A Concealed Garden: Critical View on the Restoration of Ghasr Prison, Tehran, Iran

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Introduction
In the renovation and restoration projects in general, professionals in different groups, aim to survive historical monuments and also reuse them which sometimes constrains the designers to reform or redesign some parts of buildings, but the changes should follow an appropriate framework according to respect to values and characteristics of the monuments. In the case of Ghasr buildings, the heritage rules have been observed as principles, however in its landscape, designers somewhere treated with less ethical consideration which would have acted as a restraining force about intervention in a valuable site. Therefore the historical landscape needs to evaluate much deeply in the restoration projects as well as building cases for future renovation strategies. Also, the reasons of disregarding the history of the land in design process are notable to be investigated. This presentation considers a contemporary restoration case from Iran, Ghasr prison in Tehran.

1. Ghasr Prison as a Case Study
This report as a historical research discovers the layers of the national landscape called “Ghasr project” which included three phases, the first phase was to do thematic researches for offering the renovation purposes and architectural strategies following the rules of cultural heritage organisation, as an initial framework for the project, the second phase was architectural design and preparing construction drawings of the project, and the third phase was the construction. The project has been completed under supervision of Iran Cultural Heritage Organization and now, it is open to public as a museum and cultural complex, called “Ghasr Museum-Garden”. The mentioned case has possibilities to consider and assess its restoration strategies process through a critical approach to reveal the rate of accuracy in representing historical layers of landscape.

1.1 History of Land

1.1.1. Qajar Ghasr Garden
The historical documentary layer of the site of Ghasr prison had been a Qajar garden with the stepped pattern and a palace called Ghasr, addressed by Donald, N. Wilber [Wilber, 1979]. It was built in 1790 at the time of Qajar king, Fath-ali Shah, in the form of a palace [Fig.1] on the hill shaped a stepped landscape [Fig.2, Fig.3] with the significant walls and a palace, water lines, Jafari Qanat - the mechanism of bringing the water from lower level to higher one- and green platforms, organized pursuant to the topography of the land [Fig.4 and Fig.5]. According to Wilber’s plan, the geometric garden contained grid system with 42 rectangular flats for fruit trees, pine and flowers. Indeed, the Qajar-era land was mostly comprised of gardens like Eshrat-abad, Hehshmatieh, Saltanat-abad, Malek, Negarestan, and Baghe Shah of which no
traces apart from their names are left today.
Given the aerial view of 1960, only in the south and south-east of the site, a few remained trees are visible, on the current site of Ghasr prison [Fig.13].

1.1.2. Ghasr Prison
The early intervention on the landscape of Qajar garden was to build up the modern prison ordered by Reza-Shah Pahlavi in 1929, which was one of the oldest Iranian political prisons that some of the most famous politicians and activists from different contemporary history got their legal advantages in. This prison with 192 cells -among which about 100 cells were solitary- for 800 prisoners, was designed by Nikolai Markov Russian architect in the southern part of Qajar garden [Fig.6, Fig.9 and Fig.10]. The project designed through the geometrical pattern in building and landscape which according to superposition of the plans, in somewhere coincided with old garden’s axes [Fig.7].
But, in 1948, the only document presented both the garden and prison, indicates a built up prison located in the southern half of the land with the same central axe. In addition, through comparing with the Wilber’s plan, although, the number of garden’s axes decreased from 7 to 5 in vertical direction and from 8 to 7 in horizontal one, the central significant axe of both is the same [Fig.8].

1.1.3. Political Prison
A new prison in the modern style was built in Pahlavi II period in 1950 for political prisoners. The prison is located in the northeast of Ghasr prison and before additional parts, had the initial design as a big I-shaped form with two courtyards. Although, the building is not as valuable as Ghasr prison, the socio-political memories and events happened in the cells, corridors and yards are significant for Iranians and who is interested in contemporary history of Iran. So, the political prison is preserved for the future to read the memories not only to visit the walls [Fig.11 and Fig.12].

1.2. Evolution of the Land
As aforementioned, the transformation of the garden’s land began in Pahlavi I period by designing Ghasr prison and ended in 2012 by the accomplishment of Museum-Garden project. The evolution of Qajar landscape could be investigated through considering changes in the geometry of the land due to constructions. Given the aerial views from 1960 to 2006 of the mentioned site, in the first phase of the Ghasr project, the restoration team revised the details of the changes on the land, which indicated the original layer of Qajar garden was being destroyed and become insignificant. According to the aerial view in 1960, the trace of Ghasr prison’s landscape is demonstrated as...
access roads around prison’s building, the main pool and geometrical green spaces [Fig.13]. And also, a neoclassical hospital, a greenhouse built in Art Nouveau style4 [Fig.20, Fig.21] and shoes factory can be identified. Whereas, in 1966, the triangle road of Markov’s design forming new landscape for Ghasr prison, was being eliminated and furthermore, the construction of service buildings commenced, which was not valuable in terms of architectural style [Fig.14]. The photos show that, in 1968 and 1995, the land of the prison got occupied rather preserved and also the mosque, schools, and Zur-khaneh (traditional sport-house) were revealed in 1966 [Fig.15, Fig.16]. Eventually in 2006, Tehran Municipality decided to destroy all the worthless buildings built since 1968, which could offer a vacant land to represent all its historical layers [Fig.17]. In 2012, after renovation and restoration of Ghasr site, the landscape has renewed in the geometrical, functional, formal and topographical aspects, which has not been clarified in the direction of the land history [Fig.18].

2. Discussion and finding
Although, the report of the first phase of Ghasr Project which had offered the value of Qajar Garden as well as the prisons and other destroyed well-style buildings to preserve, Ghasr Museum-Garden has been disable to represent neither Qajar garden nor the destroyed significant buildings such as the greenhouse, hospital, and schools even by highlighting their positions and locations in the landscape or representing them through virtual elements. So, it is the restoration project made an effort to preserve and reuse the prisons rather than the landscape. Considering superposition of the historical site plans of and architectural objects on the context with the final layer of restoration, any appropriate influence of Qajar and Pahlavi I landscape has not been applied

Fig.6 - Ghasr prison, Pahlavi I period; Fig.7 - The superposition of the plans of the garden & prisons, Wilber’s plan & the Ghasr site plan in 2006 (by Author, 2008)
[Fig.22 and Fig.23]. So, the disconnection between the first and second phases of the design process has been affirmed. In addition, through a professional evaluation, the restoration of the site is not based on the real analysis of “land-life” as well as heritage buildings. Although, in the second phase, designers applied green space and water in design as the elements, there is not any comprehensive overview to organize whole of the landscape along with boldlying all the historical layers based on their distinguish characteristics such as Qajar garden. For instance, the grid systematically had shaped a traditional garden covering the prisons’ site and the
main axes of garden’s geometry have not profoundly been survived [Fig.24]. In fact, ignoring the possibilities of mass trees, continuous view of the main central axe, and water lines in landscape design, has concealed the main Qajar layer of the land. Furthermore, not only professionals but also the executive rules of Iran heritage organisation do not have precise priorities about landscape heritage yet, since in the supervision of the second and third phases of Ghasr national project, it did not offer any reports about neglecting of the strategies papered in the first phase -which was confirmed by the heritage organization- in the terms of the representation clarification.
3. Proposed Solutions
Nobody could identify a Persian garden in the site which had been occupied by the prison as well as in Museum-Garden as a cultural complex replaced Ghasr prison. So, the solution for the restoration of Qajar missed layer would be redesign the landscape based on historical realities as well as contemporary possibilities of the site and buildings. Since, the main axes of the garden cross the prisons’ entrances, they would be as water lines redesigned and be significant through effectively crossing the prisons along with the stepped topography. And also, in accordance with the Qajar pattern, the enormous trees would be “symbolic mass” in anywhere. In addition, the other historical vanished buildings, hospital, greenhouse, schools, and factories would be showed by the traces of their positions and locations on the land or through virtual effects to inform people about “land-life”. Consequently, the best solution could have been a clear architectural composition claiming valuable built and non-built objects of Qajar Garden, Pahlavi I and II periods as a contemporary public space for public life.

4. Conclusion
Landscape’s representation of all the historical layers in a cultural heritage project should be considered as well as buildings’ restoration. The heritage site’s possibilities including non-built historical values, such as landscapes or their public events could creatively offer effective redesigned objects to contribute to a contemporary composition of both landscape and renovated buildings. But the final product should be responsible for the characteristics of the land in the various aspects of socio-culture, history, and design to representation “land life” for the future.
Notes
1 It was completed by a Renovation and Restoration Office: Asia Art & Technology Office.
2 The author just participated in the first phase as a chef architect in field of architectural design consultant in 2008.
3 Done by an architectural office: Experimental Branch of Architecture Office.
4 The project client was Developing Cultural of Environment Company, Tehran Municipality.
5 The greenhouse used to prepare flowers not only for prisons' yards but also to sell people as well as others products that the prisoners prepared in prisons' factories. The income was given to prisoners’ family. There was shopping in the south of the site, which became the commercial facade between the prisons and city. The shopping’s wall was as a memorial place to buy flowers and also to inter through the gate to isolated place of the city. NON LA TROVO NEL TESTO!!!!!!

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**Abstract**

Although, in the restoration of the landscapes and buildings which contain the different historical layers with different values, professionals should be considering all layers and making a decision to represent layer by layer of them due to clarification of all the values for the future. There are some cases that despite making an effort to represent historical aspects to conserve, they were not successful in representation of the separate historical layers not only in buildings but also in landscape. This presentation, as a case study, considers the restoration project of Ghasr prison located in Tehran, through a critical approach. The research's objective is to indicate the relationship between the phases of a national project to carry out the proper evaluation of the new function of the site called “Ghasr Garden-Museum”, and ultimately to respond the inquiries about the reasons of missing the values of historical layers through design process and construction.

The paper’s results claim that the efficiency of frameworks of Iran cultural heritage organization and also the client and designers’ priorities, are the main factors affecting on the renovated project. So their reflection reveals that the “Qajar Garden” as one of the best layers of the landscape has been concealed to represent itself as a part of Tehran history, which do not seem successful to discover and presentation of the whole history of the project’s site.