

The Politics of the Past: The Representation of the Ancient Empires by Iran's Modern States

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Foreword

'I am undoubtedly in a heritage environment, but the past is not easily separated from my ongoing experience' (Shanks 2012: 14).

Learning about the Middle East, one of the most common images of the region are the ones depicting violence. Both local and global media outlets are replete with the images of injured bodies, heads cut-off by ISIS and mourning women; all with a very familiar label attached to them: from the Middle East. It seems that the modern propaganda is deeply ignoring the other side of the people's lives, which involve the everyday life, and cultural plurality.

The history of the region is saturated by the male tyrants killing the enemies. According to these pictures, the ancient kings' images are being reproduced as a symbol of modern power structures. Though frankly, the ancient kings' image has two coincided sides, a powerful man who protects the nation and simultaneously, a vulnerable figure who should be protected from his enemies.

Such a long compositional grammar of history with an emphasis on king and dominant power could not be equilibrated even after pioneer antiquarians and archaeologists began to experience it objectively. Focusing on palaces, battlefields and administrative centers by such antiquarian archaeology only reinforced the political nationalistic discourse needed by new born states in the Middle East after the First World War. As a result, the recent recurring violence in the region is always metaphorically dealing with ancient emperors and kings; Saddam Hussein compared himself with *Assyrian* emperors during Iran-Iraq war (1980–1988) while the presidents and kings of modern Iran are trying to present themselves as the grandchildren of *Cyrus II*, *Darius I* (*Achaemenid* kings) or powerful holy Muslim Caliphs. History in Middle East is the weapon for politicians who call themselves the fathers of all the nation, in purpose of referring to a bountiful past, glorious duties of kings and absolute innocence against real enemies of the territory.

Two ancient empires, *Achaemenid* and *Sasanian*, whose territories extended from current Pakistan to Syria, have mostly been the objects of the modern propaganda. For the contemporary governments in the region, the extended territories of these empires, as well as their offensive tendencies have made an allegorical field for propaganda, justifying dictatorship and power centralization.

Obviously, the reality of life in historical and modern Middle East is much more different from its representation in the mainstream media and conventional history. Considering the real lives of ordinary people, like all over the world the region's history in fact has been created by ordinary men and women, children, slaves, workers, homosexuals, disabled people, minorities and all the people whom the politicians; hence, kings and power structures are only a part of. Though, the bitter reality is that propaganda and media have gradually reduced such diverse voices merely to the monologue of kings. Criticizing this process (and point of view) is the key component of this book.

The first and main premise that this book rests upon is that the fabricated history is a reduced one and reality is that the diverse groups of human beings and pluralities have been neglected in such a political narrative. The second premise is that the archaeology, both as an academic discipline and also as a political action has accompanied the politicians en route to promoting a monologist narrative of history with nationalism as its dominant theme. Critical approach can unmask what has been intentionally disguised in the most prevalent formal narrative. Driven by this aim, authors, both female indigenous Iranian archaeologists, endeavor to examine the constitution of archaeological past of the region by modern states. Contextualising their own professional experience, the authors attempt to outline some principles, including ethics, that can help transcend official history, in fact, the commonly overlooked ones. This book is more about the deconstruction of accepted narratives and aims to present a reinterpretation of history of domination through using cultural material and outside the nationalism framework.

The book includes five chapters, which are all on the critique of dominant narrative of political history. Chapters one and four go through the details of modern states' attitudes toward past material remains, whereas chapters two and three try to put forward alternative interpretations of empire remains. However, each chapter can also be read separately just as if they are independent articles. Indeed, the notions of chapters two and three are accompanied by an artistic rhetoric and alternate narratives. In these chapters, the reader is invited to join the authors to go beyond the media-narrated version of the history of ancient empires of the Near East, *Achaemenid* and *Sasanian* Empires, and speculate and visualize the histories which 'could' have occurred.

Chapter five puts forward the challenges and dilemmas of practicing archaeology in the Middle East. Briefly, it contests the conventional ways of doing archaeology advocating

the more contextualised types of archaeologies. To consider the localities, minorities and also ignored episodes of past and its materialities can characterize more engaged archaeologies.

Chapter 1

Governments, Archaeologists, and the Lasting Remains of Ancient Empires in the Middle East

Introduction: identity crisis in the modern Middle East

The highly unanticipated independence referendum of Kurdistan Region on 25th September 2017 shocked the global political sphere. The news was quickly spread online and stunned the geopolitical neighbors of Iraq. To the people of the Middle East, it was obvious for years that some *Kurd* parties had struggled and had been claiming to gain an independent ethnical and national identity. But is the archeological side of such claims of any importance to those eager to follow the changes in the region? Were the archaeologists working in the region aware of the consequences of their investigations? Did they think about the possible misunderstanding or misuse of the results of their investigations? Have they possibly imposed contemporary identities on the archaeological sites and findings consciously or unconsciously?

To reply to such questions, it is necessary to know that during the last decade, the Kurdistan Regional Government has invited foreign archaeologists and invested a considerable budget in conserving the monuments and sites. Iranian, Greek, German and other foreign teams have divided Kurdistan Region into archaeological research sections. Just a simple search on Google would display plenty of results, a huge proportion of which simply include promotional and vague content and titles such as '150 new archaeological sites found in Iraqi Kurdistan' (The Archaeology News Network 2016) or 'Iraqi Kurdistan site reveals evolution towards the first cities' (The University of Alabama 2016).

Scrutinizing the point, the authors briefly discuss a research published in 2015. The project was supported by Harvard University (Kopaniias *et al.* 2015) and is accessible as an Open Access content. The report mentions 52 different archaeological, conservation, survey and excavation and museum projects. According to the report,

this huge project whose completion took about five years, is a methodological and chronological mixture of different approaches, time periods and sites; from mosques to Assyrian graves. Only a glimpse of the contents of the project shows that almost all the provinces of Iraqi Kurdistan, namely *Deyhuk*, Sulaymaniyah and Erbil have been surveyed. Indeed, each of these provinces have a Department of *Antiquities* which are all under the supervision of the Central Department of Antiquities of Kurdistan.

The introductory section of the report written by *Mala Awat*, the general director of Department of Antiquities of Kurdistan, indicates that 'Kurdistan has become one of the most important areas of archaeological research in the world. In recognition of this, and as one way of taking this further, consideration is being given to creating an independent institute of archaeology able to provide information and data and archaeological expertise to both local and foreign investigators in support of their activities, whose value we fully appreciate, so that future research in Kurdistan will be able to set the record straight and help answer the many questions which continue to exercise the minds of archaeologists' (Awat 2015: iii). Although it has been claimed that promoting a scientific basis for future has been the main target of these archaeological projects in the region, it could be inferred that they follow an explicitly political agenda: 'here is a genuine gap in literature in Kurdish dealing with archaeological research, a circumstance principally due to the fact that until very recently the Kurdish nation did not have its own country. Generating the necessary expertise and experience in the field is now a central priority. In this context, the collaboration of Kurdish and foreign historians and archaeologists has a genuine role to play in promoting scientific research projects systematically designed to investigate the relationship between the Kurdish nation and the people and civilizations of the *Zagros Mountains and Mesopotamia*' (Awat 2015: iii).

Despite claiming that the project was conducted in order to answer some academic questions, the entire report implied that no coherent theoretical nor even chronological concern have been adhered to by the archaeologists. In what followed, a vast and diverse collection of the materials including post *Elimate* cities, Assyrian graves and Islamic mosques have been redefined under the umbrella of Kurd identity. Seemingly, the main aim is to cover all the geographical context of Kurdistan and also the regions such as *Mosul* and *Kirkuk*, whose political ownership is still a matter of struggle between Kurdistan Regional Government and Iraqi Government.

Maybe one of the most famous archaeological interventions aimed at building new identities in the entire Middle East is the one attempted by Gertrude Margaret Lowthian Bell, whose attempts were successful in shaping the Iraqi nation (Adams 2010). However, even that attempt was not very pioneering. Previously, and during the closing decades of 19th century, the Russian and European colonial activities made *Qajarid* Iran to relinquish parts of its territory. Some decades later, *Ottoman* Empire was dissolved into fourteen countries as a consequence of an agreement known as Sykes-

Picot. Therefore, the decades between the two World Wars observed a new political order installed in the Middle East with every nation suffering from identity crisis.

Concentrating on the newly derived identities of the Middle East, in this chapter we consider the role of archaeology in constitution of identities in the region. Critically, among the major issues of the Middle East are identity problems (Maalouf 2001). Obviously, to build new countries, a national identity is supposed to be identified and indeed, this new identity is responsible for integrating the diverse identities. For thousands years, the diverse ethnic and religious groups had lived together in the region. But it was during the last two centuries that new identities were slowly built on the ruins of the past, while the mythological past was gradually changed into an archaeological one. To constitute new identities in the Middle East (and also in regions like the Balkans), the current identities of the region is being imposed particularly on historical or even prehistorical sites. The modern governments present their own propagated interpretation of archaeological facts to fill the identity gaps. Even, people believe that these were their direct ancestors who lived in the same place as they live, so the archaeologists are seen as the experts who are excavating the current people's grand grand parents' graves!

According to what mentioned, the chapter will investigate the ethical and professional challenges of archaeology in the Middle East. Do archaeologists consider their ethical responsibilities before accepting a project? To what extent are they aware of the social and political implications of archaeological practice?

Historical background: the rise of nationalism in the Middle East

To reply to above questions, we have to delve deeper into the recent history of the Middle East. Will Durant (1935) has dedicated the first volume of his great eleven-volume book, *The Story of Civilization*, to the Near East, the volume is named *Our Oriental Heritage*. The book discusses the 'glory' of the past civilizations of the Near East, namely *Sumer*, *Egypt*, *Babylonia*, *Assyria*, *Judea* and *Persia*. During 19th and 20th centuries, this ideal image of the Near East as the land of the first civilizations, the glorious ones, has been (re)produced several times by orientalist and archaeologist as modern stewards of history.

Prior to the introduction of archaeology to the region, traditional history was the only form of interpreting the past. As a case in point, post-Islamic Iranian historians (such as *Al-Tabari*, *Ibn al-Muqaffa*) presented historical and mythological information in accordance with *Pahlavi Sasanian* texts (Jaafariyan 1997) which were mostly translated to Arabic during the first centuries after the emergence of Islam. Indeed, very few attempts to reach a unified identity can be observed throughout the traditional history. Moreover, the ethnical, folkloric and mythological histories also defined the past and the living world.

Co-occurrence of the pioneering archaeological activities and the rise of modern governments made the traditional history fade gradually, whereas the new interpretation of history was being highly encouraged. The new identities, particularly the concept of modern citizen, justified the existence of the modern borders. In the past, the concept of border was different for the people of the Middle East; borders were usually the territorial ancient ones and since it was a permeable and flexible phenomenon, it was possible to pass through the borders. The new borders, even after a century, are still the theme for endless political challenges in the region given every nation attempts to present its historical superiority. It has to be clarified, though, how the governments and archaeologists claimed strong ties between splendid remote past and contemporary Middle East, a region far from peace and involved in sporadic bloodsheds. It should be endorsed that some conservative classic researchers reject any direct relationship between the current people of the Middle East and that glorious past (Hanna 2016: 120). They do not recognize current population of the region as the descendants of *Cyrus*, *Sargon* or *Assurbanipal*. On the contrary, these are the modern governments of the region which are trying to construct a bridge between the past and the present.

The aim of this book is to explain how the material remains of the remote past make a path for the governments to identify themselves as the deserving successors of ancient kings. 2500th anniversary of *Cyrus* reign celebrated by *Mohammad Reza Shah* of Iran as well as the commemoration of *Assurbanipal* by *Saddam Hussein* who was desperate to depict himself as the heir to *Babylonian* and *Assyrian* kings' thrones on the billboards, are arguably some endeavours of political figures to resort to using the remote past as a means of nationalism project.

Some scholars consider the first appearance of Iranian nationalism to be in *Qajar* era. Obviously, nationalism which was propagated as the main characteristic of *Pahlavi* monarchy was initially utilized in *Fath-Ali Shah* era (Bausani 1992: 259). The rise of nationalism in Iran coincided with the occupation of northern territories by Russian Army in 19th century (Ajoodani 2016). Although Arabian Nationalism emerged later than its Persian version, it seems that in 20th century and following the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, there were some conflicts between these two nationalistic movements. 'In 1930s Pan-Arabism gained greater definition' (Al-Rodhan *et al.* 2011: 74). 'A prominent Pan-Arabism party was the *Baa'th* party, which was founded in 1940s. It espoused Arab unity, socialism and anti-colonialism' (Al-Rodhan *et al.* 2011: 74).

In Iraq, nationalism had already gained relevance before *Saddam's* reign started. 'In 1933, *Faisal* pronounced his concern regarding the formation of a national identity' (Othman 2017: 72). 'In 1970s, the Iraqi *Baa'th* party had increasingly believed in itself as the only representative of the demands and ambitions of the Arab nation' (Othman 2017: 72). *Baa'th* party, in fact had an objectified program to reintroduce the new country of Iraq based on ancient past. 'Saddam confirmed and supported Iraqi

patriotism claiming the determining role the country had played in the history of the Arab world' (Othman 2017: 71). He 'mentioned pre-Islamic Iraq (Farrokh 2015) and glorified the period as the cradle of the human civilization, praising figures such as *Nebuchadnezzar II* and *Hammurabi*. He spent a significant amount of financial resources for archaeological projects' (Othman 2017: 72).

Such a program was being followed seriously in Egypt by *Gamal Abdul Nasser* who tried to reunite Arabs and made the dichotomy between Arabs and Persians, enflaming anti-Iranism (Flynn 2017). Nasserism 'had a strong appeal in the Arab world in the 1950s and 1960s' (Neuberger 2006: 521). The Turkish nationalism was also supported by Turk elites of the time in 1920s, though *Kamal Atatürk* rejected Pan-Turkism (Özdoğan 2002: 116) and almost competed with the mentioned waves of nationalism in the Middle East (see Hobsbawm 1990).

Iran's first modern state and archaeology: the establishment of laws and the administrative structure

Although the first contracts of pioneering antiquarians were signed in the last two decades of 19th centuries during *Naser al-Din Shah's* reign, no administrative was especially adopted to regulate the remained material culture and monuments of the past before *Reza Shah's* era. Contracts were under the supervision of the king himself and the process of conducting archaeological activities was under the Ministry of Culture and Art.

The lack of a specialized administrative part made a chaos in the excavations, the foreign antiquarians exported the materials from Iran to the Europe and there was no actual law to avoid such actions (Karimloo 2001). The Department of Antiquities which was founded in 1918 under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture and Art was responsible for evaluating foreign contracts and buying or selling the Antiques. This supervision process evolved into a more modernized and structured one during *Pahlavi* dynasty.

The first *Pahlavi* king, *Reza Shah* (r.1925–1941), faced two influential waves of thought: the traditional religious perspective (Banuazizi and Weiner 1988) and that of the educated nationalists. *Reza Shah* had to satisfy both groups in order to empower his newly-established dynasty. He handed the right for constituting the civil law to the clergymen. The new civil code followed the French model but it also included certain parts of the *Fiqh* (Islamic juridical and civil laws) (Samadi 1997). Also a new commercial code was introduced in 1925 (Riesebrodt 1998). The new Antiquities Law benefited the nationalists and intellectulls, also the establishment of the modern police, municipality and a courthouse was meant to satisfy them.

Reza Shah declared the abolition of the *Qajar* contracts (Keddie 1999). The French missionaries' position was undermined and they were gradually replaced by German and American archaeologists. Taking the first aerial photos, Schmidt documented the archaeological sites of Iran. In 1930s, Ernst Herzfeld (Yeroushalmi 2009) started the excavations at Persepolis, known in Iran as *Takht-e Jamshid*. The power structure invested in history, but this time by means of archaeology, aiming to producing idealized history and identity.

Antiquities Law (passed in 1931) (Mohammad Moradi 2003) was a step towards making the Iranian archaeology more governmental. In order to control the sites and the foreign excavations, it mainly focused on the role of the government rather than the experts and the public consciousness. There were some preliminary drafts of a similar law in *Qajar* era, but it seems that it was only seriously discussed in the *Pahlavi* era (Papoli-Yazdi and Garazhian 2012). This law can be seen as one of the first attempts to objectify the subjective mythical past. As Özdoğan has discussed the issue in regards to the Ottoman Empire, the traditional perception of the past in many non-western societies 'was less dependent on factual evidence, the facts did not necessarily have to be as concrete as they are in the Western way of thinking' (Özdoğan 2002: 113). The law legitimized the conservation and preservation of the ancient objects. Noticeably, the Antiquities Law was in contrast with the Islamic Law, *Fiqh*, which emphasized that the findings from a field belong to the owner of that field. The law insists on the supervision of the Iranian experts on the foreign excavations. It was in parts a translation of the respective Austrian law, and for the first time the Iranian government became responsible for the conservation and preservation of all the antique objects, which were dated up to the end of the *Zand* Dynasty (1751–1794) (Nasiri-Moghaddam 2013). The administrative structure of archaeology in the pre-revolution (pre-1979) Iran was based on a center called Department of Antiquities (Mohammad Moradi 2003: 14) which was later replaced by Center of Archaeological Research.

The government also decided to establish museums and public libraries. For such a project, the French missionaries were handed the prerogative. André Godard traveled to Iran in 1929 to build the National Museum of Iran. The French were able to retain their position in the National Museum of Iran until 1960, when André Godard lost his place (Isenstadt and Rizvi 2008). Godard's oversight over the Museum (1928–1960) had resulted in the domination of a history of art and aesthetic perspective throughout the first *Pahlavi* period which was inspired by French school. As reading mute material culture depends entirely on individuals who are in charge and authorities as part of the pyramid of power, the selective view of the French school of museology in the National Museum of Iran resulted in the exclusion of objects deemed 'not beautiful' from exhibitions. Up to the present, the so-called beautiful objects of the great *Persian* Empires are more likely to be exhibited than contemporaneous pottery sherds.

By the rise of governmental institutes such as National Museum and later, the Institute of Archaeology of University of Tehran, the old and traditional history was replaced by new archaeological interpretations which were strongly based on material culture. Archaeological interpretation of past, accompanied by the concept of archaeological site were introduced to Iran in 19th and 20th centuries courtesy of European explorers and archaeologists. The traditional perception of the past can be considered an amalgamation of local histories, folktales, myth and a rich body of traditional historiography which was represented by researchers like *Forsat-al-Dawlah Shirazi* in *Qajar* era.

Archaeological reading opposed somehow indigenous understandings of the past and history. As a science, archaeology has proved itself to be valid, unbiased and evidence-based whereas the local histories were propagated blended with superstition (Hamilakis and Anagnostopoulos 2009). Also, archaeology bestowed the acquisition of ancient monuments and ruins, redefined as archaeological sites, upon the archaeologists as the eligible government stewards. Hence, the people working on the farms where ancient monuments and sites were usually located lost the ownership on parts of their lands. Even if they had the right to cultivate the farms, they had to report to the government or ask for permission for any kind of intervention. From another viewpoint, the relation between people and the sites reduced. For example, the site called *Takt-e Soleymān*, the throne of Solomon, located in Western *Azerbaijan* province was attributed to Solomon the prophet by the villagers (later known as a religious *Sasanian* center), Persepolis (known as The Throne of *Jamšid*, a mythical king) and graveyards conventionally attributed to *Gabrs* (local word for Zoroastrians) gradually lost their mythical and cult values for the indigenous people.

The growing body of nationalism based on the archaeological findings has lift the emphasis from the diverse local mythological culture and emptied it from its initial tenets. Based on the elucidation of its process, we interpret archaeology as an imported commodity whose agents, both the foreign and the Iranian archaeologists, have practiced nationalism in its most pragmatic sense. The most propagated archaeological materials of the Iranian history have been from the *Sasanian* and the *Achaemenid* eras. The materials from archaeological contexts morphed into the tools of conformity and suppression.

There are no statistical investigations presenting the amount of money invested in archaeological activities during *Pahlavi* era, but it can actually be elucidated that archaeological studies were allocated a considerable proportion of governmental budget. Herzfeld, asked by *Reza Shah*, listed 25 significant sites to register in Iranian National Heritage list (Grigor 2004). Indeed, *Cyrus* and *Darius*, the *Achaemenid* kings, were introduced by Post Islamic historians but attributing the monuments to them was actually a *Pahlavi* phenomenon (see Ghani 2000). The ruins of *Pasargadae* and *Persepolis* were defined as *Cyrus* and *Darius* masterpieces, and *Mohammad Reza Shah*

claimed enthusiastically that Iran is approaching the great civilization (Pahlavi 1976). Both prehistory and historical archaeology paid little attention to indigenous people. The foreign archaeologists who joined Iranians mostly had very limited relationships with Iranian people as well (Negahban 2005).

Deciding to study a site was more of a political decision than an academic attempt to answer scientific questions. The members of Society for National Heritage (*Pirnia*, *Forūgī*, *Teymourtaš*, etc.), who all were political elites close to *Pahlavi* court, were nationalists whose activities played a key role in Iranian archaeology. A vivid example is Tomb of *Ferdowsi*. The old, traditional tomb was first suggested to be rebuilt by anti-government intellectuals. *Aref Qazvini* (1978: 81) wrote about *Ferdowsi* and his impact on Iranian culture while he was regretting the bad condition of the great poet's tomb. In September 1934, Society for National Heritage celebrated the first millennium of *Šāhnāma*. There, *Ferdowsi* was described as a national icon (Yahaghi 1993). The decision to hold this ceremony was definitely politically-situated. Was it also done to refute the latest activities of opponents like *Aref*?

Obviously, the governments neither considered the public opinion nor were nor were willing to claim the responsibilities for their policies about the past. One result of such process was a gap between people and the government which finally resulted in a revolution.

Archaeologists and the professional ethics

Despite the popular image of archaeology in public, the discipline is neither about fantasy and excitement, nor treasure hunting. According to McGuire (2008), archaeology is a political action. As a modern phenomenon, the discipline itself was a result of Renaissance (Thomas 2000), hence, doing archaeology is usually very much influenced by contemporary context.

For the Middle Eastern governments, the discipline has functioned as a tool for them to present themselves as a distinctive existence. (see Bourdieu 2013). Contrary to historical data, documents and texts, archaeological materials possess the potential to be exhibited and it encourages the governments to present them as icons; material culture could simply act as showcase objectifying the desired identities. The governments gift these items to their political partners or rivals, borrow them in order to hold local exhibitions and fund the production of historical films. For example, Ahmadinejad's government (2005–2013) borrowed the *Cyrus Cylinder* from British Museum and exhibited it in National Museum of Iran. 'Reza Shah promoted the ethnic difference of the Iranians from the Arabs and in fact, changed the traditional name of the country from Persia¹, to Iran in his international correspondence (Aryan

¹*Persia* was used by Europeans to refer to the Qajarid Iran but actually among Iranian and other Near Easterners, the world Persia addresses Fars province. For the people living in Iran and local monarchies,

land), to emphasize on their links with the Indo-Europeans, the linguistic group to which the Persian language belongs to' (Chary 2006: 1034).

The instability and chaos perpetually surrounding the Middle East has caused the borders to be changed several times. Fictitious borders have been imposed on people and communities who have continuously enjoyed commercial and cultural partnerships (like the Syrians and Lebanese, the Iraqis and Iranians) for centuries. Sometimes even a single ethnic group has been divided and was forced to accept different nationalities, the best example of which are *Baluch* people who currently hold citizenships of Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Modern borders passing through the region are acting like Berlin Wall, not only they are almost impossible to cross, but also they have inflamed ethnic and religious conflicts and struggles.

It should be mentioned that, dividing the people with common roots has intensified a plethora of cultural problems, destroying their lifestyles and traditions. There are some ethnical groups, such as *Baluch* people, whose ancestors' graves are located in the adjacent country. For people believing in spiritual life and the other world, praying for the dead relatives weekly and asking God for putting the souls of their ancestors in peace is a necessity. However, borders act as a rigid political barrier separating them. In such an unstable and critical context, archaeology could easily be misused by governments.

Despite this dark history which has occasionally influenced the life of people worldwide (e.g. the role of Aryan Myth in the Second World War), archaeologists, with some exceptions, usually ignore the political and social implications of their research. Politicians use symbolic interpretations of past to justify suppression, conflicts and wars. In this context, 'an archaeologist is not viewed as a professional studying the ruins, rather as a labourer for the factory of producing the past' (Papoli-Yazdi and Masoudi 2017: 443). 'We should avoid becoming the cultural branch of war machines' (Hamilakis 2009: 57).

McGuire strongly warns archaeologists to be aware of such possible misuses: 'Scholars need to recognize that politics may be a dirty word but that archaeology is a dirty business' (McGuire 2007: 10). He and the other critical archaeologists (see. Arnold 1990) believe that archaeology has the potential to be exploited as a tool for suppression, physical omission and structural violence. Not only in the context of totalitarianism, but also in societies like Greece, Macedonia, China and all around the Middle East (Galaty and Watkinson 2004). 'Archaeologists must remember that giving up the control over the past to politicians will transform the history into a dangerous weapon. Did Ernst Herzfeld, the excavator of Persepolis, know that the site would be used to construct the Iranian Aryan Myth?' (Papoli-Yazdi and Massoudi 2017).

the country was called 'armed country of Iran'. Reza Shah issued the name Iran as the official name of the country (see Ghani 2000).

But how can the dedicated archaeologists protect this discipline from misuse? The first step is to accept that the archaeological knowledge is politically-situated and archaeological interpretations and materials could be applied to suppress the people. Needless to say that it is impossible to ask all the archaeologists to act as a political activist. The second step is learning to sometimes say NO to authorities who can generate great changes in some cases. Hamilakis, criticizing the military-archaeology complex as part of USA's military, warns against 'the dangers of a de-politicized, professionalized archaeology' (Hamilakis 2009: 56). According to Anne Pyburn (2003: 170), 'it is nice to be in good standing with the national governments where we work, it is not nice to let the local [and national] authorities use the project vehicle to transport political prisoners'. In Iran, a notable example was the disagreement between the government and independent archaeologists during 2500th anniversary of Cyrus reign when some Iranian archaeologists declined to cooperate with *Pahlavi* regime and were subsequently arrested (Dezhamkhooy *et al.* 2015). On the other hand, some others were cooperating with the dictator government. Donald Wilber is one of the most well-known figures in the discipline who served as a CIA official aiding the *Pahlavis*' dictatorship during Iran 1953 Anglo-American coup against *Mosaddegh* national government (Khosravi Nik 2015: 19).

Not only the ethnical groups and local communities, but also the archaeological sites themselves are among the very first victims of political abuse. There are several reports in Iran indicating that archaeological sites are being harmed by both illegal excavators, and extremists. Khazal's Palace in *Khorramshahr* built by an Arab local governor late in *Qajar* era was demolished by a military organization due to its symbolic significance to the identity of local Arab community. Also, both Persepolis and *Pasargadae*, the sites which were subject to heavy propagation by the *Pahlavis*, transformed into a negative heritage after the 1979 revolution (see Chapter four). In Soviet Union, archaeologists had to develop their findings with an emphasis on 'the imposition of Marxist orthodoxy, beginning in 1928,' (Trigger 2006: 574) unilineal evolution.

From a Foucauldian viewpoint, power and knowledge tie deeply together in modern times (Foucault 2012), the mechanisms of power establish effective tools for production and accumulation of knowledge. 'All social actions are situated within specific regimes of power' (Hamilakis 2009: 44). The archaeologists who are aware of the impact of power on their subjectivity and research, in a Foucauldian terminology, are going to resist. Such a resistance would dedicate archaeological investigations to the study of nationalism, mass graves, massacres, homelessness (Harrison and Schofield 2010), etc.

Archaeology is a discipline which can operate against or in favor of dictatorship and prejudices. It can deconstruct and challenge patriarchal violent orders and give voice to the voiceless. It can reinterpret power mechanisms of ancient empires and political structures, as well as criticizing the orthodox readings of materials. Parts of the

material culture which have traditionally been the subject of interest in conventional archaeology have indeed been ideological tools serving suppression and violence. Archaeology can challenge the 'pure beauty' exhibited in museums' showcases.

Why the archaeology of *Persian* empires needs to be deconstructed?

Since opening the doors to archaeology in the last two centuries, the modern archaeological narratives of past have been playing its indirect role in the lives of Middle Easterners. The initial archaeological steps toward shaping the new viewpoints of people were in contrast with the traditional history. Highly supported by nationalist governments, archaeology encouraged people to define themselves according to the past. Conventional interpretations of the *Achaemenids*, *Sasanians*, *Assyrians* and *Babylonians* have provided excuses for mono-vocality and suppression. According to the governments, these monarchs are not merely some names but they are their glorious ancestors, a mirror in which the nations can imagine themselves to be more glorious, victor and distinguished.

There is no end to the narratives and anecdotes related to past empires. They are reborn, re-interpreted and re-consumed permanently and their remains transform into some form of capital in the hands of political structures. Policy makers in the region ambitiously aspire to politicize the past. The material remains of ancient empires do not automatically turn into cultural heritage, despite what's commonly claimed by the governments, The ancient empires are usually propagated as successful models of governance, which is seemingly a means of supporting and promoting modern states' policies. The ancient remains have even attracted the attention of fundamentalists, terrorists and extremists and has been subject to ideological interpretation, vandalism or trafficking. 'ISIS occupied Palmyra and used coliseum of Palmyra for their performances of violence as a site of execution' (Papoli-Yazdi and Massoudi 2017: 448).

One application of history within the power discourse is the use of historic affairs as a background for current events (Collingwood 1951). Archaeological evidence may be extremely susceptible to manipulation for nationalistic purposes (Kohl 1998: 240). By redefining themselves, both *Pahlavi* and Islamic regimes have invented and presented the historical and archaeological terminology that implied their regimes to be a continuation of the 2500 years of history (Scot Aghai 2011). They highlighted the invention of the first Human Rights Declaration by *Cyrus* (Davaran 2010) and the idea of *Persian* empires being the longest-ruling empires in all of the history.

'Ruins have become the context for propaganda and display of power for the powerful' (Papoli-Yazdi and Massoudi 2017). Archaeology recovered *Sasanian* and *Achaemenid* rock reliefs to reproduce kings as the only ones who could possibly have written and narrated the history. Reliefs and inscriptions have been used to represent the

identity of a warrior/victorious king. No room was left for archaeological sites that primarily consisted of the remains of ordinary people. Very little systematic research has been conducted on political oppositions, women, children, mythical history and ethnic/religious minorities since archaeology was introduced to Iran. Archaeologists interested in these subjects have been gradually sidelined. Is it possible to discuss the histories of ordinary people and social minorities? Can historical archaeology talk about an ordinary woman in *Achaemenid* times, a child in the *Parthian* Empire or the life of a slave in *Sasanian* Iran? What are the alternatives to escape from the dominance of kings over history? To avoid history functioning as a hegemonic discourse, historiography should be fragmented and multi-vocal based on the wide variety of sources it discovers. Such a process results in a better and more comprehensive understanding of history.

The government-oriented archaeology of Iran has resulted in the partial elimination of the cultural diversity and devolve Iranians into uniform and docile bodies. Since a century ago, national history derived from archaeological material is being applied with purpose of suppressing the diversity. The school books being written in *Tehran* representing official political history for the African origin people of the south, Turks and Turkmens of north and Baluch and *Khorasanis* of the east. Very recently, the people of *Zahedan*, one of the main centres of *Sistani*, *Baluch* and *Sikh* communities in south eastern Iran, attempted to show their dissatisfaction with the material exhibited in the Regional Museum of South-eastern, focused mostly on the prehistory and history of northern *Sistan*. Fortunately, the local authorities have decided not only to change the internal design and the contents of showcases, but also revise the basic concepts of museum.

However, the archaeologists who stand against nationalism can hardly receive a position in academia or start their own projects. The same can be said about the historians who have dedicated their research to critical readings of the contemporary past (see. *Dezhamkhooy et al.* 2015). Such policies also put pressure on publications; an example is the book *Da* written by *Zahra Hosseini*, a Persian from *Khuzestan* on Iran-Iraq war which had tens of thousands of copies published by state publications. On the other hand, *Ghazi Rabihavi*, an Arab from *Khuzestan* could not publish most of his monographs in Iran and was finally forced to immigrate. For both current and *Pahlavi* political structures, there is only one legitimate narrative of every event deserving to be published; all other narratives are condemned to remain unheard. For this aim, the Ministry of Culture in *Pahlavi* era and later, Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance and the Islamic Development Organization are responsible for censoring the narratives, books, films, theaters and music tracks.

Indeed, the history of great empires suffers from a univocal masculine narrative. The tipping point is that very few attempts have been made to make a feminist or gender-involved narrative of *Persian* empires. The history of *Persian* empires is a patriarchally

biased collection of masculine values, war stories and propaganda (see. Burton 1992). Deciding on the topic of the manuscript, the authors, both female Iranian archaeologists who had experienced the bitter taste of suppression of narratives in a patriarchal context, decided to walk toward a 'feminist narratology' (Lanser 1986). How would female archaeologists tell the story of the kings? Is there any remaining window to open and enjoy the light of a new narration? How can we deconstruct such a solid history produced by dominant patriarchy and reproduced by well-off, urbanized, educated, powerful, white men? Is there a method to recreate the history based on neglected stories and voices of archaeologists who desire not to be impelled by prevalent narratives? Those who mainly concentrate on the women, slaves, defeated soldiers, children, workers, religious and ethnic minorities and refugees?

Deconstruction is an appropriate method to break down the history of domination. It can help not only intellectuals, but also the broader public to gain more awareness about historical metanarratives. There can be many other alternative interpretations of history in which every community and marginal group can play its own role. Deconstruction does not change structures from the outside, but rather acts from the inside. Deconstruction borrows strategic and economic resources from the very structure itself (Derrida 1998). According to Derrida, deconstruction is neither negative nor destructive (Critchely 2000). It can be considered as a double reading of a text from its very inside. Derrida emphasizes that it helps reading the repeating conventional dualities (Critchely 2000). Hence, deconstruction puts an alteration inside the text and helps to see the text from another point of view, but it is not concerned with reversing the dualities as the logic of text. Accordingly, we try to deconstruct the patriarchal nationalistic archaeological practice but it doesn't imply that the authors necessarily pursue a feminine narrative. But 'deconstruction is hyper-politicizing in following paths and codes which are clearly not traditional, it permits us to think the political (Derrida 1996: 87). Thus, it gives us the chance of approaching the point zero where there is no governmental history constructed (see chapter five) and opening up the possibility of introducing new narratives regarding histories of the others who have been silenced in conventional histories. Rhetorically, point zero emphasizes on the beginning of dialogue with history, denying the dominant ideology. This book attempts to do this: to approach the point zero.