

Viewpoint\ Editorial

Iranian Civilizational Continuity and the Progressive Logic of Space

Iran is, first and foremost, a name; yet there exists a profound reality to which this name refers. This reality- its name invoked more than eight hundred times in the Shahnameh- has repeatedly fallen prey to foreign invasions over the course of many centuries. Nonetheless, despite political crises and ruptures, continuity has been preserved within the cultural strata of this land-a continuity of essence that, though quiet and gradual, has always been characterized by the accumulation of experience and the transmission of knowledge across generations. One of the most significant arenas for observing this continuity is the history of space in Iran. In the Iranian tradition, a building was never merely a structural volume, a garden was not simply a green space, and a city was not just a collection of physical elements. These three, in truth, constitute different scales of a shared logic-a logic founded upon meaning, geometric order, water engineering, the precise relationship between the built environment and the natural landscape, and the rational organization of collective life. In Iranian architecture, one can discern a clear trajectory of transmission, refinement, and evolution of technical knowledge. Fundamental archetypes that emerged in pre-Islamic eras did not perish in subsequent periods; rather, they expanded into new paradigms. The evolution of the iwan, the progression of spatial roofing systems, the advancement of dome-construction techniques, and the increasing complexity of the relationship between structure and ornament all demonstrate that Iranian architecture has adhered to a logic of accumulation and progression. This progress cannot be observed solely in architectural construction. The very principles operating at the scale of the individual building persist at the urban scale, albeit in an expanded dimension. Throughout history, the Iranian city has existed as an interwoven structure of the bazaar, the congregational mosque (masjid-e jame), the public square (meydan), the neighborhood (mahalleh), the citadel (arg), the garden, and the street network. These elements did not take shape haphazardly, but rather within a sustainable order tailored to climate, economy, and civic life. Despite periodic destruction or decline, historical Iranian cities have generally managed to preserve this internal logic and reorganize themselves at a higher level of complexity in subsequent eras. In Safavid Isfahan, the integration of the square, bazaar, palace, boulevard, and neighborhoods achieved a level of cohesion that demonstrates the Iranian city did not develop from a tabula rasa, but rather evolved through the accumulation of long-standing experiences. By the same token, Iranian urban planning must be understood as an extension of the same tradition present in both architecture and garden design. From the perspective of architectural and urban history, Iranian civilization cannot be conceptualized under the paradigm of the "short-term society". Spatial evidence demonstrates that historical evolution in Iran has principally transpired through the absorption, reorganization, and expansion of prior achievements, rather than their wholesale negation and recurrent cycles of starting from scratch. Were a society to be truly "short-term," one would expect to observe perpetual ruptures in the transmission of knowledge, the rapid decay of spatial archetypes, and an inability to accumulate technical experiences. Conversely, in Iranian history, from the organization of the garden and water engineering to the integration of the bazaar, mosque, square, and neighborhood in the city, as well as the gradual evolution of structural techniques in architecture, a long-term and cumulative continuity is clearly manifest. This continuity demonstrates that the spatial memory of Iran has operated far beyond an unstable, transient logic; rather than being explained by the concept of rupture, it is best understood through the logic of historical continuity and civilizational accumulation. Based on such an understanding, contemporary pressures and incursions must also be viewed as events within a much longer historical context, wherein Iran has repeatedly succeeded in reorganizing and reproducing its internal capacities within new frameworks.

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HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE

Kasravi, R. (2026). Iranian Civilizational Continuity and the Progressive Logic of Space. *Journal of Art & Civilization of the Orient*, 14(52), 5.

DOI: [10.22034/JACO.2026.246555](https://doi.org/10.22034/JACO.2026.246555)

URL: https://www.jaco-sj.com/article_246555.html?lang=en

