Cosmopolitanism of Modernist Architects in Reza Shah's Iran

The initial inquiry for this study began with a simple question: why, given the staunchly nationalist environment of Reza Shah's reign, did so many of the leading Iranian architects, come from religious minorities? Or rather, how come so many young professionals from Christian, Baha'i, Jewish, and Zoroastrian communities chose the field of architecture as their careers and succeeded in designing so much of Iran's modernist urban environment? The talk proposes that Reza Shah's push for modernization created an inadvertent affirmative action nation, from within which professional architects from the margins of a minority – and as pioneers of modernity and cosmopolitanism – rose to the challenge of building the secular nation.

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