

Uncomfortable, irregular, anarchist: an archaeology of repetition. Archaeological investigations in the Faculty of Art and Architecture, Bu Ali Sina University (Hamadan, Iran)

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Zitiervorschlag

Leila Papoli Yazdi et al. 2013. Uncomfortable, irregular, anarchist: an archaeology of repetition. Archaeological investigations in the Faculty of Art and Architecture, Bu Ali Sina University (Hamadan, Iran). Forum Kritische Archäologie 2: 29-47.

URI [http://www.kritischearchaeologie.de/repositorium/fka/2013\\_2\\_04\\_Papoli.pdf](http://www.kritischearchaeologie.de/repositorium/fka/2013_2_04_Papoli.pdf) 10.6105/  
DOI [journal.fka.2013.2.4 ; http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/refubium-42147](http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/refubium-42147)  
ISSN 2194-346X



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## Uncomfortable, irregular, anarchist: an archaeology of repetition. Archaeological investigations in the Faculty of Art and Architecture, Bu Ali Sina University (Hamadan, Iran)

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### Abstract

Do historical processes have the potential of being repeated? This article presents such a possibility by studying two cases in Iran, one from the 1970s and the other from 2009. The political circumstances of contemporary Iran have posed this question: why have the political protests never truly changed the political structure? Why are we repeatedly experiencing dictatorship despite two great political movements over the last century? This article tries to reconsider this issue by interpreting material culture from an archaeological perspective. It is the result of an archaeological investigation conducted in 2009 in the Faculty of Art and Architecture of Bu Ali Sina University, Hamadan, Iran. The function of the faculty building changed several times during the 1960s and 1970s. In the process of investigating the first function of the faculty as a 1970s detention centre, archaeologists discovered that the material culture represented the existence of an exiled professor and the process of his resistance against a dictatorial political system.

### Zusammenfassung

Haben historische Prozesse das Potential sich zu wiederholen? Der vorliegende Artikel arbeitet zwei Fälle auf, einen aus den 1970er Jahren und einen aus dem Jahre 2009, die ein solches Phänomen darstellen. Die politischen Zustände im heutigen Iran werfen die Frage auf, warum Proteste die politische Struktur im Iran niemals substantiell verändert haben und warum es trotz der zwei bedeutenden politischen Bewegungen im letzten Jahrhundert wiederholt zu Diktaturen kam. Der vorliegende Artikel versucht dieser Frage nachzugehen, indem er materielle Kultur aus einer archäologischen Perspektive interpretiert. Er ist das Ergebnis einer archäologischen Untersuchung, die 2009 in dem Gebäude der Fakultät für Kunst und Architektur an der Bu Ali Sina Universität, Hamadan, Iran durchgeführt wurde. Die funktionelle Nutzung des Fakultätsgebäudes veränderte sich in den 1960er und 1970er Jahre mehrfach. Bei der archäologischen Untersuchung der ersten Nutzungsphase des Fakultätsgebäudes als Haftanstalt in den 1970er Jahren, fanden Archäologinnen und Archäologen die Existenz eines exilierten Professors vor. In der materiellen Kultur des Gebäudes ist der Widerstand dieses Professors gegen ein diktatorisches politisches System repräsentiert.

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Revolution is a common experience for the last three generations in Iran. The most bizarre collective response of the older generation in a country like Iran which is ruled by a totalitarian structure is to criticize young people and prevent them from exerting their agency and taking action against existing power structures (Keddie and Richard 2006). In a collective response elders believe that any generation confronting such a structure and trying to take action against it will, in fact, waste its energy, since it would result in nothing and the existing structure would prevail (Abrahamian 1982). Their well-known remark is, "We all have done the same thing as you are doing today; if anything was supposed to be changed, it would have changed by now." Their attitude, as agents belonging to the previous generation, is one of lethargy leading to reproduction of existing structures. On the other hand, however, we are faced with another point of view: young people prefer death to life under totalitarianism. They fight against the structure without a gun but with their personal decision and social action. This decision often results in new levels of demands (Barrington et al. 2009), changing from civil rights to freedom to the right of connection. Their resistance may, as their fathers and mothers say, cost them their own lives.

The long-term process of revolutions has often been analysed with political science methods, but it has not been studied from a political archaeology point of view by taking material culture into account. This article is the result of a short-term investigation in the Art and Architecture Faculty of Bu Ali Sina University in Hamadan (Iran), which led to the identification of some documents and an architectural structure connected to political pressure during the 1960s-1970s in Hamadan. The documents demonstrate that the Faculty of Art had been originally used as an architectural structure for Iran's pre-1979-revolution security service (SAVAK) in which young students and professors were monitored and punished. This

evidence was discovered right at the moment when Iran was, politically and socially, dealing with another conflict. Is the dictatorial political structure of Iran repeating itself? What is the role of agents in this procedure? This article is a narration of the same context at two different periods of time, trying to demonstrate the similarity of experience for those involved.

## Structure, Procedure, Repetition, Agent

The historical memory of Iranians can point to at least four times of resistance against power structures over the past 150 years. Almost every Iranian has heard stories about his/her family's or friend's resistance against the structures of hypocritical systems in the past centuries (Parsa 1989), just as today's generation has to deal constantly with autocracy. The historical experience of three recent generations in Iran shows the depth of a power structure that is constantly being reiterated, as if it has a hegemonic (Adib-Moghaddam 2008: 44) ability to reproduce itself, and social agents, generation by generation, have to resist it (Shakibi 2007). Revolutions are the outcome of the existence of a civil society as well as its conflict with a ruling regime (Rahmani 2001). The historical experiment of three Iranian generations indicates its repetitive nature, in which the actors repeat the very same roles to reproduce the unintended result (Donovan 2011). This fact that the ruling structure of Iran is reproducing itself in a hegemonic manner (Maloney 2000: 149) means that the petty actors are turned into leading roles (Gheisari 2009). Agamben and Heller-Roazen (1999: 113, 287) interpreted this configuration as an opposition that has one foot inside and another one outside the structure. As three revolutionary generations have experienced, in Iran the opposition often keeps both feet inside the structure after its victory (Javadzadeh 2010). As a consequence, the structure may repeat its cycle, with the opposition taking on the role of the ruling power. This process then repeats itself (Arendt 1966; Sedghi 2007).

It should be considered whether even the first government of Iran, the Achaemenid kingdom (Dandamaev 1989; Dandamaev et al. 2004), was a totalitarian one. The material culture from the ancient empires of

<sup>1</sup> Apart from the authors' names, all real names have been changed.

Iran, such as the inscription of Behistun from the time of Darius (Herzfeld 1968) mentions killing protesters and members of the opposition as well as resorting to torture.

In such totalitarian systems, because of violent repression, protests appear as revolutions. Revolution, when successful, is a long-term process leading to change (Arendt 1990; Zahedi 2001). In fact, the willingness to change is made possible by agents from inside the government. If the regime makes an effort to stop this process, then a revolution will take place (Rush 1992).

To clarify the issue, to explain stages of revolutions, Jaroslav Krejčí and Anna Krejčová (1994) discuss the onset stage, which is a long period of innovative and reform moves among some members of the cultural elite of society. In this stage the procedure is reformatory rather than revolutionary. The reformists then go one stage further by institutionalizing, which involves adopting certain existing social and political structures to provide a power position from which to begin the reform. In this stage a reformist point of view may gain control and begin to make noticeable social changes. On the other hand, by entering the power structure, such agents may be confronted with unintended consequences and as a result lose gradually their control over change.

In Iran the opposition has usually been formed at first around a reformatory viewpoint (Levermore and Budd 2004; the opposition inside the present regime of Iran is also named as a “reformist party”), but in practice, resisting traditional dictatorship and totalitarianism, it is forced to change its attitude. Looking from an historical perspective, in Iran oppositions become radical when ruling regimes reject their reformatory solutions (Chehabi 1990) and decide to eliminate them.<sup>2</sup> In two previous revolutions, the opposition within the structure changed to an opposition against the structure in a very short-term process (Bergman 2006). To examine this issue in more

detail, we will take a look at agents’ positions and rates of structural change.

In a totalitarian context the existence of revolutionary agency is only a necessary but not a sufficient precondition (Sztompka 1991) in order to change such a political system. The effective factor in the change of a political system is in fact social action, which in totalitarian structures can be divided into two categories: first, neutral action that lets the agents survive within the structure, and second, actions of agents who believe in their own impact to change structure and context. Sometimes the actions of human agents emerge as the continuance of historical process (Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003: 279). They act against an existing structure, but there is no organized volition to achieve the goal of change. In such a context involving many contradictions (Žižek 2009), social agents intend to make changes and embark on actions at small scales. On the other hand actions, according to Giddens, are situated within unacknowledged conditions and produce unintended consequences that in turn reproduce the unacknowledged conditions (Appelrouth and Edles 2008). Actions always have a surplus that is beyond the intentions of those who act, and when it is political action against the reproduction of structures (Caldwell 2006), the unintended consequences may be the reversal of the intended change: reproduction of structures. In the case of repetition, the agents may lose their control of the long-term patterns that are repeated structurally. When the structure is under pressure, it replaces reformist agents automatically (Huesca 2006) in order to save itself from change (Wight 2006). In such a case, the structure is an unintended environment for actions in which agents have to interact with the system if they want to survive (Archer 2003).

Let us return to the perceptive remark of Michael Rush (1992) that a revolution can be recognized only through a review of its consequences. In that respect has a revolution ever taken place in Iran? Has any basic, structural change been made via a revolution?

The experience of three generations engaged in consecutive protest and revolution is a social one leading to the aforementioned result: we are located

<sup>2</sup> Compare the condition of the communist party – Toudeh – in Iran between 1960 and 1970 (Ganji 2002).

within a process that is repeated with every generation, and repetition displays just a small change in appearance: defying, resisting, protesting, achieving victory, rebuilding the structure, again defying....

This paper is based on the documents discovered in basement of the Art and Architecture Faculty of Bu Ali Sina University in Hamadan. Among those documents there was the name of a man, S. Hesami, who once upon a time was an associate professor at the university, a protester who firmly resisted the ruling system. In the end, this stance cost him a lot. According to the documents, he lost his job and his social status. Coincident with the discovery and identification of these documents, a similar procedure was about to occur at exactly the same place: two associate professors in the Faculty of Art and Architecture lost their social status. The procedure repeated itself at a distance of 37 years between the two events. Has the process recurred? Is it only the agents who have changed, while the structure has played out the same pattern again? If the answer is yes, is it possible to consider the repetition of the process as a result and think of the possibility of its occurrence again in future times?

This paper is a narration of two similar stories belonging to two different generations - maybe our fathers and mothers and their fathers and mothers - but happening in the same context. Our narration is particular since it takes material culture and a labyrinthine building plan into account.

### **The Structure of Repetitive Process as an Archaeological Concept**

The main theme of this article is the repetition of a political process. As we have observed in material culture, documents, and architecture itself, it can be assumed that a similar process has occurred in a similar context, 37 years earlier than the one we have personally experienced.

The "repetition of a process", a term used by Gordon Childe (1958: 50; Patterson and Orser 2004), consequently proclaims that history has two sides: repetition (or continuity) and change (Hart 2002). The pro-

cess of repetition in history has mostly been discussed as a pattern (MacEachern 2002). Archaeologically, this subject is generally idealized, especially when political. As Shanks and Tilley (1992: 152) emphasize, based on Gombrich, the analysis of repetition can reduce the potential meaning of a process.

Studying the process of repetition is useful in some ways for archaeologists (Joyce 2007); hence, the relation between the repetition of processes and the role of human agents to change processes is our interest. Can we view this repetition as a process of enactment through reproduction and conformity (Moore 2000: 77)? Does the long-term perspective reveal that social action avoids exactly that repetition (Chapman 2000: 173)?

Living in Iran gives us, the archaeologists of another planet (Johnson 2003), the opportunity to experience such repetition. Our generation is always thinking about repetition. What if we are just repeating the process our fathers have repeated and our grandfathers before them? Are we always caught up in a vicious circle of repeated processes? Would repetition change the process to a frivolous (Gasché 2007) or comic one (Marx, in Helmling 2001)? Are we going to be actors in a repetitive scenario?

In mid-2009, we found an old, hidden prison just under our feet, in the faculty building where we taught and studied. The events occurring in the upper part of the building, the modern faculty, made us pay attention to the process of repetition. We were in conflict with the system, just as the people who were tortured or jailed in the basement more than three decades before. We were experiencing the same conditions: resisting/defying/standing up against a system, in two different times, in the same context, in the same manner. Could we state that we, as the new generation, were experiencing a repetition? Were the people of the ruling system acting just like those three or four decades before? Actually, after the revolution of 1979, the governmental system of Iran was changed completely to a theocracy, but what about the social structures?

Searching for possible material remaining in the building led us to discover a room where scattered papers from 1960-70 were found, the data from which we gained practical knowledge of repetition and the results of action (Tilley 1981:30).

The theoretical questions presented here cannot be fully answered in this article, since they are fundamental beyond our time. However, we can narrate a real story of what happened in the Faculty of Art of Bu Ali Sina University in two time periods, what we experienced and what the former generation experienced, in the form of historical repetition (Murphy 1998; Davis 2005).

All the data presented here derive from finds of an unfinished excavation in a hidden detention center, including paper documents and the building plan itself. Interviews were also conducted to test the results.

### The Context of Two Similar Events in Two Different Periods: Building X: an Old Detention Center, a Refuge, or a Faculty?

The Faculty of Art and Architecture is a building separate from the main campus of the Bu Ali Sina University on Janbazan Boulevard, west of the Hamadan-Tehran main road. According to local residents, during the 1960s and 1970s this area was covered by trees, and a garden surrounded by high walls stood in place of the building we now see. Older inhabitants mention that in the 1940s this garden had been an old Jewish cemetery, so people would rarely pass through it.

Today, the building has three floors (Fig. 1). The lowest is now the basement of the Faculty (Fig. 2), the whole structure of which had apparently remained unchanged for at least thirty years before being noticed by us. At least six rooms of 12 to 20 square meters are partitioned off and deliberately turned into a dead

end. One of the terminal rooms has been converted into a central heating system. The basement rooms have neither windows nor doors. The main door of the basement has now been removed, but the metal frame of the previous door has been kept: the door that could cut off the whole connection of the basement to the world outside. The only other entrance to the basement was a hidden door through a zigzag path ending at the outside door, which is now a dead end. What was the building's function? Political arrestees in Hamadan in the 1960s remember being moved into a car and then taken somewhere before going to the main jail. Their statements are incomplete but can be considered as a description of a "Building X". None of them are willing to explain more about it; there are still frightened expressions on their faces. Is it possible that the carriageway they are talking about is the same place that today is used as a self-service restaurant that ends in the basement? Was the building used as a hidden detention facility? Or could it have been something else entirely, for example, a refuge dating back to World War II? Some elder residents remember the presence of the Americans in this region of the city during World War II, but no reliable data could be found to establish a connection between Americans and the building.

However, comparing the building with other similar examples around the world supports its identifica-



Fig. 1 Building X and the excavated trenches in the yard.

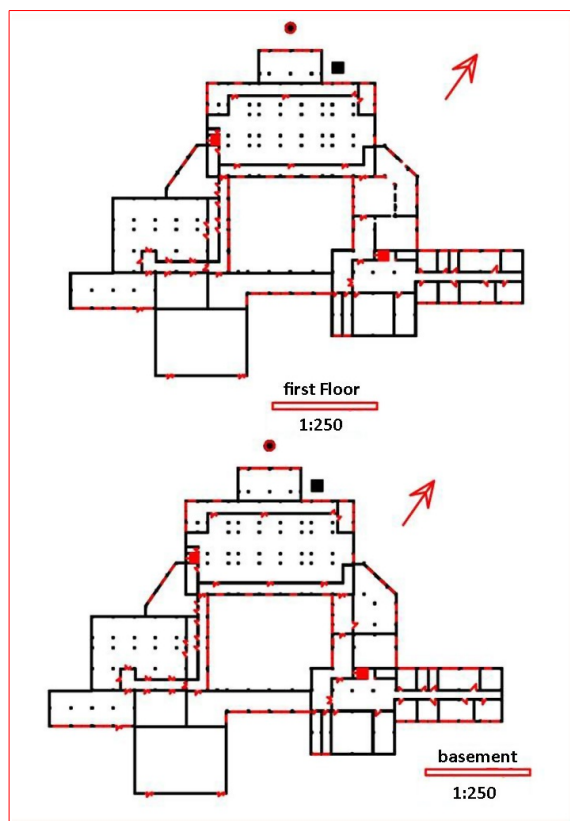


Fig. 2 Building X: plan of the first floor and the basement.



Fig. 3 Building X, basement, the room full of documents.

tion as a place of detention;; the plan of a closed architecture besides closed rooms has been observed in other detention facilities, while the most characteristic feature of the plan, being hidden, strengthens the argument. One excavated example is a clandestine

detention center in Argentina in which architecture and spatial organization represent alternative languages communicating messages in a much more concrete way than the spoken word (Zarankin and Niro 2010: 75; Zarankin and Salerno 2011).

A search in the Iranian Construction Document Organization (Hamadan) showed that there is no existing construction document for the building of the Art and Architecture Faculty, and it is recorded in the archives as Building X (in Farsi: Sakhteman-e X<sup>3</sup>). The Building X dossier in the archive lacks a plan, a certificate of occupancy, and the name of the architect. The only available information is about the upper floor, which was built in the 1980s during the last period of construction.

To explore the first stage of construction, we excavated a trench (RT.1) in one of the northern rooms of the basement where leftover paper documents were scattered on the floor. All around the room, the mosaics were removed where it had been dug down to a depth of 40-50 cm, and the documents were covered by soil and debris (Fig. 3). Some of

them were thrust into a sack, and others were thrown carelessly onto the floor. A metal bed was placed in the middle of the room, and it was covered with a pile of blank sheets of paper. In a rusty metal file cabinet hidden next to the door nothing was discovered except for some exam papers. Overall, the arrangement of the papers in trench RT.1 indicates that they were moved and hidden in haste.

The second trench (RT.2) was excavated in the yard, focusing on well-like spaces. These wells were about 10 meters deep ending in large spaces made of clay, nine

square meters in area and linked to another room by a

3 Surprisingly, the building was registered in the documents center with the Latin letter “X,” referring to something unknown or hidden, and not with a letter from the Persian or Arabic alphabets.

four-meter corridor. Considering that the project could not yet be finished, the connection between these spaces and Building X is just a hypothesis, but tracing their limits indicates that they had likely been linked to the building.

According to investigations into architectural structures around Building X, there are two round spaces to the north of the building which are about two meters in diameter, joined to the main building by a door with an approximate height of 0.7 meters. Taking this unusual height and the current location of the garden into account, it seems that the upper level of the circles were at ground level at the time they were in use. Later on they were raised to a higher level to protect them from being penetrated by water.

Based on the information presented, we can assume that during its first construction period in the 1960s the Faculty could have functioned as a hidden detention place that was abandoned in the 1970s, after which Bu Ali Sina University took possession of it. In this period, the former function of the building was concealed by adding the first floor of the faculty. Then, in the 1980s, the building was completely refurbished as a faculty, and its origin and hidden function forgotten. Extending the urban environment, destroying the gardens, and the emigration or death of the former “residents” all caused the building structure to become separated from its original context and replaced by a new, secondary one.

Twelve years after the conversion of the building to a faculty, the curious young students of archaeology decided to study the unusual structure of the basement whose depth is unsuitable for the foundation of a public educational building. There is still some doubt about the exact time when the documents were moved to the building or whether the structure was abandoned for a while, and then, in the 1970s, used to archive the documents we discovered. However, according to the students studying in 1977-79 there is no doubt that in 1979 when the revolution occurred in Iran the documents were thrown all over the basement floor.

The following is a narration about one of the members of the scientific committee of the Agriculture Faculty whom we identified in some of the papers in the basement. This narrative talks about incidents that happened in two different decades, the 1970s and 2000s. In producing this report we, the authors of this paper, have endeavored to remain completely loyal to the documents and the structure of Building X.

**Episode 1.** 12 February 1979: This episode is the result of an interview with revolutionary protesting students of the 1970s. Former students and politicians were invited to the faculty to talk about the structure.

Everyone knew the old cemetery of the Jews located in the garden which was full of trees, on the west side of the city. It was next to the path at the end of which was the Tehran road... That’s right! Do you remember? ... There were also several graves belonging to the Baha’is of Hamadan who used to bury their dead there in the last years of the Pahlavi time... Aha! ... That’s it! ... You mean the garden whose middle building was converted to a high school in 1977, and the next year it was closed... The truth is that I once went there just after the revolution...

I went to the cemetery I’ve told you about with some of the Muslim guys... Downstairs at the old high school, we faced some politically left students who were stenciling manifestos. I knew them, they weren’t bad people. After exchanging greetings, I went closer and asked them, “What can be found in the basement?” One of them, who was a student at the Technical College, told me, “there is a pile of papers in the room at the end of the corridor.” I gave my Kalashnikov to one of the Muslim brothers, went to the room he mentioned and took a look at the papers cluttered on the floor among the other trash. I picked up some of them; they were nothing but students’ reports and that sort of thing... Coming out, I told the guy: “You’re right. That’s nothing.” I took my Kalashnikov, and we set out for Sabze Meydan square.



**Episode 2.** 3 September 1973: This episode is the result of investigations into documents written by Dr. Hesami and a former head of the college.

S. Hesami was going to class when the postman of the faculty called to him and gave him a letter. He looked at the envelope: it was from the head of the college where he had been forced to teach during the last year. He could guess what was in it: a dismissal threat or something similar. It wasn't the first time he had received such a letter. It had also happened before in Urmiya and Karaj. He put the letter in his bag, because he thought that if he read it before class, it would disturb him and would affect his teaching. He knew how interested the students were in his course. He promised himself he wouldn't open it before the end of the class.

In the afternoon, Hesami opened the envelope in his office. It was a warning from Ekhtari, the college head. He had written that he had a dossier on Hesami's activities at the University of Tehran, that he was accused of causing disorder in the Agriculture Faculty and distributing letters of sedition among the students. Ekhtari threatened him with dismissal if he continued his activities. Dr. Hesami folded the letter and put it in his pocket, clenched his fist, and gazed for seconds at the red sun that was slowly sinking behind Alvand Mountain. He made his decision.

**Episode 3.** 20 February 1978: A result of investigations into documents written by Dr. Hesami and the then head of the faculty.

Hesami had been exiled once, and it was quite enough. The new students couldn't stand another dismissal. They had heard about these problems in 1973 and the fact that students had supported their beloved professor; Hesami had been obliged to retire. The head of the faculty could easily dismiss him. The students wrote a petition to Dr. Riahi, head of Bu Ali Sina University and the successor of the committee of trustees of the Agriculture College, complaining about Dr. Ekhtari, the likely substitute for Hesami. All the students in Hesami's classes signed the petition.

After a week, Khalil Khalili, the new head of the college, wrote to Dr. Riahi, warning about the students' petition:

"Nine students, among whom are troublemakers and agitators. These nine are expellees of other universities who were banished to Hamadan, and now they are supporting their anarchist professor!"

**Episode 4.** 1978: The triangle of Saberi/Ekhtari/SAVAK, based on Dr. Hesami's letters and correspondence of the head of the Faculty of Agriculture.

Ekhtari and Saberi (the assistant director of the college) decided to report the problem to SAVAK. Ekhtari had a secret; the only person who knew it was Saberi. He was Colonel Ekhtari more than Professor Ekhtari. He wrote a letter to the central office of SAVAK in Tehran:

"Here in Hamadan we have encountered a security problem, a troublemaker who does not believe in the monarchy of the Shah. Let us know what to do with him."

**Episode 5.** Building X, 2009.

I am Leila Papoli, archaeologist and professor in the faculty of Art and Architecture, Bu Ali Sina University. I am in my office at my desk. I have a paper in my hands which I'm looking at up and down: commitments of my husband (Omran Garazhian) and I are transferred against my will to another university. I have to find a way to inform my students about it. I don't know yet why I'm paying this price. However, I know that it's all because of insisting on my beliefs. I'll lose the place where I love to live. I put the letter in my bag. I don't want the students coming to my office to find out about it. I know they will feel so humiliated when they realize that I am leaving as well.

"Professor!"

I look back, it's F.

"Hi! Have you brought your paper?" I ask.

“No, professor! Would you come with me?”

She is so excited, unlike me who has no energy to stand up anymore.

“What’s up?”

“Just come...”

She holds my hand, and I come down the stairs of the faculty building with her. She looks around, lowers her voice and says:

“Come in gently...”

“What’s the matter, F.?”

She holds my hand. Suddenly I notice M. is standing in the darkness in the basement, soiled and dirty. It worries me. I follow them to the end of the corridor.

“Professor! There is a room here, full of papers!”

“What papers?”

“We don’t know. We found it by chance.”

We go into the dark room. It seems that in the past five years, they have been excavating the floor in order to change the pipes and have thrown the documents all over the floor (Fig. 3). There is a layer of soil, about 30 cm thick, covering everything. It is difficult to estimate the dimensions of the room, but clearly we must be standing on lots of papers. I give my office key to F. to bring some sacks. We put the papers in them and drag them to my office. I scatter the papers on the floor and the three of us sit in the middle of the pile. Suddenly M. roars with laughter:

“Professor! Look!”

It’s a letter from 1974 about a boy who had insulted his girl classmate. They both laugh, and I remind them,

“Don’t laugh! I’m not in a good state. I may be under

surveillance. Let’s see to which years these letters belong.”

M. and F. hastily categorize the letters: 1960s and 1970s. Most of them are educational letters, but some confidential letters are also present.

“Professor!”

“Yeah?”

“A bunch of letters belonging to Dr. Hesami! Do you know him?”

“No, but I can search for his name.”

It’s midday. The girls are leaving. I should go to class in the afternoon.

### Episode 6. Building X/The Detention Center

“Professor! The basement of this damn faculty had been closed for years. But now... look! The corridors are full of partitioned rooms!”

A. shines the flash light around the room (Figs. 4 and 5).

“What’s in it?”

“A bed.”

“What kind of bed?”



Fig. 4 Building X, basement, the bricked doors of basement rooms.

“One of those metal beds.”



Fig. 5 Building X, corridors.

“Oh...”

“What else? Nothing?”

“Stop talking, F.! Stand aside and let me see.”

“Look! There must have been a metal door before; I mean the ones with a lock.”

“OK, by now we have a corridor, a two-meter basement, lots of partitioned rooms without any windows and a metal door! I wish my guess was wrong!”

“Professor! Do you also think that this was a detention place?”

“Do you think so as well?”

“Yeah. I’m sorry to have to say that in my opinion it was used as a detention place in the 1960s-1970s. Well, I can imagine how they came into it down the stairs, brought the poor accused people here, closed the door and then tortured them as much as they could.”

“What about the documents, Professor?”

“It’s a mystery to me, too. These documents seem unlikely to have any connection with the building. Maybe once in the late 1970s, just before the revolution, someone became aware of the abandonment of the building and brought the documents here for some reason.”

“And what was the reason? Why should someone have thrown this mass of papers in here?”

“I don’t know ... Just listen, it’s been a couple of days since I received a letter of compulsory transfer. If I weren’t here or if I was dismissed, it’s you who should revive the strangled voice in this corridor... ok?”

**Episode 7.** 19 June 1978: This episode is the result of investigations into documents written by Dr. Hesami and the then head of the faculty.

It was obvious to Hesami that he was under surveillance since Khalili wrote to the Hamadan SAVAK about the “disorderly Hesami who has become an anarchist as well and is demanding his salary.” He knew that they were watching him, that they had postponed and held his salary, just as a hostage, to force him to surrender. But he was the same Hesami as in 1972 when he was dismissed from his post in this selfsame college, later on from Urmiya University and then from the University of Tehran; he was the same Hesami who knew why and how he was placed in conditions in which the system blocked his salary to make him leave or surrender. But if he had decided to leave, he would have done so six years earlier. The generation he took responsibility for, his young students, were in love with him.

Hesami declared in a letter that he would not submit the students’ exam results because of the college

policy and his unpaid salary. His letter was handed out to the students. Worries about the probable loss of their beloved professor was the spark for them to write a petition, first to the faculty head and then to the head of the university. But the petition made the situation worse. Subsequently, Khalili wrote a letter to SAVAK, in which he claimed that,

“Hesami is a troublemaker who wants to play on students’ emotions.”

SAVAK’s attention was attracted to those nine students dismissed from other universities whose names were prominent among the names of those who had signed the petition. Was it a case of collusion between an agitating professor and troublemaking students?

The students whose letter was ineffective went on strike; Hesami reported the university to the police. That night, twenty-three of the students were arrested including those nine troublemakers. Hesami’s complaint resulted in nothing but a vicious circle, it was referred to the University... 24 hours later, the students were freed.

#### Episode 8. February 2010.

“I have permission from the university head to excavate here, in the yard and building” (Figs. 6 and 7).

“And we are ordered to stop you.”

“Listen! I know you are one of the university wardens and have to supervise our work. Here, this is my permission signed by the head of the university.”

“Why are you excavating here?”

“Come here, please. Aha! We think that this building was a jail before the

revolution. We are looking for its entrance paths in the yard. I think it might be associated with these sewers. I think that these were converted to sewers in the 1980s, and before they had been interconnected rooms through which people could enter the building.”

“Great! They say you are making trouble.”

“What kind of trouble? Anyway, I am an associate professor at this university; I have the right to teach my students, don’t I?”

“Maybe you’d better say former associate professor! You know you are transferred, probably because of the troubles you’ve caused... Anyway, you’ve disturbed the Faculty order.”

“I am an associate professor of this faculty until I leave it. In addition, is it troublemaking to make a sounding in the middle of the garden in the Faculty when we have permission from the head of the university? If we reach a conclusion, it would be advantageous to the history of the revolution in Hamadan.”

“Don’t shoot the messenger. .... There must be something wrong with your



Fig. 6: Trench 2 in the course of work.



Fig. 7 Trench 2 at the start of excavations.

work. Please fill the trench you've dug and give us whatever documents you've found in the basement."

### Episode 9. They Won't Live Happily Ever After!

These are the documents (Figs. 8 and 9) I had to deliver to the university warden, but I told them that I would take photographs of them. We scanned the documents and gave them the originals. We had no alternative; I was terribly worried about the students, especially in the days of the 2009-10 protests. Now we have documents about Dr. Hesami and his seven-year fight against the higher education system of Iran. Dr. Ekhtari remained in the position of the director of the Agriculture College until he was replaced by Khalili just before the 1979 revolution.

Although at the end of fairy tales the good guys always live happily ever after, the story of Khalili, Ekhtari, Saberi, and Hesami bears a happy end for the bad ones. Ekhtari taught in a private college established by his fans, although he was 95 years old. When he died in 2013 the Iranian newspapers and media wrote about him; before that, he had received a national award from the Islamic Republic because of lifetime service in agriculture: 10 golden coins and a Peugeot. Maybe no one knows that he was Colonel Ekhtari who reported names of students to SAVAK,

who called them troublemakers, anarchists and agitators, who caused Dr. Hesami's dismissal... maybe! Khalili and Dr. Saberi have immigrated to the United States. It is unfortunately the repetitive story of political systems in which people are silenced by more or less brutal means ranging from deprivation of education to physical annihilation (Bernbeck and Pollock 2007: 229).

Dr. Hesami was a victim of the process of silencing. He vanished, apparently completely lost in history. A professor of the University

of Tehran who had been banished to Hamadan was lost somewhere in history in such a way that no one, even 1970s students of Bu Ali Sina University and the Agriculture College, could remember him, the unwillingly retired associate professor of agriculture. He could not be found even in Behesht-i Zahra, the largest cemetery of Iran. He was completely lost somewhere in the contemporary history of Iran, somewhere before the revolution of 1979, while Saberi and Khalili are still alive, writing history as they want, without any trace of Hesami's name.

Hesami never received the salary from his last year of university service in 1978. Maybe I will never find any photo of him; maybe... But his image in my mind is the one he himself has painted in his last letter to his students: an associate professor of the Agriculture Faculty who wants to teach freely and live by doing his job.

Maybe he could never imagine that at some point he would be withdrawn from the contemporary history of Iran. Maybe, according to his writing, he said goodbye and left without intending to be back. Maybe he never imagined that one day, over thirty years later, he, the banished associate professor, would be reconstructed by another banished associate professor, her students, and her colleagues – a reconstruction indebted to contemporary archaeology. Aha! What's

wrong?! An archaeology of the recent past had not been born in Hesami's time.

### Episode 10. Discussion, 2011, in the Office.

The main group of documents is related to the Agriculture College of Hamadan, mostly from the 1960s and 1970s, the riotous and turbulent years of Pahlavi II. The number and content of the documents dating to the 1970s are especially noticeable. They clearly indicate unstable and disorderly conditions in Iran during those years. Older documents mostly consist of common business letters, but those from the 1970s contain reports on student unrest and the Faculty head's correspondence with the gendarmerie, police, governorship, and SAVAK. These letters mainly include reports on troublemaking students and professors and the actions taken in order to control and suppress these two groups, involving expulsion of the so-called anarchist students.<sup>4</sup>

The contents of the letters, their literal characteristics, words and terms used in their writing, strategies and remedies for coping with the situation – such as making speeches and holding conferences – are all similar to those of contemporary Iran, as if we are living in the riotous years of Pahlavi II, in those years before the revolution. What a familiar context! How familiar the terms, commentaries, analyses, and strategies are! As if nothing has changed and time has stopped; as if all things are being repeated in a cycle.

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We have just finished analyzing and reading the documents. We are all amazed, frozen with shock. We (M. Naimi [N], L. Papoli [P], O. Garazhian [G], M. Dezhamkhooy [D], A. Masoudi) have a hard time accepting such a repetition in history. It has metamorphosed us. Having seen no explanation for it, we need to discuss it further. In an academic dialogue,

<sup>4</sup> They might have been from the reformist groups of other left parties but it seemed that they were all called "anarchist" in the documents written by universities. It cannot be ascertained whether they were really "anarchists" or not, as even now, being an anarchist is illegal in Iran and as a result people do not speak their beliefs frankly.

referring to books and article read before is normal. Here, summarizing the text, the repetitive verbal phrases such as "I have seen in a book written by..." have been changed into direct references.

P: It's unbelievable. Is it possible that history can contain such a repetition? As if we are living before the revolution. What has happened to me and Omran is the same as Hesami.

N: Where does this repetition arise from? How can we decode it? Can we conceptualize the meaning of this rather than decoding it (Sørensen 2006)?

G: In my opinion, this issue goes back to deep social structures of Iran - a context which never changes.

D: You mean the context is static?

G: No, Maryam! This context is dynamic, but it doesn't change (Knapp 1992).

N: Supposedly the context doesn't change and neither do human agents. They have practically no effect on the structure; they are merely replaced by others. However, here one sees how problematic theories are that state that it is individuals who are active agents in the historical process (Gamble and Porr 2005).

P: Nevertheless, I think that we should pay more attention to human agents, especially when they decide to resist the structures in which they live.

G: The agents adapt themselves to the structure in order to guarantee their own and the structure's existence (van der Leeuw and McGlade 1997).

D: When we talk about societies' dynamism in archaeology, we usually mean "change" versus "continuity". Archaeology has rarely proceeded to repetition (Moore 1987). I mean the repetition of processes.

N: It resembles the movements of a clock's hands; they return to the place from which they started after a series of events.

D: It seems that processes in the last 30 years have gone in the same direction as those in the reign of Pahlavi II.

G: Social structures and contexts in Iran are not flexible enough, and the rate of contextual changes is too low. The agents living in this social context have also a great effect on this situation.

D: What then is the role of the agency of those who resist, such as oppositional groups?

P: The agency of eliminated agents like Dr. Hesami must not be discounted.

D: The effect of their actions on changing the government and causing revolutions is undeniable (Kienle 2001).

N: So why are we turning around and around in a closed cycle? Why are we living in the same political condition as in the time of Pahlavi II, although it has been a long time since the 1979 revolution?

G: It's difficult to interpret this situation. One reason is that the structure doesn't change, and consequently, society encourages only gradual changes. The revolution does not necessarily lead to changes in political and social structures (Arendt 1990), and agents try, often consciously, to reject or eliminate dissenting voices, as we see in documents from the Pahlavi period.

D: And the cycle of elimination and repetition goes on. We are stuck in that cycle!

G: The system functions like a spring. When being pushed (by some forces such as those from inside the system), it comes under pressure (a government will be overthrown because of a revolution), and after a while, in a mid-term process (50

years in the case of Iran), the spring returns to its original position. The structure doesn't change.

N: It's been about 50 years since the critical period of the 1960s and 1970s: 50 years of repetition!

P: As archaeologists we cannot expect to find a predictable correspondence between the archaeological record and some imagined category (Little and Kassner 2001:63). We may be able somehow to interpret what has happened in Iran in the recent 50-60 years but we cannot predict whether the story of the spring will be repeated again or not. Will the future be structurally the same as the past? Seconds, minutes, and hours are passing, but we do not move ahead. Will Iran's clock remain motionless and time go on merely in its temporal aspect? Or will social agents at last manage to penetrate into the structure and cause fundamental changes?

N: It should be noticed that the agency of the material world and that of the human world can be seen as mutually related (Jones 2002: 84, 181). As humans are the subject of archaeology, and as their agency and activity limit the predictability of a situation, it is always possible for social agents' actions to make a practical change. But what is the reason for their ineffectiveness? Why, in spite of all the actions they take, do social agents in Iran still strengthen rather than weaken structures?

D: One of the problems of Iranian society is its imbalance. The political system of Iran doesn't interact either with its internal agents or with the world outside. Our relations to each other and to the broader context have always been unidirectional and involved imposition and the elimination of oppositional voices. Such a condition involves a kind of monotony; the problem is not a change of political system, the problem is our socio-cultural context. As long as our relation to context is uni-dimensional and

based on omission, there is no chance for change.

P: Maybe the only thing we can do as archeologists is to present the outcomes of our analyses and study of these documents. We should present our interpreta-

tion of what has come over Iran in the 20th century. We should write it down and publicize warnings signs.

D: Maybe in this way we can manage to free ourselves from this Sisyphus-like repetition.



Fig. 8: Sample of a 1972 document from the director (known as Ekhtari in the article) of the Agriculture College, Hamadan University. The letter orders the members of the college to gather in order to pray for Mohammad Reza Shah's health after an unsuccessful terror attack.



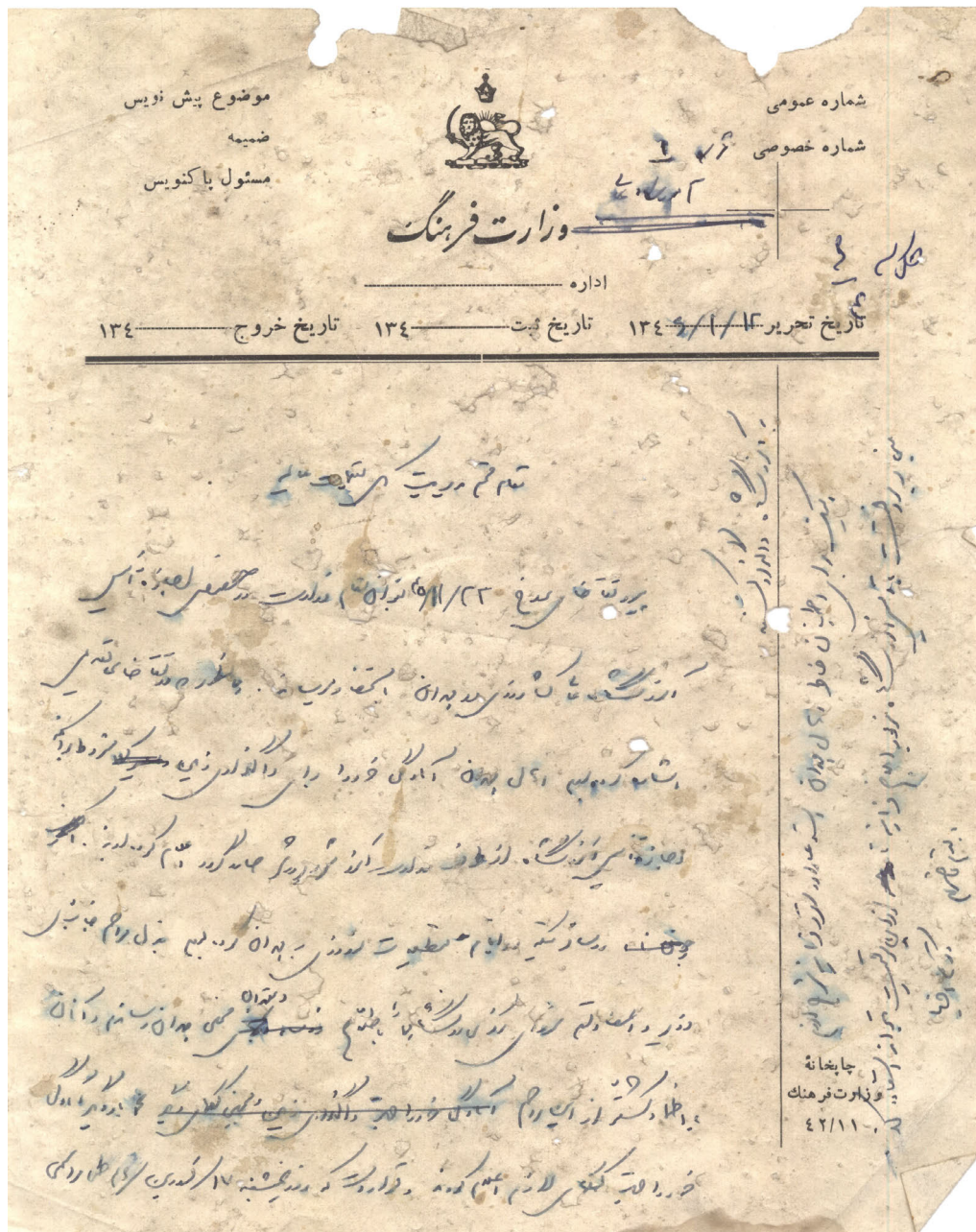


Fig. 9: Sample of a 1965 document, addressed to the Ministry of Science, to buy a field for construction of a new building for the faculty.

### Acknowledgements

This article is the result of an incomplete project which was in process in 2009, with the official permission of the heads of Bu Ali Sina University, but which was then blocked by them for unknown reasons. This project involved the excavation of architectural structures of the Art Faculty. Apparently, it was itself a victim of the protests that followed the 2009 election and was doomed to remain uncompleted. It is a secret whose clues may be found by archaeologists

in decades to follow. We are extremely grateful to tens of B.A. students of archaeology of Bu Ali Sina University in 2009-2010 for their unstinting support and to the people of Hamadan who kindly helped us with their local knowledge in order to find the lost clues. We are also grateful to Fahimeh Kaseb for translation of the text. We, the writers, accept responsibility for any mistakes in this article.

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