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# Heritage Conservation versus Urban Development and Politics: Persepolis Tent City in the Aftermath of the Imperial Celebration, 1971-1979

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## **Abstract**

*In 1971, MohammadReza Pahlavi, the former Shah of Iran, invited the most then-influential individuals of the world to Iran to commemorate the 2,500-year Anniversary of the Founding of the Persian Empire by Cyrus the Great (The Imperial Celebration). To accommodate the guests, Iran set up a city of prefabricated apartments by Persepolis that looked like tents, hence Persepolis Tent City. In the aftermath of the Imperial Celebration, the government proposed or received six different plans to reuse the Tent City. Such attempts were mostly to make the site profitable, hence responding to criticisms of its extravagance. The primary stakeholders in the conception and realisation of these plans were NASCO, an architectural and urban planning consultancy firm; Homa, the National Airline of Iran that owned the Tent City; and the Planning and Budget Organisation, a governmental body that planned and supervised the public budget. There was also a Shah whose orders had to be accommodated. The plans, however, could not bring reconciliation between active stakeholders, leading to their rejection or abandonment. As a result, the Tent City slowly deteriorated to the degree that no more than its steel structures exist today.*

*This paper contributes to a better understanding of the relations between nationalism, heritage conservation, institutional architecture and political disputes manifested in Persepolis Tent City. The paper also offers an account of a remarkable architectural intervention, the largest-ever intervention in the first-level buffer zone of the 2500-year-old site, now a UNESCO World Heritage site, that either because of the content or the (mis)reading of the messages it carried, has remained undervalued. To pursue these objectives, the research draws on previously unexamined archival documents retrieved from the National Archive of Iran and print media published in the 1970s.*

## Introduction

This paper concerns Persepolis Tent City (c. 1971), a set of prefabricated apartments amidst a carefully landscaped site adjacent to Persepolis (c. 550-330 BCE), in the aftermath of Iran's 1971 Imperial Celebration, an international event to commemorate the 2500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Persian Empire. It contributes to a better understanding of the relations between nationalism, heritage conservation, institutional architecture, political disputes and diplomacy as manifested in Persepolis Tent City, Iran. The paper also offers an account of a remarkable architectural intervention, the largest-ever intervention in the first-level buffer zone of the 2500-year-old site, now a UNESCO World Heritage site, that either because of the content or because of the (mis)reading of the messages it carried, has remained undervalued. To pursue these objectives, the research draws on previously unexamined archival documents retrieved from the National Archive of Iran and print media published in the 1970s.

Persepolis Tent City was built to accommodate the heads of states during the ceremonies at Persepolis during Iran's Imperial Celebration. The guests included one emperor, seven kings, three queens, 21 princes and princesses, four emirs, one sultan, two governors-general, 21 presidents, and four prime ministers. The former Shah of Iran invited them to commemorate the 2500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Persian empire in an array of parades, audiovisual spectacles, exhibitions, inaugurations and banquets. The highly political and diplomatically significant Imperial Celebration had two primary objectives. For a domestic audience, the event bolstered the ideological underpinning of the Pahlavi regime by promoting the idea that the successes of the country had been, and always would be, dependent on the throne, while to an international audience, the event signalled the beginning of a new period of prosperity and global influence for Iran.<sup>1</sup>

Persepolis Tent City constituted 50 circular residential tents, one oblong dining tent, one grand circular reception tent, three tents for hairdressing and makeup services,<sup>2</sup> one tent as a social club, and a few buildings for cooking and services. A 70-metre-long street, flanked between a round square at the end of Shiraz-Persepolis road on the north and an 1800 square metre heliport on the south, divided the area into two parts. Residential and hairdressing tents were on the eastern side, closer to Persepolis Palace, and the reception, dining and social tents were on the western side. Parallel

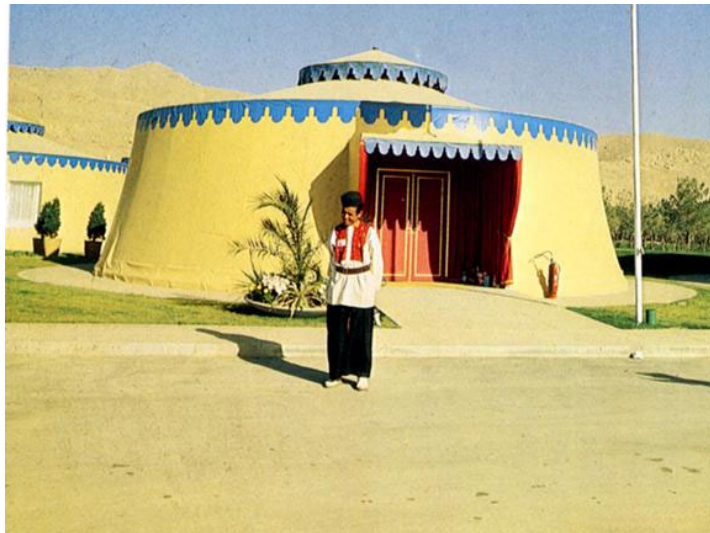
to the main street, a 45-metre-wide street separated the Persepolis heritage site from Persepolis Tent City (Figure 1).<sup>3</sup>

Residential tents, 13 metres in diameter and 3 metres in height, were spaced along five wings branching out from a central fountain to create a star-shaped encampment. Each wing of this star had ten tents paired on the opposite sides of an avenue. Residential tents were of beige and royal blue fabric containing an audience chamber, two bedrooms, two bathrooms and a kitchen (Figure 2).<sup>4</sup> Another tent, 24.5 metres in diameter, was the social club near the heliport to while away the idle hours. It was equipped with a bar, a restaurant and a casino, all in modern décor.<sup>5</sup> The reception hall, or the Tent of Honour, 34 metres in diameter with a 6-metre domed ceiling, included the Shah's and his Queen's apartments. With walls of red Italian silk damask that were furnished with a continuous gold-trimmed valance and eight Empire-style chandeliers made of ormolu and Bohemian crystal hanging from an elegantly gathered 6-metre-tall domed ceiling of golden voile, and a floor of cerise moquette and woven wool fabric, the room was like a large jewel box.<sup>6</sup> Designed to seat 500 guests, 68 metres long, 24 metres wide and 13 metres high, the royal dining hall was like a "cathedral of cloth."<sup>7</sup> Its carpet was in blue and gold, a blue silk Persian design covered the wall, and a pink silk-draped ceiling with twelve coffered recesses had gilt and patinated bronze triple-tier chandeliers with stylised branches in the form of acanthus hanging from it (Figure 3).

A circular road marked the outer boundary of residential tents. This dominant register of the encampment was further extended and formalised by a dense garden, a wood of young pines.<sup>8</sup> Landscape architects decorated the area. The prominent feature of the landscape was the massive central fountain with 1211 pumps and 400 projectors.<sup>9</sup> At night, the dramatically lighted jets of water served to join the contemporary tented city with the illuminated monumental ruins of Persepolis.<sup>10</sup> The juxtaposition created a dominant east-west sightline, with the palace of Darius as a suggestive beginning point and the conjoint reception and dining tents as the culmination.<sup>11</sup> Overall, approximately 52,000 metres of waterproof and non-flammable canvas and fabric were used in constructing and decorating the tents.<sup>12</sup> The tents had been tested to withstand wind velocity of 125 miles per hour.<sup>13</sup>



**Figure 1.** Tent City (c. 1971) at the back vs Persepolis (c. 550-330 BCE) at the front side (Unknown Author, 1971, Wikimedia Commons, <http://bit.ly/3XZ8nOp>, accessed 3 February 2023).



**Figure 2.** Residential Tents (Photograph by Cyrus Kadivar, 1971, Wikimedia Commons, <http://bit.ly/3DEtYmZ>, accessed 3 February 2023).



**Figure 3.** The Dining Tent during the Gala Dinner  
(Photograph by Unknown Author, 1971, Wikimedia  
Commons, <http://bit.ly/3HtPrQI>, accessed 3 February 2023).

### **1961-1979: Persepolis Tent City and the Imperial Celebration**

The idea of developing a city of tents near Persepolis to accommodate the heads of states was first proposed by a highly celebrated art and architectural historian, Arthur Upham Pope (1881-1969).<sup>14</sup> Arguing that accommodating delegates of foreign countries in tents near Persepolis was the tradition of ancient Achaemenid kings (550-330 BCE), in 1961, Pope suggested setting up tented accommodation, noting that they should “err a bit on the luxurious side for the sake of foreign visitors.”<sup>15</sup> Even before October 1971, it was evident that the Celebration, with so many dignitaries present at Oriental tents and so much history around, would be a television photographer’s delight.<sup>16</sup> It was like a world fair, a universal exposition representing a single expanded world in a microcosm.<sup>17</sup> The event turned out to be successful from many perspectives, especially publicity. During the first four days of the Imperial Celebration, journalists and photographers circulated 12 million words, took nearly 500,000 photos, recorded roughly 1200 hours of video and made 3000 hours of phone calls.<sup>18</sup> All these figures were record-breaking in 1971. Peter Ramsbotham, the UK’s ambassador to Iran, noted that the Celebrations “put Iran on the map” and Persepolis “for a brief forty-eight hours, became the centre of world interest.”<sup>19</sup> Print media called it “Iran’s biggest possible publicity venture to date.”<sup>20</sup> They argued that “the publicity alone for Iran will be priceless.”<sup>21</sup> A projected estimated audience of 1.016 billion people worldwide was to witness the event.<sup>22</sup> Statistics showed that the Celebration increased Iran’s tourism rate. The number of foreign tourists soared from 210,000 in 1966 to 514,000 by 1972 and the average duration of trips increased from thirteen nights to nineteen in the same

period.<sup>23</sup> The travellers also saw Iran's security and "the Persian economic miracle along with the smooth, meticulously kept highways; in the countless construction sites with ultramodern equipment; in the small, neat factories and workshops; in the mechanized farms, and the extensive, reforested dunes along arid slopes."<sup>24</sup>

The event received some criticisms as well. In August 1971, for example, Rosette Hargrove, the *American-Statesman's* journalist, wrote "the Iranian birthday party will be an all-French production."<sup>25</sup> This statement was partially true. Most of the Tent City and its facilities had been delivered by foreign companies, especially French. Maxim's, the renowned culinary establishment in Paris, prepared the food. A team of 120 captains headed by Pierre Gachet, director of the then new restaurant service at Orly Airport in France, some Potel et Chabot staff from the Palace Hotel in St Moritz, Andrea Badrutt's team from the Hotel de Paris in Monte Carlo and Raymond Thuillier from the Baumaniere in Les Beaux in the south of France offered their services during the event.<sup>26</sup> The wines were from the UK's Rothschild's cellar and the French Moët et Chandon. The French Raynaud created a china set of Céralene. Bullet-proof Mercedes-Benz cars were imported from Germany. Limoges designed serving plates, Haviland supplied china cups for coffee, Porthault prepared linens and towels, and Baccarat made the glasses. A French designer was commissioned to make two sets of 30 dresses for the ladies in waiting. All the tents had been built by the Paris-based Saint Frères Group, international specialists in industrial textile, and designed by Jansen, a Paris-based interior design firm.<sup>27</sup> Apartments were equipped with the finest French toiletries, including Guerlain shaving preparations for men and Joy Eau de Cologne for women,<sup>28</sup> while the pantries had even the US-made Alka-Seltzer.<sup>29</sup> A French artist built the fountain, and England and Belgian designers delivered the landscape of the site.<sup>30</sup>

Non-Iranians were overwhelmingly more involved in developing the site for the Iranians' birthday party. It led to several issues. On the one hand, Iran had gone too far in erring on the side of luxury. Some questioned the necessity of such luxury and the opposition forces objected to the excessive costs. To address these critics, Iran decided to turn the Persepolis Tent City into a permanent and profitable structure using Iranian technology and resources. The following sections organise and interpret several hundred pieces of correspondence between Iranian entities and offer a history of the Tent City in the aftermath of the Celebration.

### **Plan No.1: Club Meditarranée**

The initial idea to reuse the Tent City in the aftermath of the Imperial Celebration was in place before the Celebration. The Tourism Organisation of Iran, which later became the Ministry of the Information and Tourism, wanted to turn it into a resort centre, to be operated by Club Meditarranée, a group of resort centres used by club members. Club Meditarranée had signalled its desire to take over the tents.<sup>31</sup> The vision, though, did not come true. After the event, the Club proposed to Iran's Tourism Organisation, the then owner of the site, a meagre sum of \$3 a night per guest.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, Iran rejected the offer and terminated further collaboration with the Club. Hoping to find serious investors willing to pay more to the owner, the Tourism Organisation negotiated with other potential investors. But Pan American, Intercontinental and Hilton declined the opportunity to invest in the tents. Eventually, Iran could not find serious investors.<sup>33</sup>

The failure of the too optimistic plan of turning the tents into a resort for millionaires added up to the tensions. Probably, and retrospectively, now Iranian organisers, especially those affiliated with the Tourism Organisation, could see how unrealistic the initial goal was. A tent whose additional value comes from its previous owner, e.g. a king or queen of a nation, cannot function like a hotel room. Such furniture does not tolerate wear-and-tear, which is the basic principle of any resort centre or hotel. Upon Shah's approval, the ownership of the Tent City was transferred to the Iran National Airline (Homa) in August 1972.<sup>34</sup> The new owner, Homa, invited Jansen, the interior architecture firm who had designed the tents, to inspect the tents as they were deteriorating rapidly. Eight months later, Jansen advised Homa that the deterioration was due to Iranians' negligence of maintenance protocols.<sup>35</sup> While Homa, not unlike the Tourism Organisation, had not been successful in making the tents profitable, the increasing maintenance costs were imposing further challenges. The head of Homa wrote to the prime minister that Tent City's expenses were around 24,442,000 rials while its income was only 1,200,000 rials (\$350,000 c.f. \$17,150 USD). The report shows that Tent City had 129 staff members, a large number.<sup>36</sup> In another letter, he informed the Planning and Budget Organisation (PBO) about the 23,242,000 rials deficiency (\$332,000 USD) in the Tent City budgets.<sup>37</sup> Although the government had allocated a 30,000,000 rials (\$400,000 USD) budget to maintain the tents,<sup>38</sup> the letter suggests that the Tourism Organisation, the previous owner, accessed it while it was never realised for Homa. AbdolMajid Majidi, PBO's director, argued that since Homa is a for-profit entity, the government could not fund a site without public use with the public budget.<sup>39</sup>



### **Plan No.2: Conference Venue**

Having failed to attract investors and turn the Tent City into a luxury hotel, Homa sought alternative solutions. In July 1972, the Culture and Tourism Department at PBO put forward a plan for organising national and international conferences at the Tent City.<sup>40</sup> The letter also proposed allocating an annual maintenance budget and organising cultural and student tours to raise the site's income. As the tents' deterioration was a major concern, PBO suggested repairing them through another commission to Jansen. Since the cloths and furniture were Jansen-made, they saw it as the only short-term solution. On 20 June 1973, Jansen submitted a detailed quote in 40 pages: 4,130,605 French Francs (\$940,000 USD) for repairing and cleaning the tents and furniture, painting, flooring and plumbing. Although the tents were air-conditioned, Jansen also submitted another quote for 3,974,030 Francs (\$900,000 USD) for HVAC equipment, suggesting that the previous devices needed either improvement or replacement.<sup>41</sup>

### **Plan No.3: Façade Retention**

Jansen's quote raised desperation among Iranian entities, especially Homa, because maintenance costs would soon surpass the cost of creating them. The Tent City was not even nearly profitable, and the objections to the costs and extravagance of the party were still a concern. In the meantime, AliMohammad Khademi (1913-1978), the head of Homa, continued negotiating with PBO to have an annual budget for maintenance costs.<sup>42</sup> On 15 November 1973, Homa requested an urgent 17,000,000 rials (\$243,000 USD) for repairing the Tent City, suggesting that the deterioration of the tents was getting close to a critical condition.<sup>43</sup> While PBO had already rejected such offers on the basis that the public budget cannot fund a for-profit non-public entity, the urgency of repair made PBO approve the request, provided the prime minister's approval.<sup>44</sup>

Frustrated by Jansen's quote and the seemingly endless maintenance costs, the shah himself entered the scene. The grand tent was the primary concern. So, on 4 August 1973, he ordered "masonry materials or even concrete should fill in the space between metal frames to preserve the interior from climate conditions and a fabric similar to the original one, preferably produced locally by Iranian engineers, cover the structure."<sup>45</sup> Preferring Iranian engineers was most likely a reaction to the objections on commissioning foreign, especially French, companies over Iranians. The Shah also asserted that the "original layout of the Tent City should remain intact" and the grand hall should turn into a conference venue.<sup>46</sup> While the plan to turn the grand tent into a conference venue was already proposed by the PBO, it also received the Shah's order.

One month later, he organised a small party in the Tent City where he called upon the head of Homa and gave a more detailed order: “outsource anything related to furniture and covering fabrics to Jansen; but masonry works, construction of new buildings, and installing new equipment and facilities should be given to Iranian engineers.”<sup>47</sup>

#### **Plan No.4: Sports Club and Conference Room**

Following up on shah’s orders, on 18 September 1973, Homa advised PBO that executing the royal orders required: 1. repairing the tents urgently, especially since winter is close; 2. transforming the tents into permanent structures; and 3. transforming the grand tent into a conference venue. Homa also brought in an Iranian engineering consultancy, NASCO. According to the letter, requirement No. 1, i.e. repairing the tents, would be conducted by Jansen, though through direct supervision of NASCO, Homa and PBO. Item No. 2 was outsourced to NASCO, though the consultancy could liaise with Jansen if needed. And for No. 3, NASCO was expected to undertake a feasibility study.<sup>48</sup>

Assigning three entities to supervise Jansen indicates that the quality of Jansen’s deliveries was not completely satisfactory. In November 1974, PBO sent an inspector to assess Jansen’s work. The inspector’s report demonstrated that Jansen’s work was not of satisfactory quality: “The necessity of the current repairs comes from the vendor’s [Jansen] negligence in its choice of materials and execution. Consequently, climate conditions, humidity, and rainwater are deteriorating the floors, internal walls, and wooden walls.”<sup>49</sup> The report circulated confidentially among PBO and Homa. Nevertheless, Jansen finished repairing the tents by July 1975, when Iran hosted the president of Mexico at the Tent City. It is not clear who paid for the repair cost, PBO or Homa; similarly, while Jansen’s quote was for roughly \$940,000 USD, documents do not indicate how much was eventually spent on restoring the tents. Meanwhile, NASCO argued that turning the grand tent into a conference venue was not feasible. The grand tent did not have audio-visual, ventilation and communication equipment and adding them would change the characteristics of the tent, which was not acceptable to the shah.<sup>50</sup>

Therefore, NASCO reconciled the shah’s order with the realities of a conference venue and in August 1975 suggested constructing a 500-600-seat conference venue at Darius Hotel.<sup>51</sup> Created in 1971 by the Persepolis for the Imperial Celebrations, Darius Hotel was built to accommodate less influential representatives. During the 1971 event, delegates from 48 foreign countries, among the 63 countries attending the

Celebration, were accommodated in the Tent City, and the rest resided at Darius Hotel. The hotel had followed the materials and characteristics of conventional hotels, masonry materials and reinforced concrete.<sup>52</sup> However, the proposal to establish a conference venue at Darius Hotel also meant another massive constructional attempt in Persepolis' first-level buffer zone, indicating that high maintenance costs and growing frustrations were pushing heritage conservation principles aside. To turn the tents into permanent structures, NASCO suggested that the cloth covering the tents should be removed and replaced with either a steel frame system or epoxy roofing.<sup>53</sup> The proposal presented by NASCO also mentioned that to make Persepolis Tent City profitable, the Persepolis region should become more vibrant and have more visitors. Therefore, it suggested developing the Persepolis Imperial Club, a set of sports facilities (golf, tennis and horseracing, among others). One week later, Shah approved the proposal. Regarding NASCO's suggested alternatives for the roofing system of the tents, he asked for a council of engineers to discuss it and decide the best approach. Later and after a few more discussions, the Shah's orders were sent to Homa in more detail. It included making the Tent City a permanent structure using NASCO's suggestions, constructing a 600-seat conference venue near Darius Hotel, and developing Persepolis Imperial Club near Persepolis.<sup>54</sup>

#### **Plan No.5: Wire Mesh Cable Tray System**

No plan was implemented by 10 October 1977, when another letter circulated in the court and government regarding NASCO's new proposals. The remaining archival documents do not explain why the previous proposals were abandoned. It is possible, though, that the epoxy roofing system was rejected because it was not permanent enough, and the steel frame roofing system was abandoned because it could change the visual characteristics of the Tent City. Either way, the new letter contained two new solutions and indicated another liaising session with Jansen: (i) Jansen System, a new cover of tiles and steel frame to be installed on the current cover; and (ii) wire mesh cable tray system, a network of cable trays and wires that would top the current covering and be covered with a layer of polyester.<sup>55</sup>

The letter also stresses that the small tents had satisfactory structures and did not need a new covering. It is not clear why the smaller tents were exempted from repairs and restructuring. Presumably, Jansen's previous repairs under the direct supervision of three Iranian entities sufficed for the smaller tents. The new letter recommended an 83,000,000 rials (\$1,185,714 USD) budget for installing electrical and mechanical equipment for smaller tents; therefore, it suggested Iran had accepted Jansen's quote

on repairing the tents while rejecting their quote on HVAC installations. Finally, the letter estimated an annual 50,000,000 rials (\$715,000 USD) maintenance cost. It ended with sharing the PBO's opinion, which was inclined toward the wire mesh cable tray system.<sup>56</sup>

#### **Plan No.6: Commemorative Monument**

One month after NASCO's second proposal, in October 1977, exactly six years after the Celebration, the Shah expressed his desire one more time that the Tent City must become profitable. "You have to examine how we can put this project in use [...] and find ways to make money from it," said the Shah to his prime minister, "perhaps you can strengthen the structure by concrete or brick; if it is not possible, do whatever costs less [to turn it into a permanent structure]."<sup>57</sup> Consequently, Homa, NASCO and PBO discussed it over a meeting and agreed to find a way to meet the Shah's desires.<sup>58</sup> A few weeks later, Homa advised the planning organisation on its plan. This plan was an amalgamation of all the previous proposals, including making the tents permanent structures, renting smaller tents to "people of certain classes," selling entry tickets to tourists and developing sports facilities to make the Persepolis region vibrant all year round.

Eventually, on 20 December 1977, in another confidential letter, PBO and its new head, Manuchehr Agah (1930-2012), decided to summarise and conclude all the previous plans and submit them to the Shah. It began by addressing Homa's plan (Plan No. 4) to develop a sports centre and turning the small tents into hotels for people of certain classes and the large tent into a conference venue. PBO concluded that this plan would inevitably change or damage the interior decorations. They added that "even if we transform the large tent into a conference venue, it will not pay off because the decorations are too delicate and irreplaceable." Regarding equipping Darius Hotel to make the Persepolis area more vibrant, the confidential letter advised that the occupation rate of the hotel stood at 13.71% and adding more facilities to the site would not help because Persepolis is located far from an established urban life. As a result, the letter continued, "tourists prefer to stay in Shiraz and have a half-day trip to Persepolis rather than accommodating in Persepolis."<sup>59</sup> It should be noted that Shiraz, one of the largest cities in Iran with abundant tourist attraction and facilities, has only a 60-kilometre distance from Persepolis, i.e. a 45-minute drive.

Regarding Plan No. 3, PBO explained that in the structural system used in the large tent, cables and metal frames bear the loads and forces. Therefore, using brick or

concrete would not help. The letter then turned to Plan No. 5, NASCO's proposal to use a wire mesh cable tray system. It clarified that the consultancy, NASCO, reconsidered their proposal and added that using such a system on the current system will only postpone, not prevent, the periodical need to change the cover; either way, a maintenance cost should be allocated. According to the letter, NASCO had proposed another solution which was demolishing the large tent and building another tent of the same size, but this time with permanent structures and materials. PBO echoed NASCO's observation that using a wire mesh cable tray system would not solve the problem for good or turn the tents into permanent buildings. It also dismissed the second proposal as it was "another project that requires a separate feasibility study" and "irrelevant to the core objective of retaining the form and characteristics of the tents."<sup>60</sup>

In surprisingly blunt language, the confidential letter concluded that Tent City could not become profitable or even self-sufficient. It advised the Shah that any scenario to preserve the tents as they are, without changing their forms and visual characteristics, required annual maintenance costs and massive expenditure from the public budget. There was no guaranteed plan to reuse the tents successfully, and they could no longer "evade the reality that all the tents were temporary structures." Finally, the letter requested the Shah's approval of PBO's proposal: disassembling the tents and constructing a commemorative monument in their place to "preserve the unforgettable memory of the fortunate Imperial Celebrations and to [enable] a deep understanding of Iran's culture," asserting that a team of "cultural experts, sociologists, and archaeologists should consider the architectural identity of Persepolis and the cultural and social contexts of the auspicious Pahlavi era" to design the monument.<sup>61</sup>

One year later, in April 1979, a revolution ended the Pahlavi era. Shortly after, the new regime decided to "purge" the community from "corrupted" consultancy firms, defining corruption as any history of collaboration with the defunct regime.<sup>62</sup> NASCO was among them, hence its obliteration. It is likely, also stated by some scholars,<sup>63</sup> that the Jansen-delivered furniture was looted after the revolution. There is no information on where they are now or how they are in use. Currently, the steel frames of the smaller tents are the only survivors of the once-lavish Tent City. So far, the new regime has commissioned nearly a dozen consultancy or engineering firms and academics to develop a plan to revive or reuse the remnants of the tents. None of those plans has been executed so far. The four-decade-long demonisation of the Imperial Celebration

by the Islamic Republic and the fact that all the furniture is gone have added another layer of complexity to the already unsettling site.



**Figure 4.** Residential Tents in 2012 (Photograph by Adam Jones, Wikimedia Commons, <https://bit.ly/3vimbgP>, accessed 13 January 2023).



**Figure 5.** Residential Tents in 2017. (Rup, Wikimedia Commons, <http://bit.ly/3Ynzty2>, accessed 3 February 2023).

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

The development of a city of tents near Persepolis heritage site was conceived in 1961 and executed in 1971. It was deemed a political act from the beginning, bound with the

nation's identity and the government's propaganda. To develop a profitable resort or venue, the government built on the invented heritage of having modern kings and queens sleep in some tents that were themselves a reinvigoration of ancient kings sleeping in tents near Persepolis. They insisted on keeping the visual identity and characteristics of the Tent City intact. Making the tents profitable using Iranian entities was also politically charged, as it could resolve the objections on the extravagance of the event and the blatant absence of Iranians in Iran's birthday party.

The (hi)story of the Tent City in the aftermath of the Imperial Celebrations had three primary players: NASCO, a consultancy firm primarily interested in large-scale architectural and urban planning projects; Homa, the national airline of Iran that owned the Tent City and wanted to make the site profitable; and the Planning and Budget Organisation, a governmental body that planned and supervised the public budget. There was also a Shah whose orders had to be accommodated. The contradicting incentives and objectives of these forces and the power imbalance between them shaped the life of Tent City. The relative success of the event at the Tent City, the media push it brought for Iran, the active and contradicting forces in the scene, the objections against its extravagance and vendors, and the formal and informal protests by heritage counsellors and archaeologists made the Tent City one of the most sensitive and complicated urban and architectural developments in Iran's modern history.

### **Delimitation Statement**

Iran had several established heritage organisations, including the Society for National Heritage and the Ministry of Culture and Arts, and other active cultural and political figures and entities, such as Empress Farah's office and organisations or institutes founded by her. While addressing the role and contributions of these entities to contextualise Persepolis Tent City in the aftermath of the Celebration could offer a more comprehensive understanding, this paper is highly dependent on archival documents relevant to the Tent City that exist at the National Archive of Iran. These documents, eight collections containing 1256 documents, are mostly correspondence between Homa, NASCO, PBO and the royal court. While this high number of documents does not indicate any other entity involved with the Tent City, there is a chance that other archives host relevant materials unexamined by this research. Currently, the Shah's role is very notable; however, it may be the outcome of focusing on correspondences between the court and a few court-dependant organisations.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Robert Steele, *The Shah's Imperial Celebrations of 1971: Nationalism, Culture and Politics in Late Pahlavi Iran* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), 1.
- <sup>2</sup> Betty Beale, "Fabulous Persian Celebration," *Washington Star*, 8 August 1971.
- <sup>3</sup> Sally Quinn, "50 Monarchs and All the Sheikhs of Arabia," *Washington Post*, 29 August 1971.
- <sup>4</sup> Joseph Mazandi, "World's Oldest Monarchy Celebrates Persian Whoopee in Persepolis," *Philadelphia Bulletin*, 19 September 1971.
- <sup>5</sup> Jacques Lowe, *Celebration at Persepolis* (Geneva: Creative Communications, 1971), 41; Quinn, "50 Monarchs."
- <sup>6</sup> James Anchor Abbot, *Jansen* (New York: Acanthus Publication, 2006), 259.
- <sup>7</sup> Quinn, "50 Monarchs."
- <sup>8</sup> Jean Powell, "Hundreds invited to Iran," *Washington Star*, 22 August 1971.
- <sup>9</sup> *Zane Rooz*, no. 342, special issue (October 1971): 110.
- <sup>10</sup> Abbot, *Jansen*, 258.
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