



Confessions of a Green Notebook: Reading Unpublished Documents About the Oppression of Iranian Archaeology Professors During the 1980s

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Accepted: 19 December 2022 / Published online: 17 January 2023

ABSTRACT

A couple of months after the 1979 revolution of Iran, the universities were occupied by the Islamists who oppressed dissident academics drastically. Two years after the revolution, the headquarter of the Cultural Revolution was established, and universities were shuttered to be purified from any other ideology except Islamism. Due to the heavy censorship of the regime, very little is known about the documents and process of oppression during and after the occupation of the universities. In 2010, the author gained access to a 'green notebook' found in a trashcan at the University of Tehran, which contains informal minutes of several meetings held by the Islamic Association of Students (IAS). As a direct practice of oppression, IAS had the mission to report the behaviors of the professors working in the department of archaeology to authorities. In this article, the author elucidates the process of oppression of archaeology professors through reading documents of the 'green notebook.'

RESUMEN: Un par de meses después de la revolución de 1979 en Irán, las universidades fueron ocupadas por los islamistas que reprimieron drásticamente el quehacer crítico y académico. Dos años después de la revolución, se estableció la sede de la Revolución Cultural y se cerraron las universidades para purificarlas de cualquier otra ideología excepto el islamismo. Debido a la fuerte censura del régimen, se sabe muy poco sobre los documentos y el proceso de opresión durante y después de la ocupación de las universidades. En 2010, el autor obtuvo acceso a un 'cuaderno verde' encontrado en un bote de basura en la Universidad de Teherán, que contiene actas informales de varias reuniones celebradas por

la Asociación Islámica de Estudiantes (AIE). Como práctica directa de opresión, la AIE tenía la misión de denunciar ante las autoridades las conductas de los profesores que laboraban en el departamento de arqueología. En este artículo, el autor dilucida el proceso de opresión de los profesores de arqueología a través de la lectura de documentos del 'cuaderno verde'.

RÉSUMÉ DE RECHERCHE: Deux mois après la révolution de 1979 en Iran, les universités furent occupées par les Islamistes, lesquels réprimèrent de manière drastique l'habitus critique et académique. Deux ans après la révolution, le siège de la Révolution culturelle fut établi et les universités fermées afin de purifier toute autre idéologie à l'exception de l'islamisme. En raison de la censure extrême du régime, on connaît fort peu de choses quant aux documents et au processus d'oppression durant et après l'occupation des universités. En 2010, l'auteur a pu consulter un « petit livre vert » trouvé dans une poubelle à l'Université de Téhéran, contenant les procès-verbaux informels de plusieurs réunions tenues par l'Association Islamique des Étudiants (IAS—*Islamic Association of Students*). En tant que pratique directe de l'oppression, l'IAS avait pour mission de rendre compte aux autorités des agissements des professeurs travaillant dans le département d'archéologie. L'auteur explicite dans cet article le processus d'oppression des professeurs d'archéologie en s'appuyant sur la lecture des documents du «petit livre vert».

KEYWORDS

Islamist fundamentalism, Oppression of professors, University of Tehran, 1979 Revolution, Department of Archaeology

States, resist much, obey little; Once unquestioning obedience, once fully enslaved; Once fully enslaved, no nation, state, city, of this earth, ever afterward resumes its liberty.

Walt Whitman

Introduction

During the 1980s' so-called Cultural Revolution in Iran, thousands of students and professors were framed, tried, fired, and arrested. The newly established revolutionary government of Iran was aware that the left parties

who had collaborated to overthrow the Pahlavi monarchy (1925–1979) would not remain silent against the empowerment of the Islamist fundamentalists. This dilemma led them to interfere with the universities. This was meant to pave the way for solely recruiting only those teachers who were loyal to the Islamists' line (Irfani, 1993, p. 219).

Since most of the opposing professors and students were fired during the Cultural Revolution, the common belief is that the further attempts to oppress the professors after the reopening of the universities loosened (Keddie and Richard, 2006, p. 257; Kozhanov, 2018). In contrast, there are documents and narratives (see Esmaili, 2010) which reveal that exerting pressure to force the younger generation of professors to obey the new regularities increased in the following years. However, not surprisingly, the policy of dismissal was replaced with some invisible control strategies (see Razavi, 2009). It seems that some associations, such as the Islamic Association of Students (IAS), had taken the responsibility of monitoring the professors.

In 2010, a student of archaeology found a notebook in a trashcan on the eastern side of the Faculty of Literatures and Humanities of the University of Tehran. She later discovered that IAS was moving from its old office to newer rooms, and they might have thrown away some of their documents. The notebook contained the informal minutes of several meetings of IAS during the 1980s and 1990s. Some notes dating back to the 1980s were about the process of oppression of professors and students from left opposition groups.

The green notebook has 302 pages. Except for the cover, all the other pages include informal minutes of 104 meetings of the Islamic Association of Students (IAS), all held in the Faculty of Literatures and Humanities, from November 3rd, 1985, to December 25th, 1993. Most of the meetings' minutes begin with the name of Allah, the date, the names of the attendees, and a detailed account of the conversations. Of 104 notes, seven do not contain dates. The handwritten notes are, in most cases, very difficult to read, which suggests that the notes were written very quickly at the meetings and while attendees were speaking to each other. The handwritings are different from note to note, which shows that probably there was no single person responsible for recording them. The name of the writer has not been inserted in any of the notes. Exceptionally, two meetings contain enclosed pages with the signatures of attendees, both from 1991. It is worth mentioning that the notebook pages were not originally numbered, and I numbered them from the first page after the cover to the end to facilitate classifying the documents.

According to the discussions, the topics of the notes were classified into twelve titles: oppression of professors, oppression of students, discussions on the nature of the regime and revolution, selecting cadres, camping, and

entertainment, routine conversations, provoking the younger generation against the professors and leftists, discussions on university management, Iran–Iraq war, Islamization, Shia Islam, and oppression of the staff.

The most discussed topic during the first years, from 1985 to 1987, is the oppression of professors and students. In the later years, the attendees mainly focus on organizing public meetings and workshops, selecting young cadres, and communicating with the directors of the university, clergymen and ministers.

In the first years up to 1990, the notes are more accurately sorted, but from 1990, the accuracy decreases. According to the notes, the faculty representatives of IAS would be elected at the beginning of each academic year; but going over the names of attendees, it is clear that the same people would continue their role as representatives for a long time until their graduation. There are some exceptions; for instance, Mr. Ba,¹ who was elected as a representative in his first years of being a student, continued to attend the meetings even after being hired as an employee in *Jahad-e Daneshgahi* (Academic Center for Education, Culture, and Research).

The author in this article focuses on the process of oppression of the professors working at the department of archaeology, University of Tehran. More than other professors, two very well-known professors, Dr. Yousef Majidzadeh and Dr. Masoud Golzari had been the topic of discussions and the main targets of oppression. Twenty-one pages of the notebook are directly about the department of archaeology, which is the primary evidence used by the author to elucidate the process of archaeologists' elimination.

Reading the green notebook's documents not only leads us to figure out the process of oppression of individuals and the toxic atmosphere of the universities in Iran during the first decade after the 1979 revolution but also reveals why and under which circumstances the field of archaeology was reduced to a nationalistic governmental tool in the hands of the powerful people (Dezhamkhooy et al., 2015; Abdi, 2001).

Why Did Fundamentalists Target Archaeology?

Both before and after the 1979 revolution, the discipline of archaeology in Iran has been misused as a tool to justify systematic discrimination and oppression (Papoli-Yazdi and Garazhian, 2012). Archaeology was imported to Iran by King Naser-al-din Shah in the late 1880s (Moosavi, 1990). French missionaries were the first antiquarians to work in Iran. But after the extinction of the Qajar dynasty and the rise of the Pahlavi dynasty in 1925, many contracts with foreign countries were terminated. French missionaries did not lose authority over the museums of Iran, but their field activities

were limited (see Ansari, 2003). During and after World War II, German and American archaeologists started to conduct field projects in Iran.

Just after the opening of the University of Tehran in 1934, the department of archaeology was established to train Iranian archaeologists (Ma'soomi, 2004). It is of note that in the 1960s, the Office of Antiques was replaced by the General Department of Archaeology of Iran, which was a parallel governmental institute to issue contracts with foreign archaeologists and permission for any archaeological activities. After the 1979 revolution, the office was closed, and later the Iranian Cultural Heritage Organization was established in 1985.

These governmental offices control archaeological activities in the country and issue permission for field activities. In a nutshell, getting an archaeological degree in Iran is not enough to conduct a field project, but it is always required to be confirmed by these governmental offices.

In the 1960s and 1970s, a new generation of archaeologists returned to Iran. They had studied archaeology abroad and were familiar with modern theoretical and methodological frameworks of archaeology. From them, Dr. Ezzat Negahban revolutionized the pedagogy of archaeology (Negahban, 2005) and added a semester of field training (survey and excavation) to the curriculum. But very soon, obstacles appeared in the trajectory of improving the discipline of archaeology.

It seems that one of the very first conflicts between the Pahlavi regime and the department of archaeology happened during the 2,500-year celebration of the Persian Empire in 1971. At the time, many archaeologists stood against the destruction of the context of Pasargadae and the tomb of Cyrus II by officials (to construct facilities to greet and accommodate the foreign politicians) but were framed and arrested (Dezhamkhooy et al., 2015).

The misuse of archaeological findings to justify the nationalistic dilemma of the government has continued to this day. As mentioned in the documents of the green notebook, the Islamic regime believed that archaeologists are classified into two major groups of Nationalists and Marxists. The Nationalists are described with words that appreciate their service to the homeland (country-lovers, the builders of the nation, in the service of the nation). In contrast, the second category is usually described with words that address treason to the state/nation/religion/Aryan ancestors, or they are simply called traitors or anti-nationalism. To be labeled anti-nationalism could deprive an archaeologist of having a job, conducting projects, or even a normal daily life (Papoli-Yazdi, 2020).

Academic archaeologists who refused to accept the nationalistic archaeology like Dr. Negahban and Dr. Majidzadeh have been the target of fundamentalists for a long time. However, it is not clear why the archaeologists labeled "Marxist/Non-Muslim" were not dismissed during the Cultural

Revolution. The fact that the governmental offices of archaeology were closed at the time and no archaeological activities took place during the first years after the revolution might be the reason for the authorities' short-term distraction from archaeologists.

Historical Background: A Key to Understanding the Green Notebook

Cultural Revolution (CR) (1980–1983)

A year after the 1979 revolution, the Islamist fundamentalists, who seized power and marginalized all other political groups, started the process of Islamization of the universities, which is called the Cultural Revolution (Enghelab-e Farhangi) (Goodarzi and Ghazinouri, 2013).

The process started after a conflict during Akbar Hashemi's² public speech at the University of Tabriz (April 15th, 1980), when the university was occupied by the Muslim Student Followers of the Imam's line. Afterward, Islamist students brutally attacked the other students in a couple of other universities (see Peykar, 1981, pp. 23 and 31). They accused the students of holding and storing weapons on the university campuses, which was never proved. Later, Elm va Sana't (University of Science and Technology) and Tarbiyat Moallem (Teachers' Training) universities were brutally occupied, followed by attacking other university campuses in Tehran and some other cities such as Ahwaz (see Fallahi, 1993; Tribunezamaneh, 2014). On April 18th, several conflicts on the university campuses across the country and the University of Tehran (Figures 1, 2) led to the injury of 349 and the death of 3 students (Kalhor, 2007).

Just after the attacks, it was announced that the universities would be closed by the authorities to Islamize the curricula and purge the campuses from the "counter-revolutionary, anti-Islam students and professors" (Mal-ekzadeh, 2016; Dehbashi, 1981; Rezamand, 2017).

According to some released documents, 700 (Ganji, 2010; Ma'soumi, 1999) professors were fired or suspended during the three years of the Cultural Revolution. At the same time, it was reported that 28–30 thousand students were arrested, fired, and lost the opportunity to continue their studies (Peyvandi, 2016). The universities were reopened in 1983, but as the evidence indicates, this did not mean that the process of oppression stopped.

The Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution (Shoora-ye Aali-ye Enghelab-e Farhangi) was responsible "for executing and monitoring the purification of universities from corruption and westernized teachers and replacing them with honest and committed ones" (Mir-Hosseini, 2009, pp. 180). The Council was established with the direct order of Ayatollah



Figure 1. Tehran, Iran: Hezbollah forces attack leftist students, 21st April 1981 (Photo by Kaveh Kazemi, getty images)

Khomeini (Sakurai, 2016) in 1981 “with the purpose of purification of universities from Western and Eastern thoughts” (The Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, 2008). The council was never canceled and is still the most crucial decision-maker about cultural policies.

Islamic Association of Students (IAS)

IAS was founded in the 1940s under the name of the Islamic Association of the Students of the University of Tehran. After the unification of several IAS groups, the general title of the association changed to the Office for Strengthening Unity (Kasraee and Pouzesh-Shirazi, 2009) which comprised different IAS offices from several faculties. After the 1979 revolution, the first constitution of the association indicated that its aims to establish the association were “to reform the society based on Islamic law, attempt to unite the Muslims, especially communicating with (Muslim) intellectuals, promote the truth of Islam by establishing institutions and press and combating superstition” (The Office for Strengthening Unity, n.d.).

During the hostage crisis in 1981, for which the Muslim Student Followers of the Imam’s Line are known to be responsible (Ramazani, 2013), the two groups drew close. Until the end of the Iran–Iraq war (1980–1988), IAS was primarily maneuvering on the Islamic ideology. Evidently,



Figure 2. Tehran, Iran: Leftist students pull down university bars when Hezbollah forces attacked them, 21st April 1981. (Photo by Kaveh Kazemi, getty images)

the militia and some students were engaged in activities related to war (see Golkar, 2015).

In 1997, IAS supported the reformist candidate in the presidential election. During the following couple of years, the association rose to power in the parliamentary election. However, later and after the brutal attack of the militia on the Kuy dormitory of the University of Tehran on July 9th, 1999, the association was divided into several branches (see Hazegh-Nikroo, 2012). In the last decade, IAS lost its previous role as one of the key instruments of systematic oppression, especially after the 2009 post-election conflicts when some representatives of IAS were arrested and sentenced to prison (see Jalaeepour, 2010).



Figure 3. Faculty of Literatures and Humanities, University of Tehran (photo from <https://literature.ut.ac.ir>)

Faculty of Humanities and Literature, University of Tehran

The National Parliament issued the law indicating the establishment of the University of Tehran on May 29th, 1934 (Zargarinezhad et al., 2018). In 1958, the faculty was moved to its current building on the main campus of the University of Tehran, located on Enghelab Street (Revolution Street - Shah Reza Street before the 1979 revolution). The area of the faculty building is 17500 m² (Figure 3), and it was originally built in three floors to which an extra fourth floor was added after the 1979 revolution (Faculty of Literatures and Humanities, 2019).

Based on three interviews with the students studying in the faculty during the 1980s, the office of IAS had been located on the eastern side of the faculty on the first floor adjacent to the stair case. The office consisted of two separate rooms connected through a small door.

Documents About the Oppression of Professors

Of 302 pages of the notebook, 37 are directly concerned with the topic of oppression of professors. Thirty-five of these pages have been written from 1985 to 1989.

The first discussion on the oppression of professors appears on page 15, November 14th, 1985, when the attendees begin to discuss “how arrogant the professors have become.” One of the attendees states: “Admonishing the professors will be interpreted as if we [IAS] are anti-academics.”

Mr. Sh: “If there are enough documents, we should prosecute [the mentioned professors]!”

Mr. Ah: “[We should consider that] we are not the only ones who have observed the problem [in the faculty of humanities]. Such interruptions are everywhere, even at Tarbiyat Modarres University. In Mashhad city, an English communist text was circulated among the students. We should prosecute [the professors] even if they want to turn it into a political issue.”

According to his statement, Mr. Ah mentions the dichotomy between political and ideological phenomena that they believe in. To them, it seems that oppressing the professors works as a service to the regime to expand its Islamic ideology.

Brother P: “We should evaluate all the aspects. Our priority [of admonishing] is Golzari ... [We] should punch him in the face. It is a moral issue... [also] Majidi and K. [should get punched (?)].”

Here, for the first time, the evidence of physical violence is evident. It is noteworthy that there was a previous case of implementation of physical violence against a professor in the faculty. Dr. Negahban,⁹ the head of the department of archaeology, was stabbed (Dezhamkhooy and Papoli-Yazdi, 2020) eleven times in the chest in front of the faculty. Regarding such conflicts, physical violence against professors was not rare and seems to have been considered by the attendees a final solution. They do not refer to the case of Negahban, but it is not accidental that they use such a hate speech against the professors of archaeology.

On pages 28 and 29, the discussion is merely on how the professors should be controlled. At the end of the meeting, Brother Ah concludes that they should fire mentioned professors unless they bring letters from officials (it is not clear what the letter should contain). Sister S summarizes all the discussions under five titles, and among them, she emphasizes the request to fire the dissident professors. They also discuss that it is vital to justify the case for the students. Finally, someone suggests inviting the mentioned professors to the IAS office and informing them of the decisions.

The date of the next meeting is not precise. One attendee, Mr. Ab, believes that the representatives of IAS should ask for permission from Ayatollah Mahfoozi¹⁰ to fire the professors. He continues, “Someone who is fired may cause some problems...they might remain silent and stay at home...or may bring the case to the court, visit the dean of the faculty, or provoke other professors....” He wonders if the officials approve of or disapprove of such an action.

On November 24th, 1985 (Figure 6), Mr. H starts by opening a debate about the professors: “There are some professors who insult Islam and the revolution.” To complete his words, Mr. Al adds, “Some professors are

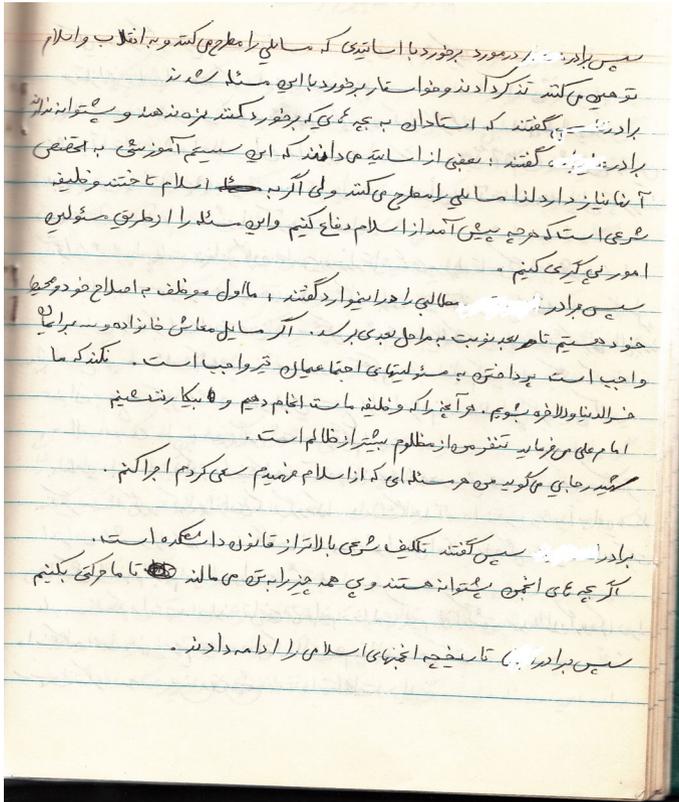


Figure 6. Page 40 of green notebook

aware that the education system needs their profession, so they talk about everything they like but ...we should defend Islam...and follow up the case through authorities.” (Page 40).

The next meeting, held on November 25th, 1985 begins with a report of a meeting with the Central Council of IAS. It is evident that some of the IAS members from the faculty had attended the meeting. The main topic of the discussion is how to control the professors. Mr. P reports that he talked with the IAS representatives from other faculties about Masoud Golzari's case. “They agreed with our ideas”, he adds. “First, they were against our suggestion [about Golzari] that [he should] bring a confirmation letter from the ministry [of Culture and Higher Education?].”

Page 42 (Figure 7) is completely about Dr. Golzari. Brother Ab says that they have admonished Golzari several times and “now, it is time to ask permission from the Council of Cultural Revolution, House of Imam [Khomeini] and Ayatollah Montazeri¹¹ to intensify the admonition and fire

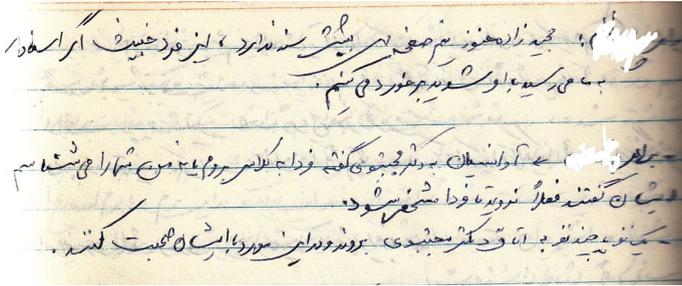


Figure 8. Page 53 of green notebook

takes” made by the professors. “So we can establish the Disciplinary Committee of professors as soon as possible,” he proposes.

On December 22nd 1985, Mr. P reports that “Golzari has been seen in the faculty...We should decide to confront him quickly.” Agreeing with Mr. P, Mr. S continues, “The decree of the new dean has not been issued yet. So, we must meet Mr. Av and decide for these two people.”

At the same meeting, Mr. H reports that he has admonished Golzari to stop his so-called misbehavior. He continues, “These [people] are professors, not children! (page 56) ... some of them intend to cause deviation in humanities. Seven years have passed since the victory of the revolution and some professors have turned their back completely [on the revolution?]. They do not understand what the Islamic republic asks them [to do]. How many times should we admonish them? Isn’t it that they have malicious intent?”

Page 69 is entirely about the professors. First, Brother A proposes the attendees to decide about Dr. K. Afterward, Brother H insists to issue the professors’ dismissal orders, while Brother Ab believes that Golzari’s return to the faculty “might be the result of Kardavani’s resistance against the students’ will.” He suggests that the attendees write a detailed report about these professors and ask the officials not to give them another opportunity to teach in the coming semester. In the following pages, they accuse Kardavani of corruption, arguing with the students and conspiracy in helping Golzari (Pages 70–71) (Figure 8).

The meeting on March 10th, 1986 appertains to the department of archaeology. Brother Ak reports that he has heard from their connector (spy?) that the atmosphere of the department has calmed down. He reports, “Among the professors, [Dr] F is moderate but Majidzade drinks shots of arak when none of the students is at the department.” He continues his report by referring to a sentence stated by Dr. Malek,¹⁴ “He has said that Mr. S is a dishonorable man.” Mr. Ak admits that “Mr. S (the head of the department) has proposed to exclude the female students from

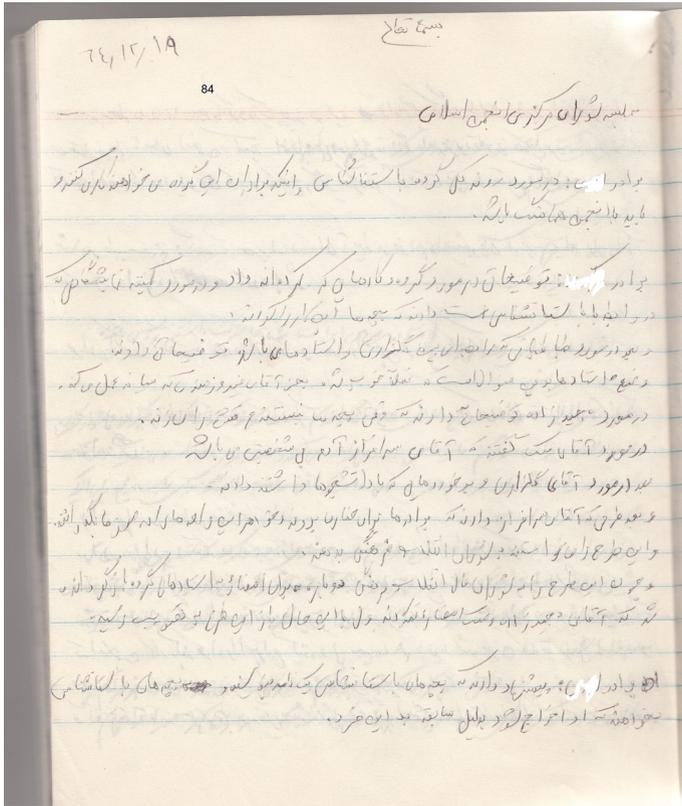


Figure 9. Page 84 of green notebook

the field training. He is going to offer these modules only to male students and send females to the museum instead. The project has been submitted to the Council of Cultural Revolution, but it had to be issued by the department first. Of the professors, only Dr. Malek and Dr. Majidzadeh refused to sign the application.” He goes on to say that it was suggested [by whom?] that “the students of archaeology write a petition and plead his [Majidzadeh] dismissal.” (page 84, Figure 9).

On 26 May 1986 (page 102), Brother P reports, “The Ministry of Culture advised M., Majidzadeh, and Kardavani to change their attitudes. But they are continuing their previous behaviors.”

This is the last meeting in which the attendees speak about the department of archaeology. It coincides with the time when both dissident professors of archaeology were suspended.

Oppressing the Professors of Archaeology

Among the dissident professors, the ones who worked at the department of archaeology experienced a different situation. Based on the discussion between the attendees, it is clear that only the head of the department of archaeology had a connection with the IAS representatives. On the other hand, there is no evidence of collaboration between the heads of other departments with IAS. Digging up the case, they were only the professors of archaeology whose private conversations with their colleagues were reported to IAS. Definitely, the attitudes of the other professors were being monitored but only in corridors, classes, and public spaces.

The anger of the members of IAS shows that their main concern was about two professors of archaeology, Dr. Majidzadeh, and Dr. Golzari. Based on the documents, the members of IAS adopted two different strategies against these two professors. In the case of Golzari, IAS representatives were framing him and exerting pressure to fire him from the very beginning. There is something different about Majidzadeh. It seems that IAS students were trying to force him to obey but when they found out that they would be unsuccessful, they decided to increase the pressure on officials to suspend him.

Some other documents show that the pressure on Majidzadeh never stopped. After years of silence and academic work outside Iran, he returned to excavate a Bronze Age site in Jiroft located in southeastern Iran.

On May 26th, 2004, the most conservative Iranian newspaper, *Keyhan*, number 17953 (page 2) published an article about Yousef Majidzadeh accusing him to be a counter-revolutionary agent. In this article, they accused Majidzadeh of being a Marxist and a supporter of *Fedaian-e Khalq*¹⁵ guerrilla group. A piece of evidence that *Keyhan* endorsed is a sentence attributed to Majidzadeh quoted by Dr. Mojtavabi, "I support Marxists."

Keyhan also refers to another very important document. It is a letter written to the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, on September 3rd, 1991, by IAS representatives of the University of Tehran. *Keyhan* (May, 26th 2004) elucidates, "The Muslim students were concerned about the possibility of the return of fired and suspended professors." In the letter, they indicate that Majidzadeh was one of the chief inspectors of the Pahlavi monarch during his reign and a Marxist after the revolution and an open anti-Islam agent who supported *Fedaian-e Khalq* guerrillas. These claims are tricky and do not clarify how someone could be simultaneously accused of being a monarchist and a Marxist.

Moreover, some archaeology courses were "Islamized" during the first decade after the revolution. Among them are some courses about evolu-

tionary archaeology that were excluded and replaced by “the archaeology of the Quran.” The same thing happened to the educational excavation and field training. As explained above and according to page 84, Dr. Majidzadeh and Dr. Malek were the only professors who refused to sign the papers related to adding Islamized courses. It should be noted that Dr. Golzari was suspended before this decision was made.

Despite the resistance of these two archaeologists, the new courses were officially issued by the other professors working at the department. Here, a new topic is raised. Besides exerting pressure on professors to conform, the enmity with the academic habitus is obvious. Both Sadegh Malek and Yousef Majidzadeh are from the modern generation of archaeologists who received their academic degrees from the American universities and started their careers under the supervision of Ezzat Negahban.

From 1986, there is no other mention of Masoud Golzari. On the other hand, a new name, S, the new head of the department of archaeology is frequently mentioned.

Encounters of the Two Fronts

Dr. Negahban was stabbed eleven times in the chest right in front of the faculty of humanities by revolutionary students. Negahban was the last head of the department of archaeology and the dean of faculty before the revolution (Negahban, 2005). Soon after, his name became the target of insults and criticism. Many rumors circulated about his connections with the last Pahlavi monarch’s court. Besides, archaeology as a discipline was under the attack of fundamentalists. One accusation of archaeology was the mistaken notion of revolutionists that this field had helped the Pahlavi regime to organize the 2,500-year celebration of the Persian Empire. Nevertheless, the fact was that none of the archaeologists were among the attendees in the meetings of the Council of the Anniversary. Negahban survived but immigrated to the United States after being released from the hospital.

Right after the victory, Islamist revolutionists created Islam/Monarchy and Nation/Ummah binaries and made multiple attempts to destroy the remains of the Persian empires such as Bishapur and Persepolis (Ma’mouri, 2014; Dezhankhooy and Papoli-Yazdi, 2018). It was when the discipline of archaeology and some archaeologists became the targets of propaganda. All of these misunderstandings led to violent crime against Negahban. The criminals were never apprehended.

Less than one year after this vicious incident, universities were closed. Three months later, on July 16th, 1980, just one day before the dissolution of the Council of Islamic Revolution, a bill was issued to determine the fate of archaeology:

Number 5662. Date: 16 July 1980

To the Ministry of Culture and Higher Education,

The legal bill about the continuation of the service of Mr. S has been issued by the Council of the Islamic Revolution. The decree is enclosed.

Single paragraph- It is permitted that the service of Mr. S, archaeologist, and specialist in the preservation of stone monuments, who has thirty years of employment history [retired], continues in the Ministry of Culture and Higher Education observing the legalities.

Signature: Council of the Islamic Revolution (Archive of the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, Letter number: 5662 25/4/1359)

By the beginning of his career in the department of archaeology, Mr. S facilitated the Islamization of courses. According to the website of the Faculty of Literatures and Humanities, Mr. S submitted a new educational curriculum which was finally authorized by the Ministry of Culture and Higher Education on April 26th, 1986 (Department of Archaeology of the Faculty of Literature and Humanities, 2019).

According to the documents of the green notebook, Mr. S's viewpoints were very close to the Islamic regime, and he was known to be trustable by many of the Islamists. The notes reveal that he was determined to eliminate the professors and students who were labeled anti-Islam, counter-revolutionary, or Marxist.

Discussion: It Is Not a Unique Story!

Both Majidzadeh and Golzari were specialists in the early historical periods. Later, after losing his job as a professor, Majidzadeh (2018) published a series of books about the early states and historical periods of western Iran and Mesopotamia. Nevertheless, Golzari (2007, 1999) concentrated on translation and writing books for children and young adults.

The specialty of these two scholars reveals that more than individuals, the regime might have been sensitive about historical periods and interpretations of the rise of the early states. For a long time, Pahlavis had attempted to manipulate the archaeological past with the hope that it might play a role in homogenizing the nation (see Abdi, 2001). The revolutionary Islamic regime reacted to the nationalistic notion of the Pahlavi monarchs by threatening the heritage of ancient empires and propagating the binary between Nation and Islamic Ummah for a couple of years (Dezhamkhooy and Papoli-Yazdi, 2018). However, this reaction of the regime turned to a sharp return to nationalism after the Iran-Iraq war (1980–1988). It was the war that aided revolutionaries to find out the benefits of reviving the Aryan myth and the Nationalistic approach (Murray and Woods, 2014) in encouraging people to join the battlefield. The depart-

ment of archaeology at the University of Tehran revised the so-called Islamized curriculum for another time, and the nationalistic description of the monuments and findings were gradually added to the topics taught to both BA and MA students.

In a broader perspective, archaeologists in Iran are constantly monitored by governmental institutions. Not only at the university but (as we observe in the case of Majidzadeh) also in the field, they are under surveillance.

It must be noted that the case of Iran is not unique. Pressure on archaeologists working under dictatorship has been reported from other countries ruled by totalitarians or dictators as well (see Galaty and Watkinson, 2004).

Some archaeologists are convinced, forced, or they simply prefer to produce biased knowledge that influences the political climate of contemporary society and encourages the people to believe a propaganda-made version of the past. The biased articles or books may be misused to justify oppressing diverse minorities and thoughts. In Iran also, the regime compares the political map of ancient empires with the political geography of modern Iran in order to justify its militaristic presence in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and many other countries (Figure 10). However, there is always a group of archaeologists who pay a high price for protecting archaeology



Figure 10. Banner says “Iran of Future, the continuation of Cyrus (II’s) path.” A banner in Mashhad city. Photo: <https://www.zeitoons.com/73364>

from misuse. The green notebook opens a very small window to the long-term oppression of archaeologists who fight for the freedom of speech and academia in Iran.

It is important to keep in mind that many nationalist archaeologists fulfill their careers by publishing and studying abroad. They even study or publish in countries that have suffered from totalitarianism for decades. These archaeologists use the credit taken from their international studies and publication to prove that their interpretation of the archaeological evidence is the only “correct” understanding of the material and the “pure truth” of the past. Documents such as the green notebook remind us of the importance of revision of professional ethics in terms of being careful about the projects we support and the articles we help to be published as well as the ideas we give a chance to be circulated.

The biased archaeology not only forms part of our understanding of the past (which is of all human beings) but has a bold role in suffocating the voices of those who are critical of the situation. The bitter story of the oppressed archaeologists in Iran is not unique and has happened previously in many other countries such as Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union which makes it more horrible and alarming. We, the archaeologists, need to raise our awareness about the dark side of the field we are experts in. Otherwise, archaeology may give a hand to the dictators who intend to manipulate the history as well as the destiny of dissident archaeologists and many other people.

Acknowledgements

I would like to appreciate my colleagues, Maryam Dezhmakhoo and Omran Garazhian, who accompanied me in the long way of reading the documents of the green notebook during the last decade. I am also very grateful to Hadi Aghajanzadeh and Shirin Taghizadeh for sharing their information about the history of the Faculty of Literatures and Humanities with me and for reading the first draft of the article. I appreciate Christian Isendahl for reminding me how important it is to publish overlooked documents about the oppression of archaeology professors.

Funding

Open access funding provided by Malmö University.

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Notes

1. For privacy concerns, the names of the attendees in the meetings have been abbreviated. In the translation of the documents, the names have been mentioned as they have been written in the original text with or without titles such as Dr., Prof., Mr., Mrs., etc. In some cases, the members of IAS have called each other Brother or Sister. These words are used by some Muslims close to Islamic Republic of Iran, instead of Mr. and Mrs.
2. Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (1934- 2017) was a politician, writer, and one of the founders of the Islamic Republic who became the fourth President of Iran from August 3rd 1989 until August 3rd 1997.
3. The names of the still-alive professors have been abbreviated. The exception is Dr.Majidzadeh, who kindly permitted the author six years ago to mention his real name in any article about oppression.
4. Masoud Golzari (1934–2020).
5. Yousef Majidzadeh (1936-).
6. Parviz Kardavani (1931–2021).
7. The phrases between brackets are added by the author to clarify the text.
8. Hezbollah (Party of God) is a Shia Islamist political party and militant group based in Lebanon and also literally a word to express the people very close to the government of Iran.
9. Ezzatollah Negahban (1926–2009).
10. Abbas Mahfouzi (1928-), a former member of the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution.
11. Hussein Ali Montazeri (1922–2009). One of the leaders of the Iranian Revolution in 1979, he was a former designated successor to the revolution's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini, with whom he had a falling-out in 1989 over government policies.

12. S, the head of the department of archaeology.
13. There are so many misspellings in the documents. The word 'other' in this sentence has been misspelled.
14. Sadegh Malek Shahmirzadi (1940–2020).
15. The Organization of Iranian People's, Fedaiian-e Khalq Guerrillas, was a Marxist-Leninist underground guerrilla organization in Iran.

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