along which he improvises a number of revelatory destinations, none of them in the promised land of Oxiana,"[54] as he moves from one form of architecture and monument to the next. Approximately, when all is said and done "this mythic Oxiana appears only in a carnivalised form in the book itself, as a poem set in Oxiana 'from the sacred pen of Matthew Arnold' (*Sohrab and Rustam*)."[55]

Regarding his second objective, he went to the frontiers, a heterogeneous and liminal place of interactions between different cultures, such as Tajiks, Turkmens, Afghans and Uzbeks. The Oxus—English 'Amu River', Tajik 'Daryoi Amu', Turkmen 'Amyderya', Uzbek 'Amudaryo', Persian 'Amu Darya', ancient name 'Oxus River', one of the longest rivers of Central Asia—has always been such a place. It allegedly derives its present name from the city of Amul, which is said to have occupied the site of modern Chärjew in Turkmenistan. In its upper course, the Oxus River forms part of Afghanistan's northern border with Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. The empire of Cyrus and Alexander reached so far but no farther. Hellenistic empires of the Parthians or Sassanins, the Abbasid Caliphate, and the Mongols destroyed it in 1258, successfully extending their

power from Baghdad across Oxiana. The book is titled *The Road to Oxiana* without getting there; the scenery of the Oxus that Byron and Christopher Sykes finally present is more a critique than a climax, he comes close to it, actually glimpsing the Oxus shimmering in the distance below, but the Afghan authorities turn him away, and Oxus becomes an Eldorado for him. *The Road to Oxiana* is imbued with Byron's quest, and Pfister argues that the book "constantly redefines its purpose and destination, fails to reach what its title proclaims with mythical resonance as the ultimate telos and reaches its climatic moment of revelation less that two-thirds into the book and long before even getting near Afghan Turkestan!"[56] Pfister states that Byron's quest

> is not only haunted by a bewildering multitude of destinations—Central Asia, Oxiana, Turkestan Afghanistan, Persia—that destabilises its teleology, it is constantly deflected from its true course and direction. All sorts of contingencies interfere and occasion digressions and deviations (such as the excursions from Teheran in chapter 2 and into the South of Persia in chapter 4) and make him reach Afghanistan twice (in chapter 3 and 5) and Oxiana not at all. These contingencies range from the serious to the trivial and ludicrous, from the political and military circumstance that prevent his ever reaching the Oxus and Oxiana to problems with Christopher's diplomatic visa, from ill health and foul weather to non-appearing or malfunctioning Charcoal-Burners and other mishaps with cars, buses, trains, horses and footwear.[57]

During the 1930s, the Persian mosques were unveiled to the world for the first time. Subsequently, the art critics, who were interested in Islamic art and architecture from different parts of the world, were stimulated by Persian Islamic architecture, and Byron's enterprise was one of several related attempts to make such an architecture known to the world. It was an attempt to foreground the importance of the role played by Persia in the formation of Islamic art as a whole after the establishment of the Abbasid dynasty at Baghdad in 750, and before it from about the fourth century B.C., as well as the influence of Persia on the neighbouring countries from Hellenistic times onwards, in terms of decoration, plans of buildings, types of construction, manner of work and techniques.

5. 4. Persian Pre-Islamic Architecture: A traveller from an antique land

Although Alexander the Great destroyed and burned the "great palace of the Achaemenids at Persepolis in 330 BC, there are sufficient remains to form a picture of its classical architecture,"[58] and the character of classical tyrannies in Persia. For instance,

"Pasargad, along with Susa and Persepolis, forcefully express the authority of the King of kings,"[59] among them Persepolis, "built between 520 and 450 BC, display[s] the splendour of an empire which for the first time incorporated the whole of West Asia, parts of Europe, Egypt and north-western India."[60] Byron finds that in Persian art there is an almost unique ability to innovate form and meaning from conjunctions. It quotes from other cultures, and then adapts and introduces new ideas, quotations without quotation marks. One can find the traces of such innovations in Persepolis and other Persian pre-Islamic and Islamic architecture; in the remnants of the Achaemenids and Sasanians the impacts of Egypt, Greece, Rome, Babylon and Assyria can be seen. The site, Christopher Sykes points out, "represents Persian art with all the eclecticism, refinement, precision, and opulence of its subsequent achievements, but with hardly a trace of the inspiration which was to make Persia fabulous for beauty."[61]

Persian architecture is a "complete verb," to quote Barthes, "both active and passive, in which no function, no *voice* (as we say in grammar, with a piquant ambiguity) is defective."[62] The tripartite dimensions of meaning concerning Persian monuments and architecture are significantly related to, first, the informational dimension focusing on the factual and encyclopaedic description of the monuments, which is the communicational dimension. The second is the symbolic dimension, "as a regular correspondence between signifiers and signifieds."[63] The third dimension reflects the underlying ideology and nature of the nation embodied in the monuments. It illustrates many voices from the history of the nation and the rise and fall of tyrannies; it means that architecture becomes a metalanguage, a "world of signifiers, of correlations, and above all of correlations which can never be imprisoned in a full signification, in a final signification."[64] At this level of meaning one can "study that mysterious operation by which any message may be impregnated with a secondary meaning, a meaning that is diffuse, generally ideological, and which is known as the '*connoted meaning*'."[65] One can distinguish these three dimensions in Persian monuments and architecture.

For Byron, as in what Barthes states about a city and its signs, the Persian monuments, architecture and signs are like a "poem [...] but not a classical poem, not a poem centered on a subject. It is a poem which deploys the signifier."[66] Byron spends his time reading

the social and cultural strata through which he is constantly given "a second message to read between the lines,"[67] for instance:

> *Persepolis, March 1st.*—The tea-house is a mile and a half up the road from Persepolis. Being in the direction of Naksh-i-Rustam, I decided to go there first, and was just starting, when the people said I could not walk as the streams were too full. [...] The carvings on the cliff at Naksh-i-Rustam range over twenty centuries, from Elamite to Achemenian to Sasanian. Below them stand two fire-altars of uncertain date and an Achemenian tomb-house. Only the last is beautiful. The rest are negative art or repellent. But while the mountains last, the rock-maniacs who commanded these things must be remembered—and they knew it. They were indifferent to the *gratitude* of posterity. No perishable aestheticism or legal benevolence for them! All they ask is attention, and they get it, like a child or Hitler, by brute insistence. In this one sentence of gigantic ideographs, they have recorded a crucial moment in the history of human ideas, when the divine right of kings emerged from pre-history to the modern world. (*RO*: 178-9)

Apart from the factual description regarding the location and historical references about the site, at its symbolic and semiological levels, in Arthur Upham Pope's words, "Persepolis [...] exhibits magnitude, power and wealth, with a commanding force sufficient to evoke those powers."[68] (Illustration No. 1)[69] Imparting their message relating to the history of Persia, and recording "a crucial moment in the history of human ideas, when the divine right of kings emerged from pre-history to the modern world," these monuments and signs need to be analysed in relation to the dominant tyranny, discourse and ideology of their time of creation. In fact, they record the history of the "divine right" or divine will dating from pre-history, and reach the present time which is pertinent to the "history of human ideas." The "carvings on the cliff" illustrate the history of power in Persia, from the "Elamite to Achemenian to Sasanian." The "rock-maniacs" reflect the dominance of classical tyrants, hidden in these signs, who "commanded these things must be remembered," as long as life continues. The site is at one and the same time empty but full; it is the very presence of power in man's life, the people's ideology, the "rock-maniacs," the tyrant's indifference towards the "*gratitude* of posterity", "divine right," god and king, "pre-history", "human ideas," and eventually, in Nietzsche's words, will to power, which find form on these harsh and lifeless rocks.

> The accent is struck by the four tombs of the Achemenid kings, regular landmarks hacked out of the cliff in the form of crosses. Each is carved with a tedious uniformity of low reliefs. These begin at the top with the usual pact between god and king—the god at this period being a human scarab—continue with a couple of couches in the Tutankhamen style, one above the other, which enclose lines of tributaries, and then expand into the arms of the

> cross with a false façade of pillars in half-round supporting bull's-head capitals. The face of the rock between the pillars is covered with cuneiform writing. (*RO*: 179)

These "gigantic ideographs" record the vicissitudes in man's ideology and worldview throughout history. It illustrates the people's belief and ideals, manifested in the site "begin at the top with the usual pact between god and king—the *god at this period being a human scarab* [my emphasis]." That is, at one time man perceives God's presence in the form of a "human scarab," whereas at another period this image is transformed into a quite different object and representation. Elsewhere, the presence of two fire-altars "round the corner," which are "four feet six inches high, and could be mistaken, if painted brown, for a pair of neo-Greek wine-coolers," and the "Achemenian tomb-house [which] stands by itself, opposite the fourth tomb [...] known as the tomb of Zoroaster, a name long ridiculed by archaeologists until Herzfeld discovered that there might be some reason for it," (*RO*: 182) show that, in Laurence Lockhart and John A. Boyle's words, during the Achaemenid period Darius was "the most notable upholder of the worship of Ahura Mazda, one of the ancient pagan hierarchy of deities who, as a result of the reforms of Zoroaster [...] had become the supreme God of the monotheistic [Persian] faith."[70] The site leads us to understand how these people led their lives, and by looking at their architecture we get to know them.

Over and above all, Persepolis is a sign of the first expression of political power, a sacred national shrine and the spiritual focus of the nation. Upham Pope describes this national shrine as a "potent setting for the spring festival, Naw Ruz."[71] It is a "center of terrestrial power, built as an earthly copy of the ancient mythic City of Heaven," an assurance which expresses "concord with the divine."[72] It is the symbolic ritual palace-complex of ancient time, an expression of "political might and [the glorification of] royal pride."[73] It is a special ritual city which "not only [glorifies] the divinely sanctioned dynasty, proclaiming the political and religious unity of the state, it [...] also concentrate[s] and heighten[s] empire's appeal to the powers of heaven for fertility and abundance, particularly at the great spring festival of the new year."[74] Its tremendous size is an affirmation of power beyond man. Its beauty is the "result of beauty being specifically recognized as sovereign value."[75] In Persepolis, the "technical skill", "what the French call *faux bons*," the "art", "a soulless refinement, [and] a veneer adopted by

the Asiatic" (*RO*: 189) illustrate and rehearse the stories of Persian nation, and bring these questions into Byron's mind: "[how] much did this cost? Was it made in a factory? No, it wasn't. Then how many workmen for how many years chiselled and polished these endless figures?" (*RO*: 189)

The site also demonstrates different social classes during that time. Metaphorically, the monuments, carvings and cuneiform narrate the history of Persia. When these lifeless objects are exposed to a traveller like Byron—whose critical observation acknowledges their historical meaning—they come to life and begin to tell their history, to talk about their sculptors, who well have read the tyrant's passions, and engraved on these lifeless rocks the "history of human ideas." (Illustration No. 2) This reminds us of Shelley's poem "Ozymandias," in which he portrays the half sunk "shattered visage" of Ozymandias in the desert "whose frown,/And wrinkled lips, and sneer of cold command,/Tell that its sculptor well those passions read/Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things." The presence of the "Sasanian King" (*RO*: 180) and court, who is "tilting with a losing enemy" (*RO*: 181) or receiving homage is the manifestation of the king's desire; it is an indication of the Sasanian art, which was for the sake of the kings and had to represent the kings' will. In other words, such monuments narrate the never-ending (hi)story of man's life in relation to power, which is replaced by other powers continuously:

> A composition three times life-size of Shapur on horseback receiving homage from the kneeling Emperor Valerin. The horse has borrowed a Roman pose, but has no strength. Like all Sasanian reliefs it is unmuscular: a stuffed dummy. One of the heads on the east side has an Achemenian look. Is it possible there was an earlier relief here, which the Sasanids destroyed to make way for their own advertisements? [...] These figures have an Achemenian look too, though the king's head is typically Sasanian. Again I wonder if there was an Achemenian relief here before, or if this look is the result of conscious antiquarianism. (*RO*: 180-1) (Illustration No. 3)

The rock relief, A.D. 260, located in the province of Fars, shows the surrender of the emperor Licinius Valerianus, the consul under Severus Alexander, to the tenth king of the Sasanian Empire Shapur. Shapur, meaning son of a king, captured Valerian and kept him a prisoner for the rest of his life. The capture of Valerian was a favourite subject of the Sasanian rock carvings. The site is a sign that shows Shapur—who withstood Roman strength by astute military strategy and diplomacy and brought the empire to the zenith of

its power, consolidated and expanded his empire—on horseback, which means gaining mastery over another power, and potency, whereas Emperor Valerian kneeling before him, indicates defeat, being overthrown and captured, the downfall of a tyrant, and impotency. Two opposite forces, the one on horseback is the conqueror, and the other kneeling is the conquered. The site "display[s] the real genius of the period," (*RO*: 181) and is "a part of architectural history" (*RO*: 185) that imparts its history, the significance, the ideas beneath it and the intention of sculptor, workmen, technical skill, art, soulless refinement, and the artistic instinct. In the meantime, these monuments and "they alone, boast a gleam of true invention; they suggest ideas, they utter a comment, with regard to other doorways" (*RO*: 188). From Alexander, as its "first tourist," (*RO*: 190) up to Byron and after, the site reveals the implied messages about the history of Persia, showing the vicissitudes of tyrannies, the impact of one tyranny on the previous one and so on:

> There used to be a temple round it. One can still see how this stood from the bases of the columns.
> Since then, it has become the Tomb of the Mother of Solomon. In deference to this transformation, a miniature mihrab and an Arabic inscription have been carved on one of the inside walls. Across the mihrab hangs bunch of rages and bells; leaves of an old Koran were blowing about the floor. The ground inside the temple boundary is occupied by Mohammadan graves. (*RO*: 190)

For Byron, these signs are not mere documents; by thickly describing their intrinsic significance, he mythologizes them. He never separates them from the power that produced them; more precisely, like a book, the signs are "caught in a system of references" to other artefacts, they are as a "node within a network."[76] These monuments plus other signs in a social and cultural structure produce a network controlled by a system, which is dispersed in the people's life. Little by little, after dominating every aspect of the society, the tyrant constructs a specific discourse in accordance with his will; more to the point, the tyrant writes, crystallizes and eternalizes his power by means of monuments and architecture throughout the country.

Through encountering the master signs in the pre-Islamic monuments and architecture, such as Taq-i-Bostan and Bisitun at Kirmanshah, Persepolis at Shiraz, Kala-i-Dukhtar, Kala-i-Pisa and Atash-Khana or House of Fire at Firuzabad (as a sign reflecting the history of the fire-worshiping cult), Byron traces and underlines the history of Persia as well as Persian architecture. At Kirmanshah, the "cinematographic-like scenes of hunt

and court" recount the history of ancient kingdoms, the Sasanians whose "empty ruthlessness" he compares with that of the "German war memorial" (*RO*: 43). The "great cuneiform inscription" in Bisitun is like the "pages of a book" (*RO*: 43) opened to him, which conveys the implied (hi)story and sovereignty. It signifies the glorification of a monarch; his sanctity, his ruthless and irresistible power, his superhuman achievement in war and his personal prowess in the hunt. In the adjoining inscription, Darius the Great wrote:

> 'the lands of which I hold possession beyond Persis (*ie* Fars), over which I held sway, which brought me tribute, which did that which was commanded them by me, and wherein my Law was maintained: Media, Susiana (*ie* Elam), Parthia, Haraiva (Herat), Bactria, Sughd, Chorasmia, Drangiana, Arachosia, Thattagush (probably the Punjab), India, Egypt, Armenia, Cappadocia, Sparda (Sardis), the Ionians, *etc etc*.'[77]

It reflects the widest expansion of Darius's kingdom and Empire, which covered a vast area, "from the Nile to the Oxus, from the Aegean to the Ganges,"[78] and links the history of Persia with that of these countries; hence, the impact of Persian art and architecture on those countries. Simultaneously, it illustrates that few countries can rival Persia during the Achaemenid dynasty.

At Shiraz, "the South, the blessed South! It gives [Byron] the same exhilaration as a first morning by the Mediterranean," (*RO*: 152) which reminds him of an enormous complex of memories and sensations. It reflects the impact of space on Byron, which is repeatedly mentioned in the book. At Firuzabad, "the first signs of antiquity: a Sasanian castle perched on a salient of the east cliff," known as "the Kala-i-Dukhtar and Kala-i-Pisa," and the other "Ardeshir's great palace" called Atash-Khana or "House of Fire," (*mistakenly written* "Artish-Khana"), are the other ancient sites he encounters (*RO*: 162). Byron argues that these untouched sites built by the Sasanians "document an obscure passage of history at the junction of the ancient and modern worlds" (*RO*: 165). He foregrounds the palace of Ardeshir, having a considerable "importance" in "the history of architecture" (*RO*: 167). The carvings of Naqsh-i Rustam and Firuzabad, as L. R. Brown states, show "Ardashir holds the centre of the stage: on horseback, he topples his enemies with his lance; in a magnificent, quiet gesture, he receives the 'Ring of Empire' from the God of the traditional Zoroastrian faith, Ahura Mazda."[79] Not only did the sculptors carve

the images of Ardashir, his enemies, the "Ring of Empire" and Ahura Mazda on the stone, but also they mythologized and eternalized these signs in the history of Persia.

The description of these buildings on the one hand shows the vicissitudes in the history of Persia, on the other hand the impact of Persian architecture on the architectures of neighbouring countries, as David Talbot Rice mentions. For instance, the construction of cupola, dome, cornice, niche, scalloped canopies, and arch stem from Persian pre-Islamic periods. Of these influences, one can refer to "Persian ideas, [which] penetrated Byzantine thought."[80] Rice argues that "the love of bright colours, rich materials, elaborate costumes, and sumptuous interior decoration is a facet of Byzantine civilization which is in no way to be attributed to Rome, but entirely to Persian influence."[81] Elsewhere, he shows the reciprocal interaction between Persian art and the art of neighbouring countries:

> It would seem from the foregoing that the traffic in motives was in the main in one direction, from east to west, and that it was continued more or less uninterruptedly throughout the early Byzantine and the Sassanian periods, that is to say, from the fourth till the seventh century. [...] It is, indeed, in the realm of architecture more than in any other art that one might expect to see Byzantine influence being exercised in Persia, for the Byzantines were in advance of the Persians in technical methods, even if, as Strzygowski would have it, they lagged behind them in originality and imaginative conception.[82]
> [...]
> Byzantine textiles and, rather later, Byzantine ceramics, were often for long periods at a time almost as Persian in appearance as they were Byzantine. Byzantine stone sculpture was considerably affected. Byzantine ivories at times show Persian influence, as does Byzantine metalwork. Even in painting and mosaic can Eastern stylistic affinities at times be traced. Cultural history shows similar relationships.[83]

Rice refers to another impact that shows how "on stone sculpture the favourite Persian animal motives were often copied in the West; [...] one shows the age-old Persian motive of the lion and bull struggle."[84] This, in Arthur Upham Pope's words, symbolises "the interaction of the two essentials of agriculture, sun and rain, [as] one of the earliest persisting astronomical myths and perhaps the most important."[85] (Illustration No. 4) It forms into a "unified symbol, a 'symplegma,'"[86] it is an appeal to and the assurance of hope and security through magic power.

Byron argues, "only archaeologists see beauty in Sasanian architecture. The interest here is historical," since the buildings are historical and historisizable, for instance, the "palace [of Ardashir] founded at the beginning of IIIrd century A.D." is a "landmark in

the development of building" (*RO*: 169). The styles used in it, Byron comments, refer to "two primary architectural styles, in the wake of two religions: mediaeval Persian, branching into Mesopotamia, the Levant, and India; and Byzantine—Romanesque" (*RO*: 169). His description of another Sasanian palace in Sarvistan, as "the germ of that other great feature of Mohammadan architecture, the arcade," (*RO*: 169) shows that Byron's descriptions are deeply imbued with historical considerations. The architectural designs and monuments are the manifestation of the will of the dominant power. That is to say, the changes of the tyrannies transform the face of the cities in accordance with the tyrant's objectives.

Visiting "Kala-i-Dukhtar at Firuzabad," Byron concludes that the building "provides another important contribution to Mohammadan architecture of the dome on squinches: the ivan or open-fronted hall. This form, more than any other, changed the character of the early mosques" (*RO*: 171). The Persian contributions to Mohammadan architecture, the notions of a dome on squinches and mainly the ivan "have changed the face of every town in Islam" (*RO*: 172).[87] For Byron, the pre-Islamic architecture is a starting point as well as a basis through which the Islamic architecture takes shape; therefore, it provides a significant contribution to the Islamic architecture.

Byron reckons the date of the carvings on the cliff of Naksh-i-Rustam "over twenty centuries, from Elamite to Achemenian to Sasanian," (*RO*: 179) which reflects the long history of Persia. The effect of the site on him is such that he states these monuments "have recorded a crucial moment in the history of human ideas, when the divine right of kings emerged from pre-history to the modern world" (*RO*: 179). In his description of the site, Byron repeatedly points out the presence of the Sasanians, their king and his "tilting with an enemy," or of Shapur who is "receiving homage from the kneeling Emperor Valerian," (*RO*: 180) and argues that "whatever the Achemenians did on this particular surface, the Sasanians were preceded by somebody, who seem to have lived about the middle of the second millennium B.C., and may therefore be called Elamite" (*RO*: 181). Such descriptions transform these lifeless and silent monuments into oral statements, a kind of speech ideologically marked; in short, these monuments become a myth.

At Persepolis, Byron encounters two fire-altars and a tomb that belonged to Zoroaster, and calls it "real architecture." This shows that they represent the "real architectural

tradition of which [European] were otherwise ignorant" (*RO*: 182). The tomb-house derived "from a form of brick or mud conveying an idea of content" (*RO*: 182). Byron traces the "spacing of ornament on a flat wall" as a "surprising and significant principle, on which all good domestic building since the Renascence has depended, fully stated in Persia about the middle of VIth century B.C." (*RO*: 182). He criticises those travellers who have come here (Persepolis) and seen nothing important in the site, and is surprised since the visitors have paid "little attention, from this point of view, [...] to Nakhsh-i-Rustam" (*RO*: 182). In his argument with Herzfeld, Byron (emphasizing his aim in visiting Persepolis) argues: "[all] I'm interested in here is the architectural forms, not because they are old, but because they are a part of architectural history" (*RO*: 185). This statement shows that he dissociates himself both from those travellers whose objectives are antiquarian and from those who fulfil the objectives of their States. Therefore, the significance of Byron's view about architecture is quite clear, and his objective is more critical than that of the mere tourists', since he believes that one can trace in architecture the evolution of the whole world by finding how architectures of the world are so interconnected that it is impossible to separate them from each other. They have influenced each other; hence, these historical interactions convey the cultural transactions among the nations.

Byron's emphasis on the survival of stone used with "such opulence and precision" in Persepolis indicates that in ancient Persia the tyrants used such a substance in order to leave behind something strong, "impervious to age" and extremely hard which can resist the passing of time, eternalizing their power.[88] This reminds us of Ruskin who states:

> when we build, let us think that we build for ever. Let it not be for present delight, nor for present use alone; let it be such work as our descendants will thank us for, and let us think, as we lay stone on stone, that a time is to come when these stones will be held sacred because our hands have touched them, and that men will say as they look upon the labour and wrought substance of them, 'See! This our fathers did for us.'[89]

Persepolis has such a great splendour that affects Byron, who recalls the history of the place from which Darius, Xerxes and Alexander were gazing at Asia. He illustrates the effect of ancient Persia and the magic breath of the site which stretched "out towards China" that "left no room for the aesthetic question, or for any question" (*RO*: 187).

Cyrus's tomb is another building Byron encounters, whose first European warrior/tourist was Alexander the Great, and as the history of Persia moves forward the tomb turns to become "the Tomb of the Mother of Solomon. In deference to this transformation, a miniature mihrab and an Arabic inscription have been carved on one of the inside walls. Across the mihrab hangs a bunch of rags and bells; leaves of an old Koran. [...] The ground inside the temple bounding is occupied by Mohammadan graves" (*RO*: 190). This shows that Byron's attempt to find the character and origin of Islamic architecture is focused first on the pre-Islamic architecture and then on its effects on the Islamic architecture.

5. 5. Persian Islamic Architecture

After the invasion of Islam, even though the victory in the political and religious fields was for the Arabs, in art, thought, and culture, it was Persia which survived and gained victory. In Rice's words, "Persian art, Persian thought, Persian culture [...] flourish[ed] anew in the service of Islam, and, impelled by a new and powerful driving force, their effect was felt in a widely extended field from the early eighth century onwards."[90] With the arrival of Islam in Persia, several renaissances occurred in Persian art and architecture. Persian architects establish new methods in the construction of buildings, hence Persianizing the effects. Byron in his architectural descriptions and analysis, tracing the impacts of Persian dynasties on art and architecture, highlights the Timurid renaissance, as a significant period in Persian architectural achievement. For instance, during the reign of Shah Rukh, the most important monuments are those erected by Gohar Shad, Shah Rukh's wife, in Herat, and one mosque adjoining the shrine of Imam Reza at Mashhad.

Arthur Upham Pope argues that Persian architecture and monument are "the most beautiful and majestic structures the world has ever seen. In meaning and purpose, monumental Persian architecture [is] primarily religious—at the beginning, magical and invocational in character—by which man [is] brought into communication and participation with the power of Heaven."[91] Understanding the form and meaning of Islamic Architecture, which is a harmonious arrangement of signs, is a complex phenomenon; it is related to the Islamic faith, putting stress on the "maintenance of unity and discipline."[92] The signification of Islamic architecture, in Barthes's words, "occurs as

soon as it is fabricated, [and] normalized."[93] It provides us with a prominent sign system of the Islamic world, which illustrates a cohesive unity of theology, commerce, war, private pleasure, mysticism, power and technology. The concept of unity is manifested in the design and construction of Islamic architecture, blending straight and curved lines, the former as static and the latter as dynamic symbolising motion and life. They illustrate an organic unity, harmonic proportions and, to quote Ruskin, "beauty, [which are] derived chiefly from the external appearances of organic nature."[94] Tracing the beauties of a building, one can understand that "all perfectly beautiful forms must be composed of curves; since there is hardly any common natural form in which it is possible to discover a straight line,"[95] and Islamic architecture has this characteristic.

Persia's huge domes derived from such prototypes as the rubble masonry domes of Sasanian, which are constructed without any support, and decorated with various divine names, as corresponding to divine beauty, are the best examples of such an organic unity and beautiful perfect form composed of curves. The Persian word *Gunbad*, meaning dome, connotes the Heaven, the Universe, the Fortune's Wheel, and when attached to other words it forms symbolic meanings, such as *Gunbad-i-Abgon* (the blue dome); *Gunbad-i-Peer* (the old dome), *Gunbad-i-Daewar* (the circulating dome), *Gunbad-i-Zar* (the golden dome), *Gunbad-i-Kabood* (the dark-blue dome), all connoting the blue sky, Fortune, universe and life. In this regard, the dome of the mosque is an element presenting a strong resemblance to the universe, a symbolism which "serves as a reminder to the Muslim of his earthly duties."[96] (Illustration No. 5)

Basically, the construction of a building is conceived as the interrelationship between the whole and the component parts, and the creation of a harmonious, single organic unity. Islamic architecture, having such a unity at its core, converts and transforms the "material world into a spiritual one,"[97] merging with a system of values, and simultaneously, embodying these values. Like other forms of artistic constructions, Islamic architecture is a response to and a product of the interaction of cultural, social, economic and environmental factors of the time, as well as the people's worldview and their ways of life. The adjective *Islamic* which is attached to architecture underlines the ethos of the Muslim world; it symbolises "the ideal order of the world as perceived and understood by Islam."[98]

On the one hand, Islamic architecture is a system and an intersection of sacred symbols, a meaningful embodiment and demonstration of the people's ethos, and on the other hand, it is the embodiment of an ideology. In Joseph A. Wilkes's and Robert T. Packard's words, it is a means through which "power [is] transmitted and shared, and [a] place in which the equality between ruler and ruled [is] manifested."[99] Since, the "sacred symbols function to synthesize a people's ethos,"[100] as Clifford Geertz argues, understanding these symbols is related to "a particular style of life and a specific (if, most often, implicit) metaphysic."[101] These symbols are the "tangible formulations of notions, abstractions from experience fixed in perceptible forms, concrete embodiments of ideas, attitudes, judgments, longings, or beliefs."[102] They "relate an ontology and a cosmology to an aesthetics and a morality: their peculiar power comes from their presumed ability to identify fact with value at the most fundamental level, to give to what is otherwise merely actual, a comprehensive normative import."[103]

One of the significant signs through which Islamic ontology and cosmology finds an opportunity to impart its particular message is the mosque. With the advent of Islam and its expansion into the conquered lands and regions, the occupiers used the existing buildings as the first mosques. Accordingly, in the early days of Islam, "the first mosques were churches and temples which were converted to serve the needs of the new Muslim rulers"; for instance, in Persia, "the Muslims converted many temples and existing buildings into mosques."[104]

Byron, in Barthes's words, "sketches a semiotics" of the travellees, and considers a city and any other object as "a discourse, and [...] actually a language."[105] Byron analyses the signs in Islamic architecture in a Barthesian way *avant la lettre*. Each sign accords with the significances underlying it, such as the inscriptions, the colours mainly blue, the physical constructions, the substances, the direction of their doors or Mihrabs, which is towards Mecca, the domes, the minarets, and the images on the tiles. Barthes states that a "sign is what repeats itself. Without repetition there is no sign, for we could not *recognize* it, and recognition establishes the sign."[106] In Persia, the mosque, as an Islamic sign and a recurrent *motif*, is constructed, reshaped and perpetually repeated.

Byron traces the strata of meaning in Islamic designs and constructions with an eye to the dominant power, which ordered these monuments and mosques to be constructed, as

well as Persian renaissances which occurred in architecture, with regard to the history of Persia. He starts his journey, as the title of the book suggests, following the route to Oxiana in search of the origin and character of Islamic architecture, to express his aesthetic appreciation of Persian architecture based on the renaissances which occurred during different periods. Contrary to the perception of the fiends of "Omar Khayam" (*RO*: 79) about the Orient, and especially Persia, he encounters Persian masculinity, Persia without an inferiority complex, Persian myths, the peace of Islam, etc. Saying goodbye to the West,[107] Byron enters Damascus in September 12th, and his first impression is:

> Here is the East in its pristine confusion. My window looks out on a narrow, cobbled street, whose odour of spiced cooking has temporarily vanished in a draught of cool air. It is dawn. People are stirring, roused by the muezzin's unearthly treble from a small minaret opposite, and the answer of distant others. The clamour of vendors and the clatter of hoofs will soon begin. (*RO*: 26)

Byron encounters a different world. His experience is neither organised nor 'anti-Orientalist.' The East shows itself to Byron in "its pristine confusion." Like a novelist, he first gives a haptic image, "a draught of cool air," and then a visual image, his "window", "a narrow, cobbled street"; next, an olfactory image, the "odour of spiced cooking." "Spiced cooking" is a sign, it is, in Barthes's words, "a basic element"[108] of the Eastern world and an "alimentary sign"[109] of Damascus. The next is an auditory image, "the muezzin's unearthly treble from a small minaret opposite, and the answer of distant others." It is a sign that refers to the Islamic world. The Eastern Islamic world, here Damascus, exposes itself to Byron through two religious signs, the "muezzin's unearthly treble," and the "minaret" each as a sign imparting significant messages. The word "unearthly," which describes the muezzin's voice, is an indication of elevation beyond the sublunary life towards a Heavenly and Divine life. The rhythm of the day starts with such a call to prayer, and it is echoed and answered by other muezzins from farther minarets. The whole atmosphere at that moment is full of such a divine treble. It is as if the East through the "unearthly treble" from the minarets invited Byron to enter into the world of Islam, to experience and eventually to be influenced by it. Life in Syria is a mixture of religion and daily activities; in short, religion encapsulates the people's life. The verb "stirring" illustrates how life is full of vivacity, and this vitality is duplicated

and accentuated by the "muezzin's unearthly treble." Moreover, the verb "clamour" intensifies the cheerfulness, happiness, and dynamism in the people's life. Metaphorically, the unearthly, religious treble injects life into the people's body at dawn, and makes them "stir, clamour, and clatter." Here, life begins with such an "unearthly" summon. Byron's use of these verbs signifies the movement and exuberance in the people's life.

Ronald Lewcock elucidates the history of the minaret: it "began as low, square masonry tower on the pattern of pre-Islamic Syrian towers, which had been built for both pagan and Christian purposes. As soon as Islamic architects desired to make them higher, however, they resorted to the stepped storeyed construction typical of Roman lighthouses."[110] Jonathan M. Bloom specifies the functions of minarets: "the traditional explanation of the minaret has been offered by Creswell and others, essentially following the lead of Max van Berchem, who proposed a tripartite analysis of the problem: functional, philological, and formal."[111] (Illustrations Nos. 5 and 11)

The minarets are constructions with a particular function relating to religion. Listening to the muezzin's voice signifies a divine communication; through such a call to prayer and listening man 'is linked to God.' The people's listening to the "muezzin's unearthly treble" signifies the importance of *who speaks* and from *where* the voice is emitted. Another implied meaning of the minaret refers to a life which is tied to religion, here Islam. The minaret is an intersection, a combinative religious factor which ties the muezzin, his voice, the content and concept behind his voice, his intention, the people, their prayer, and their belief and ideology together.

The minaret as an artistic construction, an Islamic myth, indicates both sacred and religious art. It shows the relation of body and soul, and is a bridge between the material and the spiritual worlds. In the Islamic world, it is an element which connects the sky to the earth, it shows the presence of Islam; in other words, it serves an Islamic function which refers to the 'Divine Majesty.' The verticality of minaret represents the Muslims' quest to reach Heaven, where God is sitting, and signifies a truth which is subjected to a peculiar will. The repetition of the muezzin's unearthly treble from one minaret to the next, at least five times during twenty-four hours, is an invitation to enter into the Islamic world. The very paragraph ends with the verb "begin" which echoes the religious life.

To show in a clipped photographic way the Persian Islamic monuments and architecture Byron encounters, let us have a brief look at these constructions: "a fluted grave-tower at Ray"; at Damghan, "two circular grave-tower," and at Gurgan, Gunbad-i-Qabus from XIth century Saljuqs, and "a ruined mosque, known as the Tarikh Khana or 'History House'"; at Maragha, the "polygonal grave-tower," which belongs to XIIth century, the Saljuqs period, and Rasadkhana or "star-house," which belongs to XIIIth century, the Mongol period; the "dome of Sultaniya," (1313) which belongs to the Mongol and Timurids period; at Kirman, the Friday Mosque of XIVth century, Kuba-i-Sabz, which has the Timurid style; "Shrine of Bayazid" belongs to XIVth century; at Mashhad, Qadam Gah, XVIIth century, Masjid-i-Shah, Mosque of Gohar Shad, between 1405 and 1418, the Mongol Period, and Shrine of Imam Reza; at Isfahan, Maidan Shah, Chihil Sutun, Bazaar, Masjid-i-Shah, Ali Qapu, Mosque of Sheikh Lutfullah, the Friday Mosque which belong to the Safavid period, XVIII century; at Shiraz, the Friday Mosque; and at Mahan, the Shrine of Niamatullah. They all refer to the glorious periods in Persia during which Persian artistic innovations had its greatest impact upon Islamic architecture. These monuments together indicate the instability in the life of the tyrants and the appearance and disappearance of different tyrannies, from the tenth century beginning with the Qaznavids (977—1186), the Saljuqs (1038—1194), the Mongols (1256—1353), the Mozaffarids (1314—93), the Timurids (1370—1506), and eventually to the eighteenth century, which ended with the Safavids (1501—1732).

According to Arthur Upham Pope, "during the tenth century Persia again produced its own constellation of poets, philosophers, mathematicians, astronomers, physical scientists, historians, geographers and lexicographers. [...] In comparison, the same years in Europe were dark indeed."[112] This is an important factor which shows the influence of an intellectual atmosphere on architecture. The rulers rivalled each other in patronizing poets, artists and scholars, such as Qabus-ibn Wushmgir, XIth century, who was a poet, a scholar and patron of the arts, and a leading proponent of a new authority in astrology. Paul Fussell and other critics, who all quoted Byron, misspelled the word *Gunbad-i-Qabus* as *Gumbad-i-Kabus* (the word *Gumbad* does not exist in Persian). The Gunbad-i-Qabus actually is core of the motives, which stimulated Byron to come to Persia in the first place. Fussell's remark is worth quoting here

> from the desert [of Gurgan] a thousand miles away, in adjoining Persia, rise a number of odd and beautiful medieval brick tomb-towers of startling height and purity, pre-eminently 'masculine,' even phallic. Byron had seen photographs of some in a book while he was in India, and Sykes remembers Byron's wondering whether they weren't somehow the source of much that was admirably un-dainty in early Islamic architecture. One of the brick towers had impressed him especially. It was the [Gunbad-i-Qabus], the tower of Qabus [*mistakenly written* 'Gumbad-i-Kabus']: It was a photograph of the [Gunbad-i-Qabus] alone, Byron says, that drew him to Persia. He had to see it with his own eyes.[113]

In a thick description, Byron depicts the Gunbad-i-Qabus that "stood up against the blue of the mountains."

> A tapering cylinder of café-au-lait brick springs from a round plinth to a pointed grey-green roof, which swallows it up like a candle extinguisher. The diameter of the plint is fifty feet; the total height about a hundred and fifty. Up the cylinder, between plinth and roof, rush ten triangular buttresses, which cut across two narrow garters of Kufic text, one at the top underneath the cornice, one at the bottom over the slender black entrance. [...] It is the opposition of this vertical momentum to the lateral embrace of the Kufic rings that gives the building its character, a character unlike anything else in architecture. [...] For more than a thousand years this lighthouse has announced [Qabus's] memory, and the genius of Persia, to the nomads of the Central Asia sea. Today it has a larger audience, which must wonder how the use of brick, at the beginning of the second millennium after Christ, came to produce a more ornamental, than has ever been seen in that material since. [...] I still hold the opinion I formed before going to Persia, and confirmed that evening on the steppe: that the [Gunbad-i-Qabus] ranks with the great buildings of the world. (*RO*: 230-31) (Illustrations Nos. 6 and 12)

The Gunbad-i-Qabus, a cylindrical tower with a perfect conical roof, is one of the most prominent monuments of Eastern Islamic architecture. Rising fifty-one meters above a ten-meter artificial hillock, the tower dominates the surrounding plain of Gurgan. It is associated with the advent of the Central Asian Turks; flamboyantly monumental, it presages the great Saljuq buildings of the late XIth century. Qabus-ibn Wushmgir ordered the building, called it a *qasr*, meaning a palace, during his lifetime in 1006 to house his remains and commemorate his name. His interests in art, poetry and astrology clearly play a role in the design of the tower. It is obviously an extraordinary monument, and Qabus stresses its astounding height. Not only is this tomb tower considerably taller than contemporary tomb towers; its height is further highlighted by locating the building on a ten-meter artificial hillock. In its height, it is reminiscent of the group of tomb-towers built in Persia and the eastern Islamic world at the same time. The monument dominates the plain and certainly deserves its lofty epithet. The cleverly devised and tightly woven

text on the tower might well have been the work of the monarch himself, for Qabus was a good poet and favoured the new rhymed prose style.[114] The design of the inscription also shows his hand as a calligrapher, for the inscription includes not only verbal but also visual puns. By this period, manuscripts were usually written in a cursive hand, sometimes with Kufic headings. The inscription marks a step in the development of the use of writing on Persian Islamic architecture, a development that will be continued under the Saljuqs and Ghaznavids in the following century; the inscription has been integrated into the construction.

Byron describes the splendour and precision of the tower and wonders "how the use of brick, at the beginning of the second millennium after Christ, came to produce a more heroic monument, and a happier play of surfaces and ornament, than has ever been seen in that material since" (*RO*: 230-31). He ranks the tower "with the great buildings of the world," and points out "Alexander's Wall" or the "prehistoric remains" around the site which *indicate* the history of the land. Manfred Pfister considers it "the telos of Byron's quest," and Byron compares it with what is "greatest in Eastern *and* Western architecture."[115] The tower reflects, in Arthur Upham Pope's words, the "mortal combat with Fate, as it were, a monarch-poet wrestling with eternity,"[116] and it shows the period, local style and the genius of the individual architect. It is a sign of the Saljuq architecture that is "noble and powerful, structurally inventive and sophisticated, [...] neither sudden nor accidental."[117] More precisely, it is the "culminating expression of a Persian renaissance that had begun in the early tenth century with the Samanids, [and] reached its apex under the Seljuks."[118] It connotes the world of Qabus, and concerning the meaning of *Gunbad*, it illustrates the fate and fortune of Qabus and other monarchs who survive in history by means of stone and brick.

The expansion of the Islamic empire opened up new horizons of communication, "augmenting commerce, and creating an expanding economy which in time supplied the wealth needed for a new and urgent era of building—both secular and religious."[119] Therefore, the mosque, as a master sign, which is "spiritually coextensive with the whole life of the people, becomes physically integrated with the [cities.]"[120] The presence of Islamic buildings in Persia means the disappearance of the classical dynasties and the acceptance of Islam. Accordingly, there emerged varieties of Islamic constructions in

Persia that reflect the processes of crystallizing an ideology. Islamic architecture, as the master sign in the Islamic world, is one of the means through which the new empires engraved their will on the people's life.

The first Islamic construction Byron encounters in Persia is "a fluted grave-tower at Ray about six miles off, whose lower part is Seljuk; and another at Veramin further on" (*RO*: 48). The first reference, Byron points out, is the date of their constructions, for instance, the mosque at Veramin, which dates from 14th century. Then it refers to the physical description of these constructions plus the innovations created by Persians or other nations throughout history; for example, that the construction of the dome is the work of Persian architects. The material used in the architecture is another point Byron emphasizes, since different materials indicate different periods in the course of the buildings' construction. Each period introduces a new material to the architecture that reflects the characteristics of a tyranny which rules the country. Byron puts emphasis on both the external and internal factors, as well as the amalgamation of them, in the architectural design.

The Uljaitu's mausoleum at Sultaniya constructed by "the Mongol prince Uljaitu in 1313," as the "gigantic memorial of the Mongol Empire [...] bears witness to that Central Asian virility," which "produced under the Seljuks, Mongols, and Timurids, the happiest inspirations of Persian architecture" (*RO*: 50-1); three tyrannies that engrave their will on the body of Persian history and leave their marks on each spot of Persia. Arthur Upham Pope considers it as "one of the Persia's supreme architectural achievements,"[121] a masterpiece. For Byron, this is a prototype, signifying "power and content," which "represents the triumph of the idea over technical limitations" (*RO*: 51). The building retells the (hi)story of the nation, and shows the way through which the new empire expanded its sovereignty all over Persia. If the mausoleum is compared with the adjoining buildings, it shows how the empire left behind its sign of supreme authority. With its double system of galleries, eight minarets, large blue-tiled dome, and an interior measuring twenty-five metres, it is clear that the building was intended to be imposing and to show the tyrant's attention to impressiveness of scale. The building was constructed to provide a monumental setting for the Islamic faith and for Uljaitu's authority, during whose reign the Shi'ite branch of Islam was first proclaimed the state

religion of Persia. Under the Saljuqs, Persia witnesses marvellous improvements in literature, science and religion, whereas, as Laurence Lockhart and John A. Boyle show, the Mongol period is "'the greatest [period of] catastrophe and most dire calamity' that had ever overtaken mankind. [It is the period during which] astronomical numbers of people were slaughtered,"[122] a period of invasions and blind destructiveness. (Illustration No. 7)[123]

A polygonal grave-tower at Maragha, which belongs to 12th Century, known as the "grave of the Mother of Hulagu," (*RO*: 55) having the Kufic frieze, inscription, Koranic texts, and "inlaid with glistening blue" (*RO*: 56) recounts various changes, which occurred throughout the history of Persia. For instance, the use of Kufic inscriptions in Persian architecture shows the impact of external influences on Persian architecture. The use of Koranic verses and the Kufic inscription indicate the impact of Islam and Islamic ideology on Persian social and cultural life. The script was called Kufi because it was thought to have been developed at Kufah in Iraq—an early Islamic centre of culture. It ties the architecture and the people, who repeatedly encounter it in their daily life, to the ideology of Islam. (Illustration No. 11)

Another monument at Maragha, Rasadkhana or "star-house," an observatory built by Hulagu in the 13th century shows "Islam's last contribution to astronomy till Ulugh Beg revised the calendar at the beginning of the XVth" (*RO*: 57). The presence of "another XIIth-century tower just outside the gate" of the cave, "again of old strawberry brick, but square, and mounted on a foundation of cut stone," adorned by "kufic lettering and blue inlay," and its "cubic perfection, so lyrical and yet so strong, reveals a new architectural world to the European" (*RO*: 58). The Persian splendour, "the [...] beauties of Asiatic building" (*RO*: 58) and the innovation in architecture originate in the environmental impact, cultural interaction, the architectural renaissances and above all the role of the dynasties through which Persia quotes from other cultures, and sources, then reshapes and introduces a new style which has a Persian quality, hence Persianizing the effects.

At Damghan, "two circular grave-towers" dated from the XIth century and "a ruined mosque, known as the Tarikh Khana or 'History House,'" based on the Sasanian tradition, are two important forms of architecture of which Byron believes that "the whole of Islamic architecture borrowed from this tradition, once Islam had conquered

Persia" (*RO*: 77). Tarikh Khana belongs to the Abbasid period, the VIIIth century, and is the oldest existing Islamic structure in Persia. The Sasanian architecture and the construction of the domes of "all shapes and sizes" based on such architecture is the "most important contribution to Mohammadan architecture" (*RO*: 171). Accordingly, they refer to the origin of Islamic architecture, when Islam had conquered Persia and changed the existing buildings into mosques. It shows, in Arthur Upham Pope's words, that "after the advent of Islam in Persia, there was a great surge of building"[124]; therefore, the existing buildings turned to be the mosques and places for religious objectives. (Illustration No. 8)

Along his way to Mashhad, Byron encounters Qadam Gah, a building commemorating the resting-place of Imam Reza, built in the middle of the XVIIth century. As Antony Wynn states, "Meshed is a European corruption of *Mashhad*, 'the place of martyrdom.' The martyr is Imam Reza, the eighth of the Shia Imams in line of descent from the prophet Muhammad, renowned for his piety and spiritual and miraculous powers."[125] This holy city of the Shias has been a sign of hope for the Shia people from century to century; since the moment Imam Reza entered the city, it had witnessed pilgrims, merchants, armies, kings, and travellers. The buildings, which were erected commemorating the *Imamzades*, that is the Imams or their descendants, show how Islam is crystallized in Persian life and encapsulates the people's worldview through which they come to know the world.

The beauty of the shrines of Khoja Rabi and Masjid-i-Shah fascinate Byron. For him, the "congeries of mosques, mausoleums, booths, bazaars, and labyrinths" (*RO*: 131) are the centre of the town. In his description, he recounts the transference of the capital of Khorasan (meaning 'land of the rising sun') from Tus to Mashhad. He traces the reasons underlying this transference in terms of "two funerals," one is the burial of "the Caliph" who is buried in a "holy place twenty miles off, which is now [Mashhad]," and another is the burial of Imam Reza "next to Harun-al-Rashid" (*RO*: 131). From the time when the "shrine grew up, and the city round it," Mashhad became the "holiest place in the [Shia] world" (*RO*: 131).

The mosque of Gohar Shad,[126] with its "sea-blue" dome, built between 1405 and 1418, is another building Byron describes during his sojourn at Mashhad. The Shrine of Gohar

Shad is "the finest example of colour in the whole Mohammadan architecture" (*RO*: 238). Byron argues that the "use of coloured mosaic out of doors reached its climax at the Timurid Renascence" (*RO*: 244). He believes that there are four buildings as the "finest buildings in Persia, the [Gunbad-i-Qabus], the small dome-chamber in the Friday Mosque at Isfahan, the Mosque of Gohar Shad [at Mashhad], and the Mosque of Sheikh Lutfullah at Isfahan" (*RO*: 245). His emphasis on Gohar Shad's innovations and their impact on architecture shows that contrary to those who consider the Orient as female and disordered or without any novelty, Persian architecture shows masculinity, order and beauty.

At Isfahan, known as *half of the world*, he encounters a complex of buildings at the Maidan-i-Shah (Maidan-i Naqsh-i Jahan), Chihil Sutun, Bazaar, Masjid-i-Shah, Ali Qapu, Mosque of Sheikh Lutfullah, and the Friday Mosque, all marking the apex of Persian Islamic architecture during the Safavid period. The city's golden age began in 1598 when Shah Abbas I, the Great, who reigned 1588–1629, made it his capital and rebuilt it into one of the largest and most beautiful cities of the seventeenth century. At the centre of the city, he created the immense Maidan-i-Shah as well as the noted Masjid-i-Shah, which was not finished until after his death, and the Masque of Sheikh Lutfullah. The Maidan and its buildings reflect the religious, economic and political institutions of the empire. (Illustration No.10)[127] Byron recounts the changes occurred during the history of the city, from the moment it became the capital of the country and after. At the centre of the Maidan there was before the emergence of Pahlavi dynasty a space for the Bakhtiari gentlemen to play polo. Whereas under Reza Shah's rule, "progress has constructed a sheet of ornamental water in the middle" (*RO*: 149) to prevent the Bakhtiari gentlemen from playing polo, which is an indication of the impact of a new tyranny on the face of the city. For Byron, the whole history of the city is "pictured in a single building and its restorations; the charm of Safavid colour, like that of Timurid, recedes before its venerable grandeur" (*RO*: 149). Byron gives his theory of history and the changes in the architecture and culture of the land that illustrate the changes in the history of Persia. He traces the history of the city "from the XIth century, [during which the] architects and craftsmen have recorded the fortunes of the town, its changes of taste,

government, and belief. The buildings reflect these local circumstances; it is their charm, the charm of most old towns" (*RO*: 195-6).

Through his descriptions of the buildings, Byron, repeatedly, shows the appearance and disappearance, the rise and fall of different tyrannies in Persia; for instance, the "egg-dome of plain brick, erected by Malek Shah the Seljuk," the "college of the Mother of the Shah which was built by Sultan Hussein the Safavid in 1710," the "Char Bagh, Shah Abbas's avenue," the "bridge of Ali Verdi Khan," (*RO*: 149) to name just a few. Likewise, at Isfahan, because of the missionary efforts undertaken by the imperial power, there appeared "an Armenian cathedral at Julfa, across the river, which resembles a Mohammadan shrine of the XVIIth century" (*RO*: 151).

Byron acknowledges perfection in the Friday Mosque through its dome-chambers, engineering, its genius, arches, miniature in each squinch, pure brick form, as well as its elements of construction, and compares them with the "muscles of a trained athlete" (*RO*: 196). He relates the aestheticism in architecture to the preceding dynasties such as the Saljuqs, the Qaznavides, the Mongols, the Timurids and the Safavids. Each of these dynasties "produced a new Renascence on Persian soil" (*RO*: 197). The Safavids inspired Persian art and "gave Isfahan the character it has today" (*RO*: 197). Shah Abbas, in 1618, built the Mosque of Sheikh Lutfullah that Byron considers as "Persian in the fabulous sense" (*RO*: 198). The grandeur of the Mosque is such that Byron rhapsodises: "colour and pattern are a commonplace in Persian architecture. But here they have a quality which must astonish the European, not because they infringe what he thought was his own monopoly, but because he can previously have had no idea that abstract pattern was capable of so profound a splendour" (*RO*: 198). (Illustration No. 9)[128]

Byron, again and again, complains of the blindness of previous travellers who visited Persia and found nothing of interest; for instance, those who did not notice "the portal of the Friday Mosque" (*RO*: 202) at Yazd, which dates from XIVth-century. He scrutinizes their blindness concerning the "heights of art independently [or the] rank of Isfahan among those rarer places like Athens or Rome" (*RO*: 196). The "two dome-chambers of the Friday Mosque [for Byron are the sign of] their difference" (*RO*: 196). The important sites for Byron, according to his insight, are: the virility, splendour and beauty in Jabal-i-Sang at Kerman, "a domed octagonal shrine of the XIIth century" built of stone, the

"Friday Mosque, of XIVth-century mosaic," (*RO*: 204) the "Kuba-i-Sabz" having the Timurid style; the Shrine of Niamatullah at Mahan which brought "a sudden reprieve, a blessing of water and rustle of leaves" (*RO*: 205); at Nayin, one of the oldest Persian mosques dates from the IXth century with "its stucco ornament [...] filled with bunches of grapes, [which] suggests a transition of Hellenistic ideas through Sasanian art into Mohammadan" (*RO*: 208); at Qum, "the Shrine" of Fatema-al-Maasomeh "rebuilt in the early XIXth century," with its "tall gold dome and four blue minarets"; at Shiraz, the Friday Mosque with its blue dome, and the "court of college" date back to XVIIIth-century with its "tilework of pink and yellow flowers," and "a tall square building, once domed," known, as the "Khatun" the "mausoleum of the daughter of a Muzaffarid king" (*RO*: 153). He believes that these buildings, as a part of world culture, reflect the history of the renaissances of architectural designs as well as the vicissitudes of dynasties in the history of Persia. More to the point, his surprise is at the blindness of those travellers who are not able to associate even the external factors with the changes in the material, design and construction of the buildings, for instance, the effect of space on the construction of buildings at Yazd. Since Yazd is located in the desert, there the orchards and gardens are rare and there are "no cool blue domes," instead the "town and desert are of one colour, one substance" (*RO*: 203); accordingly, the town is constructed with an emphasis on space. Even the appearance of the buildings, for instance, the wind-towers, is constructed in accordance with the climate of the place.

5. 6. The Travellees as an open text: "why blue"

For Byron, the culture of the travellees is like a discourse, a text, actually a "language," and, in Barthes's words, the "inflection"[129] of an ideology, more precisely, "a halo of virtualities where other possible meanings are floating."[130] Metaphorically speaking, the Eastern culture is to him an open text, which he studies, analyses, and deciphers word by word, sentence by sentence, and page by page. It gives him an opportunity to look inward, enter into a dialogue, and recognize his own identity. Reading piece by piece, he turns the pages of Persian text, and each word, sentence and chapter gives him a magnificent experience, as though undergoing a mythological purgatory. He encounters

Persia, Persian beauties, architecture, simplicity, and glory; afterwards when the scene is over, he remembers he is no longer the same he had been before.

Not only does Byron see, he also listens; he experiences through all his senses. His cultural reading by means of his intensive gaze is a "conductor of the desire to write."[131] In other words, it is a desire to write about Persia, a desire to reveal Persia, its glory, masculinity, beauties, etc., in a manner similar to Barthes's argument concerning a text:

> What we desire is only the desire the *scriptor* has in writing, or again: we desire the author had for the reader when he was writing, we desire the *love-me* which is in all writing. This has been very clearly put by the writer Roger Laporte: 'A *pure* reading which does not call for *another writing* is incomprehensible to me ... Reading Proust, Blanchot, Kafka, Artaud gave me no desire to write *on* these authors (not even, I might add, *like* them), but to *write*.' In this perspective, reading is a veritable production: no longer of interior images, of projections, of hallucinations, but literally of *work*: the (consumed) product is reversed into production, into promise, into desire for production, and the chain of desires begins to unroll, each reading being worth the writing it engenders, to infinity.[132]

Byron's reading Persia is a desire for "another writing." He reads Persian culture—to find the origin of Islamic architecture—and then begins to write. This time, his writing is a dynamic writing; his desires are unrolled and directed to "another writing"; this is a writing which produces a sort of proliferation; this is a will-to-write; the desire is immortalized by writing *The Road to Oxiana*. Byron's decision to write is to "decide who is going to speak"; that is to say, his travel accounts are the representation of different voices. The objects, signs, buildings and cities are a few examples of such voices. Byron's question "[do] people travel blind?" (*RO*: 202) shows his emphasis on the way of gazing and reading the travellees like a Barthesian critic *avant la lettre*. He knows how to read and how to gaze, and behind his gaze and reading there lies a desire; to quote Barthes, there is a "will-to-read" or a will-to-gaze. Byron's gazing and reading occur within a peculiar structure, which is dominated by his "will-to-read," as well as the will-to-be-read. The act of gazing and reading, active and dynamic, brings about learning, understanding and ultimately changes his identity.

Byron's gaze is imbued with historical, architectural, cultural, political and ethnographic information. There are infinite expansions of meaning and a great variety of significations. Through his gaze, Byron reads the people, cultures, and architectures, in Persia and other places through which he journeys. He is gazing at the remote lands, at

the same time he himself is the object of the Others' gaze; i.e., he reads and is read, in other words, he sees from "one point, but in [his] existence [he is] looked at from all sides."[133]

Byron spends his time and life reading cultures, architectures and the people's life, reading their gestures, appearances, behaviours, signs and images. More precisely, in order to decode the travellees, he reads between the lines, and searches for the social, ideological, religious, and moral values implied in the strata of Persian life and uncovers these messages. For him a noteworthy factor, which needs much more attention, is the "study of the landscape and natural characteristics of the countries, both from pictures and from descriptive writing" (*AA*: 15-16). Moreover, in *The Appreciation of Architecture*, he argues that the forms in "natural surroundings, both in broad effects of landscape and in the details of flowers, trees, and animals, and even of the race itself," (*AA*: 13) influence the architects. That is to say, the existing forms are "modified and expanded" by the architect's "intellectual capacity and by contemporary taste" (*AA*: 13). To confirm his argument, Byron refers to Egypt and the desert, which "is dotted with natural pyramids" (*AA*: 13). Indeed, he emphatically puts stress on the effect and relationship "between landscape and human invention," (*AA*: 13) and generalizes this theory to all genres of art.

My understanding is that Byron's view about the impact of space on the architecture is similar to Ruskinian theory. Ruskin argues that "for whatever is in architecture fair or beautiful, is imitated from natural forms; and what is not so derived, but depends for its dignity upon arrangement and government received from human mind, becomes the expression of the power of that mind, and receives a sublimity high in proportion to the power expressed."[134] Elsewhere, Ruskin claims that "all beautiful lines are adaptations of those which are commonest in the external creation."[135] Or "all beauty is founded on the laws of natural forms."[136] Persian architecture reflects the organic unity of nature and natural beauty. One significant factor in architecture, which Byron foregrounds, is light. Arthur Upham Pope mentions that in Persian architecture "from Zoroastrian times, the beautiful was integrally associated with light. It was an essential component of divine personality."[137] Byron comments on "the artistic effect of any building [which] may be analyzed in terms of light reacting on material and the concomitant pattern of shadows"

(*AA*: 14). He contextualizes the light with reference to different countries, because each country has a particular luminosity that influences its architecture, and concludes that "both the form and the material of architecture" (*AA*: 14) are related to light.

The impact of architecture and signs on the observer may be so strong that the observer magnifies those signs or objects, which take priority over other signs, and puts stress upon "those beauties that he wishes to see appreciated" (*AA*: 15). Persia influences the travellers of all periods. Not only do the buildings, but also the people have an influence on the travellers. As an example:

> Suddenly, from far across a valley, came the flash of a turquoise jar, bobbing along on a donkey. Its owner walked beside it, clad in a duller blue. And seeing the two lost in that gigantic stony waste, I understood why blue is the Persian colour, and why the Persian word for it means water as well. (*RO*: 44)

Byron uses the word *blue* more than a hundred times in *The Road to Oxiana*. Persian nature or Persian sky has different tints and shades of blue. The people's life is imbued with this magnificent colour, and Persian architects decorate Islamic buildings by means of blue mosaics. Accordingly, blue is attached to religious architecture and connotes religion, purity, and divinity for Persians. In Persian, the word *Ab* means water, which is believed to be one of the four elements of creation. It connotes Divine Prosperity and Truth, wealth, miracle, purity, peace and it is associated with light. The word *Abi*, meaning blue, means to be like water or to be like *Ab*. Historically speaking, during the Achaemenid Empire, "Persian people adored the four elements: light, which was of two kinds, the light of the day, the sun, the light of the night, the moon; next water, earth, the wind."[138] The historical point and connotative meanings of water as a means of purification and ablution before praying in Islam, and its close connection with Persian Islamic architecture mythologizes blue as a Divine colour. The word *blue* is a myth, a sign, a discourse and an ideology in Persian culture which signifies purity, divinity, religion, and peace.

Robert Payne, who travelled to Persia in the spring of 1949 accompanied by Arthur Upham Pope, in *Journey to Persia* (1951), also celebrates the characteristic of blue in Persia. He visited the mosques of Isfahan, Persepolis at Shiraz, and Tehran. Describing the Maidan-i-Shah at Isfahan, he writes:

> [T]he dome of the Shah's mosque is the blue of diamonds, but it is also the blue of peacocks, turquoises and the summer sea, that colour which you find only in summer in sandy shallows: it is so strange, so rich a blue that in the same moment it seems to have the colour of blue flames and blue ice. [...] Above the archway of the *ivan* are cascades and stalactites of blue pearls, blue faience and blue tiles. [...] the blue façade is floating above the earth, and the next moment it suggests the roots of plants—the blue façade is an expanding flower.[139]

Elsewhere: "there, when your eyes are accustomed to the light, you are aware of being surrounded by waves of blue, but this blue is darker than the sunlit riot of the Mosque of the Shah."[140] Blue is part of the myth of religious buildings and the myth of purity; this myth encapsulates a purely cultural and historical object and transforms it into the sign of a universal value, having a cultural, social and ideological function. Payne expresses his own impression as if the beauties and glories of the place overwhelmed his feelings and emotions:

> Here [...] under this blue dome one may pass the whole day quietly in meditation or prayer, or best of all in simply watching the sun's fading glow. [...] All the cunning intricacies of man's spirit, man's desire to escape the burdens of the flesh, his desire to humiliate and exalt himself, all these things disappear in contemplation of this dome, becomes a God's name, continually engraved on the tiles, becomes a field of dark blue flowers—the blue of a steady, undeviating flame. It is then that you realise that these domed chambers have their proper place in men's hearts, and that there are virtues in the Moslem mosques denied to our Christian cathedrals. [...] Here there is only the perfectly simplicity of a blue dome lit by sunlight falling through blue faience. [...] All is blue, all is perfect here. It is as though the heavens had opened into a serene blueness never seen before, not building, darker than usual, of some unaccountable blue stone which possesses the transparency of glass [...] the dome-chamber is a place where life stirs, a kind of blue womb filled with a flood of secret life: you are deep, deep down beneath the waters: here *life begins*: [...]You wait for a miracle, and *the miracle is the beginning of life*, the faint stirrings and heart-beats.[141] [My emphasis]

Here, the aesthetic fuses the spiritual. Elsewhere Payne continues:

> They have done their best to make their mosque splendid beyond anyone's desire, but it is in the people themselves that the splendid is most fully revealed—in odd glimpses, sudden smiles, a sudden pose caught unawares. We had received, we thought, the benediction of the Governor, and so we made our way to the shrine, to that immense golden-domed temple set within high walls, visible through huge gateways, all porcelain blue and molten gold.[142]

Blue is a sign that epitomises Islam in Persian architecture. The people's life and this colour are tied together. The people observe, perceive, and gaze through the peace,

purity, divinity and spirituality of this colour. Payne is obsessed with the other splendours of Persia.

> I was back in Paris, still dazed by the blue glare of Persian tiles. It was all over, the long journeys, the interminable yellow dust, the blue *ivan* of the Mosque of the Shah in Isfahan, the moonlit columns of Persepolis, the golden domes, the roaring deserts, the fountains and the roses. [...] Now I lived on memories—the Blue Mountain, the boy riding through the scented streets of Isfahan at night, the gold dome of Meshed, flashing and steaming in the hot sunlight, the stairways of Persepolis, they had become possessions, and inevitably I saw Paris through the eyes of Persians. Something had changed. There was a perpetual glitter of swords in the air; colours were brighter; those who have been to Persia are obsessed for ever with this sense of human splendour.
>
> But what is splendour?[143]

The prodigious splendour of Persian architecture changes and expands Payne's horizon of expectations, so much so that he looks at Paris "through the eyes of Persians" and sees the world anew, not as a Parisian but as a Persian; this is a transformation, a metamorphosis in the traveller's life. It reflects the impact of space on the traveller's mind, and a reciprocal dynamic dialogue and interaction between the aestheticism of architecture and the traveller's self. It illustrates the aesthetic imperative in architecture, which aims to achieve a "transcendent sense of pleasure, harmony, well-being, positive excitation, evocation to deeper or higher realizations about God, man, nature and time,"[144] and Persian architecture produces and exposes such principles to the world.