

Original Research Article

Muhammad Esma'il, the Architect, in the Historical Qajar-Era Documents of Shiraz*

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Abstract

Systematic and documented knowledge regarding the names and identities of architects in Shiraz during the pre-modern era remains limited, despite a significant portion of the city's historical fabric dating back to the Qajar period. The aim of this study is to introduce one of the unknown architects of Qajar-era Shiraz, Muhammad Esma'il, through inscriptions and letters preserved in archives, and to identify his role and position (stage) based on the analysis of these documents. The research is interpretive-historical, relying primarily on documents preserved in archival sources. Supplementary data for identifying other individuals mentioned in these documents has been obtained from library resources. Accordingly, the following questions are posed: What role and status did Muhammad Esma'il hold in the society of his time? In which inscriptions on historical buildings in Shiraz is his name recorded? And what kind of social structure do these documents reflect in relation to the concepts of 'power' and 'agents'? The research findings include four documents dated between 1884 and 1912, which collectively indicate that 'Muhammad Esma'il Mi'mār,' the architect of the Takyeh or tomb of the Qavām family, was one of the experienced and trusted members of the architectural guild of Shiraz and had assumed at least three roles: 'constructor of a building,' 'experienced architect in evaluating and estimating a building,' and 'one of the city residents.' These documents offer insights into aspects of his professional and family life. Notably, two different seal imprints of his, as well as a seal imprint of his son, 'Muhammad Kāzem,' appear in these documents, each used in a distinct context. His collaboration with 'Ustād Āqā,' another architect from Shiraz, is also evidenced in these correspondences. Although the title 'Ustād [Master]' is not used for Muhammad Esma'il in any of the documents, the findings suggest that he held a distinguished position and was a trusted agent in the champ of power within the city structure.

Keywords: *Qajar, Shiraz Architect, Muhammad Esma'il, Archival Studies, Seal Imprint.*

Introduction

Despite the abundance of Qajar-era buildings that remain within the historical fabric of Shiraz, there is

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relatively limited knowledge regarding the names and identities of their architects. The names of governors and patrons, as well as certain tile-makers from the reign of Muzaffar al-Din Shāh Qajar onward, appear in various inscriptions. However, references to architects are rarely found in foundation inscriptions

from this period. For example, the eastern and western panels of the Morvārid Īwān of the Moshir Mosque (constructed between 1848 and 1857/58) contain verses that possibly name the architect: ‘This structure, steadfast like the Ka’bah / Specifically, is the construction of this servant, Rezā.’ Additionally, on the tiles of a building known as Behbūdestān Namāzī (from the late reign of Ahmad Shāh Qajar), the name ‘Mashhadī Abū Tālib Mi’mār’ appears, who later became known as ‘Abū Tālib Mohkamī’ during the Pahlavi era (Asadpour, 2023, 73). Nevertheless, the most renowned Qajar-era architect in Shiraz is undoubtedly Muhammad Hassan Mi’mār. His name appears on the tiles of the entrance vestibule of the Nasir al-Molk Mosque (constructed between 1876 and 1887/88), amid verses by Sa’dī, and is described with the term ‘the least.’ He is the only architect referred to by Muhammad Nasir Forṣat-e Shirazī (1876–1921) as ‘Hāj Muhammad Hassan Mi’mār’ in *Āsār-e ‘Ajam*, in which he describes the structure of the Eram Garden and praises him as ‘unparalleled in the art of masonry’ and ‘renowned in architecture’ (Forṣat Shirazi, 1998, 843). His residence may have been located in Darb-e Shāhzādeh, as two historical documents—one a power of attorney (WWQI, n.d., 16179A324) and the other a later settlement over the sale of a house (ibid., 16179A52)—belonging to Karbalāyī Mīrzā Muhammad ‘Alī Pīlah-var Shirazī, reference the house of ‘Māshhadī Muhammad Hassan Mi’mār’ as being adjacent to it, respectively in May and April of 1920.

Beyond what has been mentioned so far, and possibly including additional works and evidence that remain beyond the reach of researchers, there exists only limited, documented, and substantiated information regarding Qajar architects in Shiraz. Therefore, the present research aims to introduce one such unknown architect, who has not been the subject of previous studies, and to explore his status and social roles by examining the remaining historical documents. The analysis of these documents may represent a

significant step toward a deeper understanding of architects, especially in light of archival materials that have thus far received limited scholarly attention in architectural studies. Based on what has been discussed so far, this research aims to address the following questions: 1- What role and position (stage) can be attributed to Muhammad Esma’il Mi’mār, based on the historical documents under study? 2- In which of the foundation inscriptions of historic buildings in Shiraz is the name of Muhammad Esma’il Mi’mār mentioned? 3- What type of social structure do Muhammad Esma’il and other figures found in these documents represent in relation to the concepts of ‘power’ and ‘agents’?

Research Method

The research adopts an interpretive-historical strategy. The collected documents, archival sources, and textual materials were described and analyzed, and the findings were extracted through their mutual corroboration. The archives for accessing relevant documents include the Archives of the National Library and Archives of Iran (Sākmā), the Organization of Libraries and Museums, the Center for Documentation of Āstān Quds Razavi (Sākmāq), and the Women’s Worlds in Qajar Iran Digital Archive (WWQI). Of these, only the WWQI archive contained pertinent documents. Hosted by the Harvard University Library, this archive provided valuable data on the social life of individuals in Shiraz—information not found in other archival sources. Furthermore, these documents revealed connections between certain local figures and the architectural guild, as well as the internal and external roles of this profession during the late Qajar period.

Research Background

Not only is there no dedicated study on Muhammad Esma’il Mi’mār, but overall, current knowledge about Iranian architects prior to the modern era remains extremely limited. This lack of research should not be attributed to scholarly neglect in studying and

introducing historical architects; rather, the primary reason lies in the scarcity of adequate and reliable sources across the Islamic world. The absence of such resources has hindered the development of in-depth and systematic research, leaving the few remaining traces of architects vague and obscure. In the western part of present-day Iran, the “Risāle-i Mimāriyye”—a 17th-century treatise authored by Cfar Efanđi (2016) on the life and works of Muhammad Āqā, an architect at the Ottoman court—is the only documented text concerning an Ottoman architect. Two other works, “Tezkiretū’l-būnyān ve tezkiretū’l-ebniye: Mimar Sinan’ın anıları”, serve as memoirs of the most renowned Ottoman architect, Sinan (1489–1588), written by his childhood friend, Sa’i Mustafa Çalbi (2017). In eastern Iran, “The Treatise on Clay Work (the Futvatnāmeḥ of the bricklayers)”, written in the 19th century by Habibullāh Bannā (2014)—also known as “Gil-Kār of Vazirābād” in Punjab and the son of Pir Muhammad Mi’mār—is among the few extant Persian-language works. Although the author distinguishes between the roles of bricklayer and architect, the text is significant from both engineering and mystical perspectives.

Undoubtedly, one of the most renowned Iranian architects, based on the considerable number of surviving works, is Qavām al-Dīn ibn Zayn al-Dīn Shirazi (active 1410–1438/39), whose biography and works attributed to him have been thoroughly compiled and published (Wilber, 2008). His esteemed position at the Timurid court is such that contemporary historians, including Hāfiz-e-Abri, Fasiḥ Khwāfi, Abdul Razzāq Samarkandi, Mirkhwānd, Amir Ali-Shir Nawāi, Dowlatshāh Samarkandi, and Khwāndmir, have all recorded his name (Golchin Arefi, 2009). In addition to him, Ustād Sultān Muhammad Me’mar Yazdi, the celebrated architect behind the Ganjali-Khān complex in Kermān during the Safavid era, is another architect for whom substantial studies have been conducted on his structures and signs (Makinejad, 2019).

In addition to the aforementioned studies, several scattered investigations have been conducted on

Iranian architects. One such study examines a transcribed letter of Ustād Ali Akbar Isfahāni within the poems of Esmā’il Kāshef Esfahāni, which sheds new light on his historical character, legal relations, works, and his appointment as the renowned architect of the Abbasi Jāme’ Mosque of Isfahan (Soltani & Ghasemi, 2024). Regarding architects of the Qajar period, particularly in what is often referred to as the ‘era of transformation’ (late Qajar and early Pahlavi), studies have been carried out, including monographs on Muhammad Taqī Shushtari (1896/97–1963) (Chaharmahali, 2024) and Hāji Ali Asghar Bana’i Mi’mār (1883–1962) (Jannessari, 2006).

• An investigation into available materials about Muhammad Esmā’il Mi’mār

No mention of Muhammad Esmā’il Mi’mār appears in the local historical writings of Fārs. Similarly, there is no information about him in the reports of the Shiraz Nazmiya [police] (Ettehadiye et al., 2014) or in the “Vaqāyi’-i Itēfāqīya” [The report of English spies in Shiraz] (Saeidi Sirjani, 1983). However, his name can be found in at least four documents spanning approximately three decades. The first of these is a tile-inscription from the building known as the Takyeh or tomb of Qavām, located on the western side of the Hāfezieh complex, dated 1884/85. In addition to this, three historical letters, dated 1902, 1910, and 1912, are available. Collectively, these documents cover the later years of the architect’s life, reflecting the mature and refined phase of his career.

Inscription of Takyeh (Tomb) of Qavām

The tile-inscription at the Takyeh Qavām is the earliest trace of Muhammad Esmā’il found by the author to date. The building’s architecture comprises two structures, eastern and western, separated by a small courtyard and a pond. The eastern structure includes a tall vaulted space with coffering and a complete saucer dome at its center. This part of the building excellently showcases Muhammad Esmā’il’s architectural skill and expertise, indicating that by

this time, he had matured into a proficient architect. The eastern and western iwans of this section of the building feature four vertical tile panels adorned with poetry written in Nasta'liq script. In one of the paired panels in the eastern iwan, the phrase 'Through the effort and attention of the least of the Hāj, Muhammad Esma'il Mi'mār, it was completely finished' is inscribed (Fig. 1). In another panel of the western iwan, the year '1884' (during the reign of Nāser al-Din Shāh Qajar) is visible, marking the completion of the decoration and the conclusion of the building's construction work.

To better understand the construction date and its attribution to the Qavām family, it is necessary to consider the death date of the first person buried in the building. The Fārsnāmeḥ-ye Nāseri records the death of Mirzā Ali Muhammad Khān Qavām al-Mulk (Qavām II) in early December, with the editor of the book mentioning the year '1882' (Hosseini-Fasa'i, 1999, 866). However, the Vaqāyi'-i Itefāqīya states the date as 13 December 1883. Additionally, the Vaqāyi'-i Itefāqīya recounts that 'Qavām al-Mulk passed away on Thursday night,

the 12th, and was buried with great respect in the Hāfez Tomb, where the entire population of Shiraz, both men and women, gathered' (Saeidi Sirjani, 1983, 204). The tile-inscriptions at Takyeh Qavām also corroborate this account. The poetry inscribed on the tiles states that Qavām died on 'Thursday, December of the month past ten days and two,' and in the 'twelfth of December of Three hundred and one after the thousandth year of the Prophet's migration.' Notably, in the central vaulted space of the building, a gravestone of Qavām includes the date of his death in verse form by Shurideh Shirazi:

“As one thousand three hundred and one year and no deviation/ From the emigration of the Prophet, peace be upon him// Twelve nights and ten from Safār had flown/ When Honor's sun in turbaned grace was faded away”. Determining the exact date of Mirzā Ali-Muhammad Khān Qavām's death is crucial, as it can help in providing at least a preliminary answer to the question of who commissioned and ordered the construction of this building by Muhammad Esma'il Mi'mār, and whether this edifice was erected prior to or after Qavām's demise.



Fig. 1. The signature of Muhammad Esma'il Mi'mār at Takyeh Qavām. Source: Author.

It remains unclear why Hassan Emdad (2008, 313), in his citation from *Vaqāyi'-i Itefāqīya*, identified Qavām's burial place as a 'family mausoleum.' This is particularly puzzling given that all the existing gravestones within the structure date from after 1883 (e.g., Nasr al-Dowleh in 1911; Habibollāh Qavām (Qavām IV) in 1915; Kokab al-Dowleh in 1928). Therefore, it seems implausible that any member of the Qavām family had been interred at this site prior to the death of Mirzā Ali-Muhammad Khān, especially considering that Mirzā Ali-Akbar Khān Qavām (Qavām I), upon his death in 1864, was buried in the courtyard of the Imām Rezā shrine. On the other hand, given that, tile-inscriptions are generally installed after the completion of a building's interior decorations—once construction is finished—the date inscribed on the tiles (1884) likely marks the end of the construction process. Consequently, the construction of the structure was probably commissioned by Mirzā Muhammadrezā (Qavām II), the son of Mirzā Ali-Akbar, following his father's death.

Mirzā Muhammadrezā served as Beylerbey of Shiraz from 1878 to 1881, after which his son, Habibollāh Khān, assumed his father's roles as Beylerbey and viceroy (Yazdani Moghaddam et al., 2014, 268 & 269). Mirzā Muhammadrezā Khān Qavām al-Molk remained the successor to Mirzā Ali-Akbar Khān until his assassination in 1908 (Emdad, 2008, 339), or possibly in 1907, at the hands of 'Ne'matollāh,' a servant loyal to Mo'tamed-e-Divān (Vahidnia, 2000, 192). During his tenure, he initiated a number of construction and development projects in Fārs province¹. Among these, from 1885 to 1888/89, he sponsored the building of the Qavāmābād caravanserai near the Pulvār River, between Sivand and the tomb of Cyrus (Emdad, 2008, 339), which chronologically aligns closely with the construction of the Takyeh Qavām. However, perhaps his most noteworthy project was the completion of the Divān-Khāneh-ye Qavām (Nārenjestān), which is thought to have been initiated by Mirzā Ali-Muhammad Khān and completed 'around the year 1882/83'

(Tadayyon, 2005, 46). Regrettably, no information survives regarding the architect of this building, which served as the Qavām family's residence. Around the same period, Nasir al-Molk, another prominent political figure in Shiraz, entrusted the construction of the mosque and the building of Eram garden to 'Muhammad Hassan Mi'mār.' Nearly three decades earlier, Moshir al-Molk (the Minister of Finance and Revenue in Fārs) had commissioned a mosque bearing his own name and employed a highly skilled architect (likely Gholām-e Rezā) for the task. It may be speculated that 'Muhammad Esma'il,' due to his architectural expertise, was likewise responsible for the construction of the Divān-Khāneh-ye Qavām. If so, he too—like Muhammad Hassan Mi'mār—would likely have sought an opportunity to leave a lasting signature or mark of his work.

All the architects mentioned thus far left their names on public buildings that bore relatively less governmental sensitivity. Perhaps the Divān-Khāneh, due to its governmental nature, limited number of tiles, and protracted construction timeline, did not offer an appropriate opportunity or setting for such a signature. However, the Takyeh Qavām presented a more suitable opportunity in this regard. Just slightly to the north of this building, above Hāfez's tomb, lies another edifice known as the Emārat-e Muhammad Qāsem Khān-e Vāli (d. 1872), which, based on its tile-inscription, is recorded as the work of 'Ustād Ne'matollāh Abu Tāleb Esfahāni,' titled 'Master of Architects,' in the year '1872.' It is entirely possible that 'Muhammad Esma'il' followed a similar path and regarded the Takyeh Qavām as an appropriate site for leaving his name behind.

A simple comparison between the two structures—only three years apart—attests to Muhammad Esma'il's superiority in arch construction and brickwork techniques, which are entirely absent in the building by Abu Tāleb Esfahāni. The broad and elevated span of the central arch in the Qavām edifice is notably more refined and masterfully executed than that of the building of Muhammad Qāsem Khān-e

Vāli. Nevertheless, Muhammad Esma'il refrained from calling himself 'Master,' opting instead for the modest term *aqqa* [the least/most humble].

Qajar-era Letters from Muhammad Esma'il Mi'mār

In addition to the inscription mentioned above, the author has discovered three Qajar-era letters bearing the sign or seal imprint of Muhammad Esma'il Mi'mār, which provide insights into his role, stage, and familial connections. These letters are dated 1902 (a request from Bibi Husni Jān for the construction of a shop, door, and hallway), 1910 (concerning the division of the house of the late Mirzā 'Abd al-Razzāq), and 1912 (a power of attorney granted to Sahām al-Shari'ah for a dispute). These letters will be discussed in more detail in the subsequent sections.

Request for the construction of a shop, door, and hallway

This document comprises two pages (one sheet) and

includes two main writings, three marginal notes, and seven seal imprints (WWQI, n.d., 16179A30). The first text is an instruction regarding the follow-up of the 'petition of Her Excellency Bibi Husni Jān,' which pertains to the 'inspection of the front of the residence' for the 'constructing a shop, door, and hallway.' The authenticity of this instruction is validated by a partially illegible seal imprint of the Imām Jumu'ah [Friday Prayer Leader], dated 11 July 1902 (Fig. 2). The text specifies that 'Hāji Muhammad Esma'il,' 'Karbala'i Muhammad Kāzem,' and 'Ustād Āqā,' all architects from Shiraz, along with the *kadkhodā* [Chief of Neighborhood] of the Sarduzak neighborhood, 'Āqā Ali Muhammad,' are to inspect the location in person and document 'whatever is observed'². It seems unlikely that this letter was issued by the *Baladiyyah* [municipality] of the city, as the Shiraz *Baladiyyah*, established

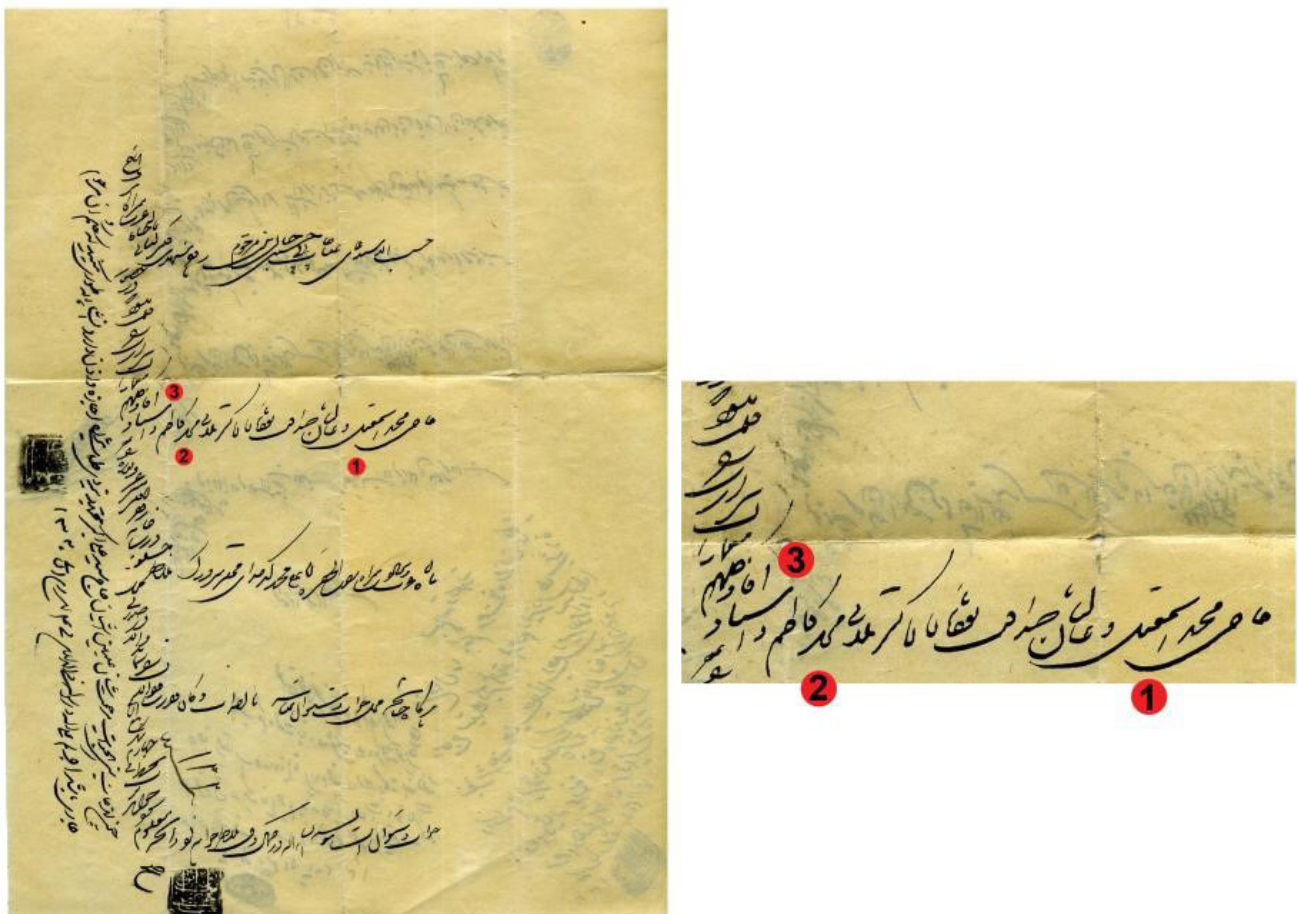


Fig. 2. Request by Bibi Husni Jān for the construction of a shop, door, and hallway, including the names of three architects of Shiraz. Source: WWQI, n.d., 16179A30.

around 1907, struggled with even basic sanitation tasks for several years. It is more plausible that the letter originated from the Nazmiya, but it is evident that it was not issued by a low-ranking individual or institution, given that it bears the validation of the city's Imām Jumu'ah.

A marginal note on this page reads: 'Since the late, noble Hāji Sayyid Ali Akbar Mujtahid Yazdi, may his grave be sanctified, granted permission and license, God willing, you shall act in a manner such that the order of the deceased is carried out. May God and His Messenger reward you in [this matter]. Dated 11 July 1902.' Hāji Sayyid Ali Akbar Mujtahid Yazdi was a second-tier mujtahid in Shiraz. He had at least three sons: Sayyid Jawād Yazdi (known as Muhaqqiq al-Ulamā'), a religious reciter who joined the Democratic Party during Mokhber al-Saltaneh's tenure and later became a deputy in the fourth parliamentary term; his brother, Sayyid Ahmad Yazdi (known as 'Alam al-Huda), who served as a public prosecutor in the Fārs judiciary between approximately 1920–1922/23; and another brother, Mansur, who worked in the Baladiyyah (*British Government of India 1925, 2022, 65–67*). Based on the endorsement on the verso of the letter—discussed below—the author of this marginal note must be the 'Imām Jumu'ah of the Province of Fārs,' namely Hāji 'Imād al-Shari'ah. 'Hāji Sheykh Yahyā Imām Jumu'ah,' the brother-in-law of Sāhib-Divān, served as the prayer leader of Shiraz until 1900/01, after which his son, 'Hāji 'Imād al-Shari'ah,' succeeded him (*Saeidi Sirjāni, 1983, 56, 208, 627*). In addition to this document, the name 'Bibi Husni Jān' also appears in a settlement agreement concerning 'all six shares of a house located in the Sang-e Siyāh neighborhood,' dated 8 November 1904, in which she distributed the house between her daughters, 'Bibi Māhtal't and Bibi Jaliyeh.' The shares were determined 'in the presence of a group

of reconciliators and two architects.' However, neither the seals nor the names of the architects are mentioned (*ibid., 14130A31*).

On the verso of the letter (*Fig. 3*), there are three texts. The main text begins with the invocation 'In the name of God, the Most Compassionate, and the Most Merciful' and is likely in the handwriting of Muhammad Esma'il³ (*ibid., 16179A30*). This passage constitutes the sole instance of the architect's handwriting discovered by the author. It certifies that the architects visited the site in person and, two days after being assigned the task, reported the following on 13 July 1902: 'Formerly, in front of the house's entrance, there was a protective wall one zar' [cubit] wide and one and a half zar' tall. It has now been removed. Apart from one zar' designated for the buffer and wall, the rest is part of the public way. Any alterations or use thereof are contingent upon the permission and approval of the Mujtahid.' The seal imprints of all three architects appear at the bottom of the letter: a square-shaped seal by 'Hāji Muhammad Esma'il' in nasta'liq script and Arabic (al-rāji Muhammad Esma'il), placed in the center; a rectangular seal by 'Karbalā'ī Muhammad Kāzem,' also in nasta'liq and Arabic (al-rāji ila Allāh 'abduh Muhammad Kāzem), located to the left of Esma'il's seal imprint; and an oval-shaped seal imprint by 'Ustād Āqā' (only the words 'Ali Āqā' are legible), placed in the right margin of the text. Although there is no clear correlation between the placement of the seals imprints and the status of the architects, the letter's phrasing itself implies a hierarchical distinction: 'The Exalted, Honorable Hāj, Hāji Muhammad Esma'il' is described with higher praise, whereas 'The Esteemed and Truthful Gentlemen, Āqā Karbalā'ī Muhammad Kāzem and Ustād Āqā' are addressed on an equal footing. Esma'il is characterized as 'exalted and honorable,' while the other two are described as 'truthful.' The order of names and the attributes assigned to them all indicate the superior status and skill of Muhammad Esma'il

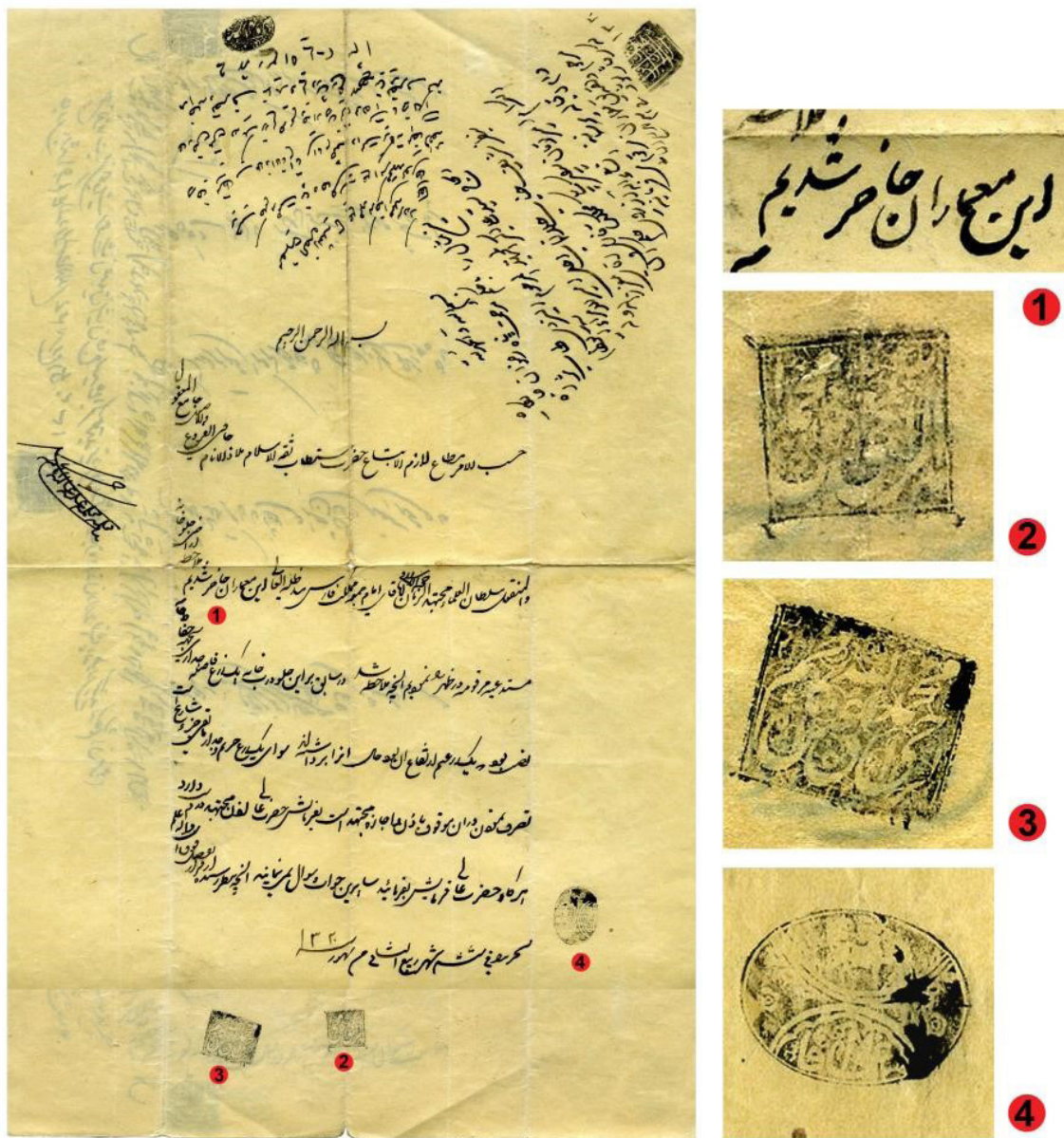


Fig. 3 Report by the architects to the Imām Jumu’ah of Fārs province, including their seal imprints. Source: WWQI, n.d., 16179A30.

compared to the others, as well as the trustworthiness and competence of all three. Further documentation elaborates on this matter.

Two marginal notes are present at the top of this page. The first, written in the top-right corner, is a note from the ‘Imām Jumu’ah of the Province of Fārs,’ dated 15 July 1902. In this note, the Imām Jumu’ah refers to the final decision to the ‘Beylerbey of Fārs Province, Āqā Mo’azzaz al-Dawlah’⁴. The seal imprint of Mo’azzaz al-Dawlah appears below this

note. He was the brother of Āsaf al-Dawlah, who served as the Governor of Fārs from 1901 until 26 February 1903 (Tadayyon, 2005, 175). In response, Mo’azzaz al-Dawlah addresses Āqā Ali Muhammad, the kadhodā of the Sarduzak neighborhood, stating that—based on the ruling of Hāji Sayyid Ali Akbar Mujtahid Yazdi and the Imām Jumu’ah—occupation is allowed only within the one zar’ buffer zone and the space previously occupied by the wall⁵. A summarized outline of this administrative process is provided in

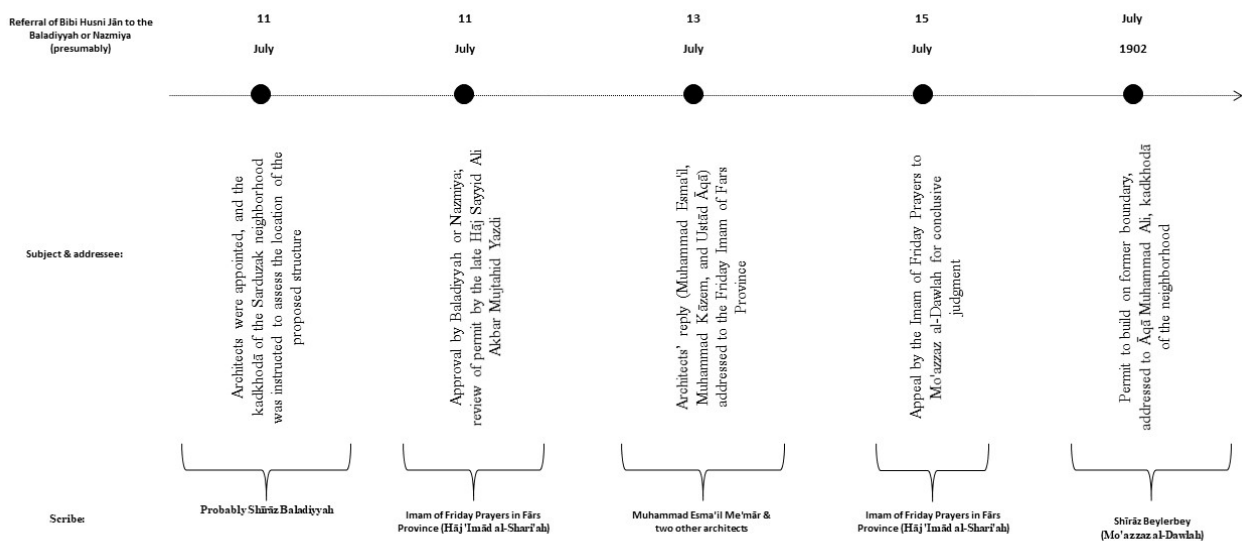


Fig. 4. A brief outline of the request process by 'Bibi Husni Jān' to build a shop in front of her house. Source: Author.

Fig. 4. Although the document does not specify the exact content of Hājī Sayyid Ali Akbar Mujtahid Yazdi's ruling, it is possible that he was the father of 'Bibi Husni Jān.' There may have existed a deed of endowment or a will stipulating that any structural modification required approval from a religious authority.

Division of the 'The Late Mirzā 'Abd al-Razzāq' House

This document pertains to the 'Separated Record of the House among the Heirs of the Late Mirzā 'Abd al-Razzāq,' dated 23 September 1910, during the reign of Ahmad Shāh Qajar (Fig. 5). It features three seal imprints—two identical seals belonging to Muhammad Esma'il and one belonging to Muhammad Kāzem. These seals are stylistically and textually consistent with those found in the previous document (WWQI, 16179A77). However, this record highlights a different professional role of the architect: the valuation of property and its division among heirs—a task that is both intricate and sensitive. In this case, the house of Mirzā 'Abd al-Razzāq was assessed and fairly divided among five heirs, based on its current market value. Each heir received a principal room of the estate—consisting of rooms with three-, two-, or one-door layouts—along with the corresponding ancillary spaces, in accordance with the will and

Islamic legal principles. The document also addresses dowry-related inheritance and concludes with a division of shared spaces among the heirs. This record demonstrates that Muhammad Esma'il was not only skilled in architectural matters but also well-versed in the principles of property valuation and inheritance law—both customary and religious. His involvement in such a legal and technical process suggests a high degree of social trust and credibility, likely making him a reliable figure for carrying out such sensitive duties. Nevertheless, it is important to note that this architectural apportionment was only one phase of the inheritance division process; the final demarcation required the drafting of a formal document approved by all involved parties.

The Power of Attorney Given to Sahām al-Shari'ah for a Dispute

The most recent document the author has identified related to Muhammad Esma'il (Fig. 6) is a power of attorney dated 1 June 1912. It states: 'The honorable Shari'ah Kheyir al-Hāj Muhammad Esma'il Mi'mār appointed Mr. Mirzā Zeyn al-Din Sahām al- as his legal representative to resolve a dispute and claim by the daughter of the late Āqā Abd al-Hussein in any legal court deemed appropriate' (ibid., 16179A215). At the bottom of this document appears a pear or teardrop-shaped seal imprint in Nasta'liq script,

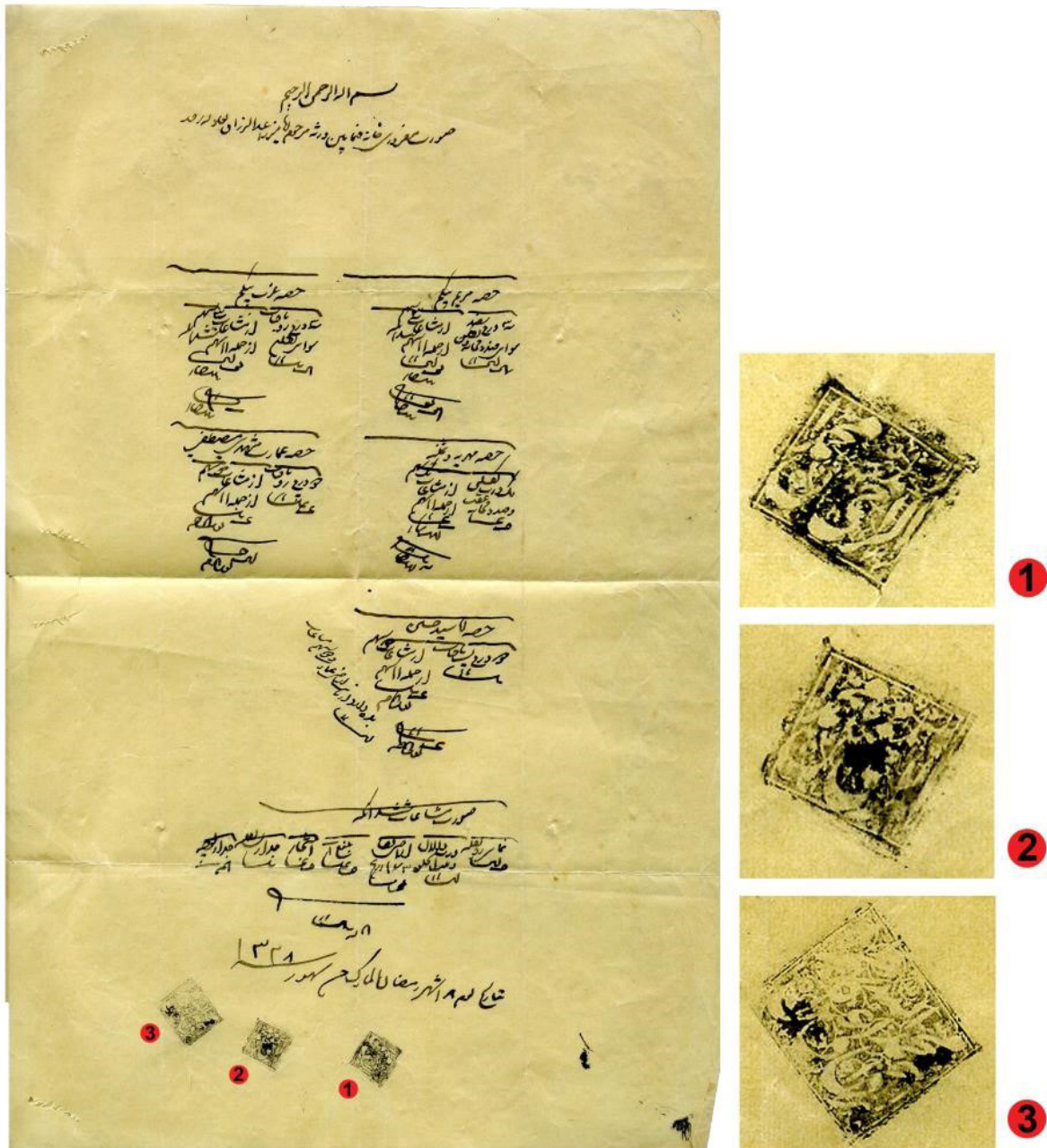


Fig. 5. Details of the partition of Mirzā ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s house among the heirs and seal imprints of ‘Muhammad Esma’il’ and ‘Muhammad Kāzem’. Source: WWQI, n.d., 16179A77.

clearly reading ‘Muhammad Esma’il.’ This seal differs from his previous architect’s seal and contains no religious or poetic legend, suggesting it was used for personal matters. In the margin, the known rectangular seal of ‘Muhammad Kāzem’ appears, confirming the architect’s identity and revealing their familial relationship. The marginal note reads: ‘We testify on your behalf, Hāji Muhammad Kāzem Mi’mār, the truthful son of the devout Hāji Muhammad

Esma’il Mi’mār.’ This confirms that the two were father and son, collaborators within the architectural guild of Shiraz.

Discussion

The documents analyzed in this study cover a span of at least three decades in the life of ‘Muhammad Esma’il Mi’mār.’ Assuming that he began his professional career in his mid-teens, the architectural

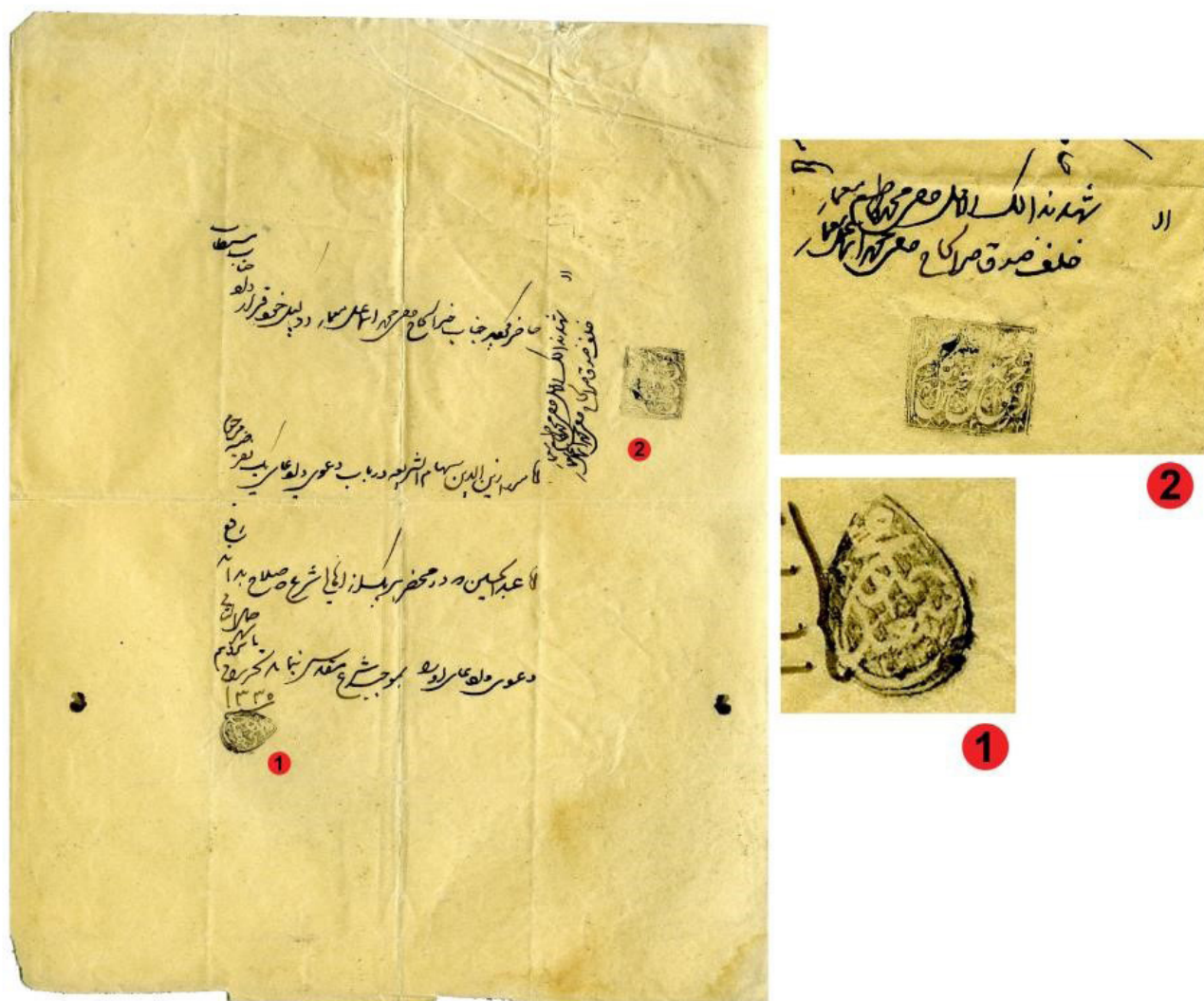


Fig. 6. Power of attorney from ‘Muhammad Esma’il’ to Sahām al-Shari’ah and confirmation by ‘Muhammad Kāzem,’ his son. Source: WWQI, 16179A215.

sophistication of the ‘Takyeh Qavām’ suggests that it was constructed during his period of professional maturity, likely no earlier than his third decade of life. Therefore, the documents likely extend into at least his sixth decade. Although the chronology and content of the documents do not allow for the construction of a precise timeline regarding his professional or social activities, nor do they fully disclose his professional network, they nonetheless provide significant insights into his ‘status’, ‘stage’, ‘associates’, and ‘the architectural career’ of the period.

• The stage and status of Muhammad Esma’il

In the documents reviewed, Muhammad Esma’il assumes three primary roles: A) As a constructor of buildings: In this capacity, he humbly identifies

himself as “*aqqal*” [the least/most humble] and is predominantly involved in construction tasks. B) As an experienced architect: In this role, he functions as a consultant or property appraiser, assisting in the partitioning of properties among stakeholders. Here, he is honored with titles such as ‘Exalted and Honored’ and ‘Ashraf al-Hāj,’ working in collaboration with the Shīrāz Baladiyyah, the Nazmiya, and local citizens. C) As a resident of the city: In this context, he appears as an ordinary individual addressing personal legal affairs, yet is still referred to as ‘Kheyr al-Hāj,’ reflecting his esteemed social standing. His collaborations with the Qavām family, local authorities, and the Baladiyyah undoubtedly enhanced his professional standing and

likely secured his position as a trusted figure within the architectural guild.

The seal imprints found in these documents show that Muhammad Esma'il used a rectangular seal inscribed in Nasta'liq with the simple legend 'al-rāji Muhammad Esma'il' for professional purposes, while for personal matters, he used a pear-shaped seal bearing only his name. The seal imprint of 'Muhammad Kāzem' further confirms their father-son relationship and their partnership within the architectural guild. Although only 'Ustād Āqā' is mentioned in the reviewed documents, other contemporary figures include 'Karbālā'i Mirzā Heydar Mi'mār,' 'Ustād Muhammad Karim Mi'mār' (*ibid.*, 16179A192), 'Muhammad Rezā Bannā'' (*ibid.*, 16179A213), and the well-known 'Muhammad Hassan Mi'mār,' 'Ustād Abu Tāleb Isfahāni,' and 'Mashhadi Abu Tāleb Mi'mār' (possibly the same individual), among others.

• Muhammad Esma'il and urban champ of power

While these documents do not offer a comprehensive view of the social microcosm of Shīrāz's architectural guild during this period, they nonetheless provide valuable insights into aspects of the urban power dynamics and the key agents involved in shaping the city. Each such 'champ' is governed by its own set of specific rules and defined by the particular objectives it seeks to achieve, necessitating the configuration of social positions in relation to one another, the regulation of spaces for contestation, and the ongoing competition for control (*Paugam, 2014, 121 & 122*). The three historical documents examined in this study—especially the first—highlight the pluralistic nature of power within the city, which is distributed between religious authorities and municipal/political institutions. These documents also serve as indicators of the social positions of the actors involved, as well as the modes through which the champ is regulated.

As an example, the way in which Bibi Husni Jān submitted her request to construct a shop in front of her residence illustrates the enduring and

central role of religious authority. The necessity of obtaining permission from the Imām Jumu'ah and the Mujtahid Sayyid Ali Akbar Yazdi, as well as from the Sharia' judge for encroachment upon the 'public street', underscores the continued power of religious institutions. On the other hand, the opinion of the Beylerbey and the supervision of the neighborhood kadkhodā were also indispensable and conclusive—demonstrating that one authority could not control the competitive dynamics and internal struggles of the champ without the other. In such a champ, architects often played a consultative rather than decisive role. The Islamic tradition of inheritance, particularly the rights granted to women, made accurate property valuation essential, and this required the expertise of experienced and trustworthy architects. Thus, architects, including Muhammad Esma'il, also had a consultative role in this champ, and for this reason, more than one architect was employed in both cases.

Conclusion

Scholarly knowledge regarding Iranian architects, particularly those from Shīrāz, remains relatively limited, and current information about the guild, the profession, and the social roles and responsibilities of architects is minimal. This study introduces and analyzes four documents—one inscription and three archival records—from the late Nāseri to early Ahmad Shāh Qajar period, shedding light on the life of Muhammad Esma'il, a relatively unknown architect from Shīrāz. While the number of these documents is limited, their historical significance and value are notable in several ways. First, these documents should be regarded as some of the few examples where an individual architect is explicitly named, providing firsthand data that are not referenced in other sources on the history of Iranian architecture. Second, the documents span a broad spectrum, from construction inscriptions to powers of attorney issued to resolve a legal dispute, each potentially revealing a different facet of an architect's life in late Qajar-era Shīrāz. Third, the seal imprints

not only identify those belonging to a Qajar architect, but the letter handwritten by Muhammad Esma'il also offers insights into the social and written conventions within the profession. Finally, these documents reflect the various roles an architect played within a society undergoing significant transformation, particularly during the Constitutional period and beyond.

The findings indicate that Hāj Muhammad Esma'il, the architect behind the Takyeh Qavām near Hāfezieh, was highly respected in Shīrāz. Together with his son, Karbala'i Muhammad Kāzem, they were regarded as 'trusted' and 'devoted' members of the architectural community. Esteemed city officials, including the Beylerbey, the city's Imām Jumu'ah, Nazmiya, and Baladiyyah, considered him a reliable and esteemed figure. The documents also reveal that architects, in addition to their building construction duties, were involved in property valuation and the division of inheritance, providing professional consultancy on construction-related requests. Muhammad Esma'il's written response to a woman's request to build a shop and hallway in front of her house illustrates the division of labor and the guild-based approach to such matters. Furthermore, these documents provide evidence of the 'multiplicity of power' within the city, particularly in the architectural profession, where both the 'institution of religion' and the 'institution of the state' played significant roles. In this context, architects like Muhammad Esma'il occupied a consultative role in the city's economic champ rather than making decisive decisions. Future research could examine other architects from Shīrāz, using existing documents from both domestic and international archives. Additional field data may also reveal more buildings attributed to Muhammad Esma'il. Sadly, many structures in the deteriorating historical fabric have either been lost or have had their inscriptions erased.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest in the conduct of this research.

Endnotes

1. The Qavām family built various structures in Shīrāz. Ali-Muhammad Khān Qavām constructed the Golshan Garden (Afīfābād), and Muhammad-Rezā Khān Qavām established the carpet weaving factory. Additionally, the Qavām family built the Qavām Hosseiniyeh and the Sālāri Garden (Tadayyon, 2005, 49–51).
2. Decipherment of the document: At the request of 'olya-jenāb Bibi Husnī Jān, daughter of the late [illegible], and the honorable dignitaries, Ashraf al-Hāj, Hāj Muhammad Esma'il, and the distinguished and truthful gentlemen, including Āqā Karbalāee Muhammad Kāzem and Ustād Āqā, and all the architects of Shīrāz, it is written that, in the presence of His Excellency, the dignity and prosperity, accompanied by the esteemed proximity of His Honor, Āqā Ali Muhammad, the kadhodā of the Sarduzak neighborhood, the requested matter concerning the front of the house [illegible] was reviewed. If the place is not suitable for a response and question, the construction of a shop, door, and hallway will be undertaken; otherwise, if the place is suitable for response and questioning, it will be written, God willing, with utmost accuracy, and whatever is determined will be written. Written on the 4th day of the month of Rabi' al-Thani, year 1320 [Hijri].
3. Bismillah al-Rahmān al-Rahim, by the command of the esteemed and most honorable, Thiqt al-Islām, the refuge of the world, the one who holds both the light of knowledge and authority, the Sultan of scholars, the Mujtahid of the time, and the Hujjat al-Islāmi, Āqā Imām Jumu'eh—may his blessed shadow remain over the kingdom of Fārs: These architects have come, and we have reviewed the land in front of the house of the applicant. Upon inspection, it was found that previously, in front of the door of the house, there was a protective partition at a distance of one zar' from the boundary, with a height of one and a half zar'. However, it has now been removed, leaving one zar' as a buffer and protective wall, while the remaining area is part of the street. Any intervention in this area requires the permission of a Mujtahid. As per the command of Your Excellency, the Mujtahid's permission is in hand. Should you give your approval, no one else will respond or object. This is the conclusion reached according to the above details. God knows best. Written on the 6th day of the month of Rabi' al-Thani, in the year 1320 [Hijri].
4. Bismillah and Alhamdulillah, This issue, by the decree of the late Hāj Seyyed Ali Akbār al-Mujtahid al-Yazdi, may God sanctify his soul, was presented to the esteemed and respected Amir al-Omarā, the most honored Amir Tumān, Beylerbey of the kingdom of Fārs, Āqā Mo'azzaz al-Dawlah, may his fortunes increase. God willing, based on the decree of the late man of honor and the approval of the architects, the matter will be carried out accordingly. Written on the eighth of Rabi' al-Thani, 1320 [Hijri].
5. The honorable Āqā Ali Muhammad, the kadhodā of the Sarduzak neighborhood, in accordance with the decree of the late Hāj Seyyed Ali Akbar al-Mujtahid Yazdi—may his soul rest in peace—and with the signature of His Excellency, the Imām Jumu'ah of Fārs, has been granted permission to intervene and manage the one zar' of boundary and protective wall that was formerly in place. However, under no circumstances should any intervention be made in the public street. Written in the month of Rabi' al-Thani, 1320 [Hijri].

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