

Statement  
on  
Cultural Heritage Losses in Iran

Society of Architectural Historians  
Heritage Conservation Committee

The Society of Architectural Historians (SAH) joins with an international group of architectural historians, architects, preservationists, and others to express our concern over the loss of cultural heritage resources in Iran.

The government of Iran is pursuing a project to expand the Shah-e-Cheragh Mosque and shrine complex in Shiraz, an expansion that will result in the demolition of some 200 historic residences and the annexation of some 140 acres of land. This plan is concentrated on what is considered the old town of Shiraz, which includes historic buildings as old as 700 years. These structures designated for demolition extend the limits of a Shi'a Shrine and the Mosque, connecting the two main religious centers in the city. The project includes the creation of a public square some six times the size of a football field. This project, known as the "shrine to shrine" project, seeks to connect the Shah-e-Cheragh Mosque to the tomb of Seyyed Alaeddin Husayn.

Shah-e-Cheragh is a funerary monument and mosque, housing the tombs of the brothers Ahmad and Mohammad, sons of the Shia seventh Imam Musa ibn Jafar al-Khadim. It is the third most important shrine in Twelver Shia Islam in Iran, after the Imam Reza shrine and Fatima Masumeh Shrine, and is the most important pilgrimage site in Shiraz. The tomb became a pilgrimage site in the 14<sup>th</sup> century when Queen Tashi Khatun erected a mosque and theological school in the vicinity. Imam Reza's shrine has several times been expanded during the Pahlavi era and after the Islamic Revolution. In the process, many of the historic neighborhoods surrounding it have been demolished. Much of the surrounding neighborhoods of Shah-e-Cheragh have likewise been demolished in recent decades, including the construction of new roads and facilities to serve pilgrims. Shiraz is one of Iran's most important pilgrimage sites for foreign visitors and Iranians alike. Pasargade and Persepolis, about 40 miles to the north of Shiraz, which date back to the Achaemenid period (559--330 BCE), and the tombs of two of Iran's most famous poets, Hafez Shirazi (1325--1390) and Saadi Shirazi (1210--1291) are among the city's most visited sites. The controversial scheme lay dormant for years but was approved in February 2023 by Parliament, with the direction that it be carried out immediately.

If this project is carried out as planned, it will result in the demolition of this important historic fabric of Shiraz. As this project continues, SAH urges the government of Iran to take this important fabric into consideration, as the loss to Shiraz's cultural heritage will be irreversible.

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