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Karin Rührdanz

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# Moscheen und Madrasabauten in Iran 1785 – 1848: Architektur zwischen Rückgriff und Neuerung. *Leiden, Boston, Brill, 2006, 1002 p., 202 pls. (Islamic History and Civilization. Studies and Texts, eds. Wadad Kadi and Rotraud Wielandt, vol. 62)*

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- 1 Although shaping the traditional quarters of Iranian cities, Qajar architecture has largely been neglected by art historians, so far. Ritter's research is a promising start to establish 19th century architecture within the framework of the art history of Iran, as this has already been achieved in respect to Qajar painting.
- 2 The first half of the volume is dedicated to the analysis of several types of mosque and madrasa buildings belonging to the early Qajar period. The second part contains the description of about 100 of these buildings based on autopsy as well as available Iranian publications and archival resources, thereby also taking into consideration the information provided by inscriptions, foundation texts, local histories and travel accounts. A large number of photographs (one tenth in colour) and 35 plates of plans support the verbal information. Access to it is facilitated by appendices listing the buildings in chronological order, according size, and by the names of patrons and artisans, followed by a general index. An English summary can be found on pp. 525-537.
- 3 While the documentation of these buildings constitutes a value in itself, it is the contextualisation that will be most appreciated. Ritter shows in detail how patrons and architects turned back for inspiration – mainly to the late Safavid period –, consciously

selected among constitutive architectural elements, but also introduced new ones to serve additional functions and changed demands. Whereas the growing precedence of the madrasa and its teaching function has parallels in other Islamic regions, it seems, however, that early Qajar architecture is not influenced by architectural styles abroad, but rather responded to the need for self-assertion by monumentalising those elements of indigenous religious architecture that most clearly conveyed claims for royal power and splendour.

- 4 With respect to patronage, Ritter documents the engagement of the urban elite eventually completely replacing royal patronage, and its effects on the architectural development. Religious buildings sponsored for and by religious scholars exhibit stronger relationship to local models and, in some important cases, seem more inventive by easier adapting structure to new purposes.
- 5 Thus, the meticulously prepared voluminous book will be extremely useful as a source as well as a step toward a revised understanding of artistic and cultural developments in the Qajar period.

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**Thèmes** : 5.1. Monde iranophone

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