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From bungalows to garden cities: The architectural evolution of British-owned oil company towns in Iran (1901–1951)

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Following the discovery of oil in southwestern Iran, an unprecedented form of settlement emerged in the region. The company towns of Masjed Soleyman (Masjid-i-Suleiman) and Abadan were built in dependence on the British-owned oil company APOC, later AIOC. The development of these cities between 1901 and 1951 reflects broader socio-political dynamics between the Company and local population. By considering both intra-company factors as well as national and international events, this research proposes a periodization aligned with shifts in the Company's policies. It studies the architecture and urbanism of each period in accordance with the socio-political context. Initially, the settlements were temporary and, like the first infrastructure, extremely limited and rudimentary. However, with the expansion of oil operations, the settlements and infrastructure became more advanced. From the unprecedented juxtaposition of buildings for European staff, bungalows that bore traces of British colonial architecture, a complex structure emerged. Yet the peak of this complexity emerged with the further development of these settlements into garden cities, another hallmark of colonial architecture and urbanism, marking a transition from the mere adjacency of individual buildings to planned neighborhoods. The analysis conducted shows how these built environments functioned as identifiers and tools of class and racial segregation.

Keywords: oil heritage, urban segregation, colonial architecture, British oil company, Iranian studies, Abadan, Masjed Soleyman

Please cite as: Seyedi, S. A., khaghani, S., Mojtahedzadeh, R., & Mehan, A. (2026). From bungalows to garden cities: The architectural evolution of British-owned oil company towns in Iran (1901–1951). *plaNext – Next Generation Planning,* 16, 63–77. https://doi.org/10.24306/plnxt/120

Introduction: Iran, Britain, and the quest for oil

Granting the D'Arcy Concession, and consequently, the discovery of commercial amounts of oil in Iran can be considered one of the pivotal moments in the modern history of Iran. With the granting of this concession, the possibility of British activity in the exploration and exploitation of oil in the "Protected Territories of Iran", except for the five northern provinces bordering the Russian Empire, was provided (Iranian Oil Industry Photo Bank, n.d.). Discovering commercial amounts of oil in Iran's southwest significantly increased Britain's influence in this region and not only deeply impacted British Iranian relations but also played a notable role in shaping the modern Middle East (Kashani-Sabet; 2022). Iran's oil also reached further than Iran's borders, which had significant consequences for Britain, particularly in shaping its military fuel supply and global energy strategy. On the eve of World War I, the British navy's fuel was changed from coal to oil-based fuels, and its leading supplier was the newly established oil industry located in Iran, which became possible after Britain ensured access to Iran's massive oil reserves (Reguer, 1982: 135). However, Iran's oil importance was not limited to military-related aspects but also economic ones. In the final years of British monopoly in Iran's oil industry, the Abadan refinery was considered the largest refinery in the world, and oil assets in Abadan constituted British most concentrated investment outside of Britain (Bamberg, 1994).

Although the mentioned investment undoubtedly benefited Britain, it had significant consequences in oil-rich countries of the Middle East (Ehsani, 1999). In Iran, particularly from the Reza Shah Pahlavi era onward, a considerable portion of the government's revenue was derived from the oil industry, although there have been many changes in the way this revenue is calculated. Before the nationalization of the Iranian oil industry in 1951, the initial basis for calculating Iran's income from the oil industry was the D'Arcy Concession, which in 1933 was substituted by the 1933 Agreement. Since both agreements primarily favored British interests, and the British government often failed to fully honor the responsibilities outlined in them, these arrangements reveal that Britain's activities in Iran extended far beyond typical foreign investment. The use of the term "nationalization" in reference to the 1951 oil industry takeover reflects not only a political shift but also acknowledges the prior depth of British control over Iran's oil sector.

This research aims to establish a new chronological framework of key events that shaped the Anglo-Persian Oil Company's strategies and infrastructure development, with a focus on how architecture and planning evolved under British influence from 1901 to 1951. Due to limited access to corporate archives and visual documentation, this study is primarily based on secondary sources. However, it offers a spatial and architectural interpretation that synthesizes these materials to provide a new analytical perspective on oil urbanism in Iran.

Periodizing British Oil Company activities: key phases of town development (1901–1951)

The British-owned Company shaped massive infrastructure for over half a century in southwestern Iran. Generally, after discovering oil in commercial quantities in a specific area, the British-owned Company settled there by establishing technical and residential facilities. This strategy led to the formation of new towns. The foundation and development of these towns were deeply dependent on the British-owned Company, which can be described as oil-related company towns. These company towns provided a unique platform for the British-owned Company to manifest its values and status through construction. In the meantime, the most essential oil-related company towns were Masjed Soleyman (Masjid-i-Suleiman) and

Abadan. Masjed Soleyman (Masjid-i-Suleiman) was the center of oil extraction, and Abadan was the center for oil refining and dispatching. Therefore, the construction in these two company towns is expected to reflect the values and status of the British-owned Company over its long years of activity in Iran.

The construction activities of the Company in Iran, over approximately half a century from the D'Arcy Concession in 1901 to the nationalization of the Iranian oil industry in 1951, can be periodized based on the most significant events that directly impacted the Company's performance and commitments. These include the D'Arcy Concession in 1901, the discovery of oil in Masjed Soleyman (Masjid-i-Suleiman) in 1908, the purchase of Company shares by the British government, the beginning of World War I in 1914, the 1933 Agreement, World War II in 1939, and the nationalization of the Iranian oil industry in 1951. This paper divides the Company's activities into five periods, beginning with the granting of the D'Arcy Concession in 1901 and continuing through to the nationalization of the Iranian oil industry in 1951. Each period reflects changes in the Company's approach to construction, planning, and political engagement. This periodization helps to reveal how architectural and urban strategies were adjusted in response to both internal company needs and broader political events.

This periodization is essential not only for organizing the historical narrative but also for analytically tracing the evolution of oil urbanism in Iran. Rather than presenting a static model of development, the five phases reflect how the Company continually adapted its architectural and spatial strategies in response to shifting political, economic, and labor dynamics. Major geopolitical events, such as the World Wars, the 1933 Agreement, and the growing nationalist movement, shaped the Company's legal position, resource allocation, and relationship with the Iranian state and society. Each period corresponds to a distinct phase of urban development, from rudimentary extraction camps to formalized residential layouts and segregated colonial townscapes. The timeline, therefore, serves as both a historical frame and a conceptual lens through which the spatial logic and socio-political functions of these towns can be better understood.

Exploration period: Temporary settlements and the absence of permanent infrastructure

The exploration period is years before oil was discovered in commercial and investable quantities. During this period, exploration teams explored the areas of Chia Sorkh, Shardin, Mametin, and Masjed Soleyman (Masjid-i-Suleiman), but only Masjed Soleyman (Masjid-i-Suleiman) yielded favorable results (Ferrier, 1982). Due to the uncertainty about discovering commercial amounts of oil, there was no reason for a long-term settlement during this period. Therefore, temporary settlement was on the agenda for the explorers, so they lived in tents or primitive shelters (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. *Remains of shelters in Mamatein, Source: Iran Petroleum Museums and Documents*

Formation period: the establishment of initial villages

With the discovery of oil in Masjed Soleyman (Masjid-i-Suleiman) and the assurance of abundant oil resources, a different type of settlement based on long-term presence was put on the agenda, which can be considered as the period of formation and development of the initial villages. One of the first actions of the British organization was to select a suitable location in Masjed Soleyman (Masjid-i-Suleiman) to build the first village for residence (BP Magazine, 1972). Thus, the initial core of the Masjed Soleyman (Masjid-i-Suleiman) company town was formed in an area of about one square kilometer, with two hundred to two hundred and fifty inhabitants (Rostampour, 2016). Although most scholars have considered the formation of this village solely for the residence of the company's foreign employees, the lack of information about its exact location has left it shrouded in ambiguity (Mehan, 2025). It appears that the constructions were focused on operational sites and oil wells, and due to their dispersion, it is impossible to imagine a cohesive village or town (see Figure 2).

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Figure 2. *A view of Masjed Soleyman (Masjid-i-Suleiman) during the formation period, Source: Iran Petroleum Museums and Documents*

In addition to Masjed Soleyman (Masjid-i-Suleiman), the site of oil extraction, Abadan also emerged as a vital operational center due to its role in oil refining and the logistical dispatch of petroleum products. In fact, following the discovery of oil in Masjed Soleyman (Masjid-i-Suleiman), the issue of transporting refined oil was raised. After investigations by the Burma Oil Company specialists, Abadan was considered the most suitable area for establishing a port and building a refinery (Ferrier, 1982). Moreover, the pipeline route from Masjed Soleyman (Masjid-i-Suleiman) to Abadan was also designed. Despite differing opinions on the status of Abadan's residents before the Company's investment, the construction of the Abadan refinery undoubtedly signaled a transformative shift in spatial organization and labor settlement patterns (Ehsani, 2014). The Company's highest priorities at this time were completing the pipeline, constructing the refinery, and increasing its productivity. However, the initial settlement cores were also formed in Abadan and on both sides of the refinery. The western side of the refinery was the Braim village, where European employees lived, and on the eastern side of the refinery was an area known as Coolie Lines, where Indian workers resided, and to the east of Coolie Lines, Iranian workers lived in primitive shelters (see Figure 3). Meanwhile, the available maps of the Abadan refinery from 1910 and 1913 show two different depictions of the Braim village and Coolie Lines and do not provide information about the Iranian workers' area (see Figure 4). This variation is probably because these maps focused on the Abadan refinery's technical facilities. Furthermore, it is possible that not every element illustrated had been built yet when these maps were drawn. This latter possibility increases when we examine these maps alongside available photos and reports, all of which confirm the scarcity and dispersion of the constructed buildings.

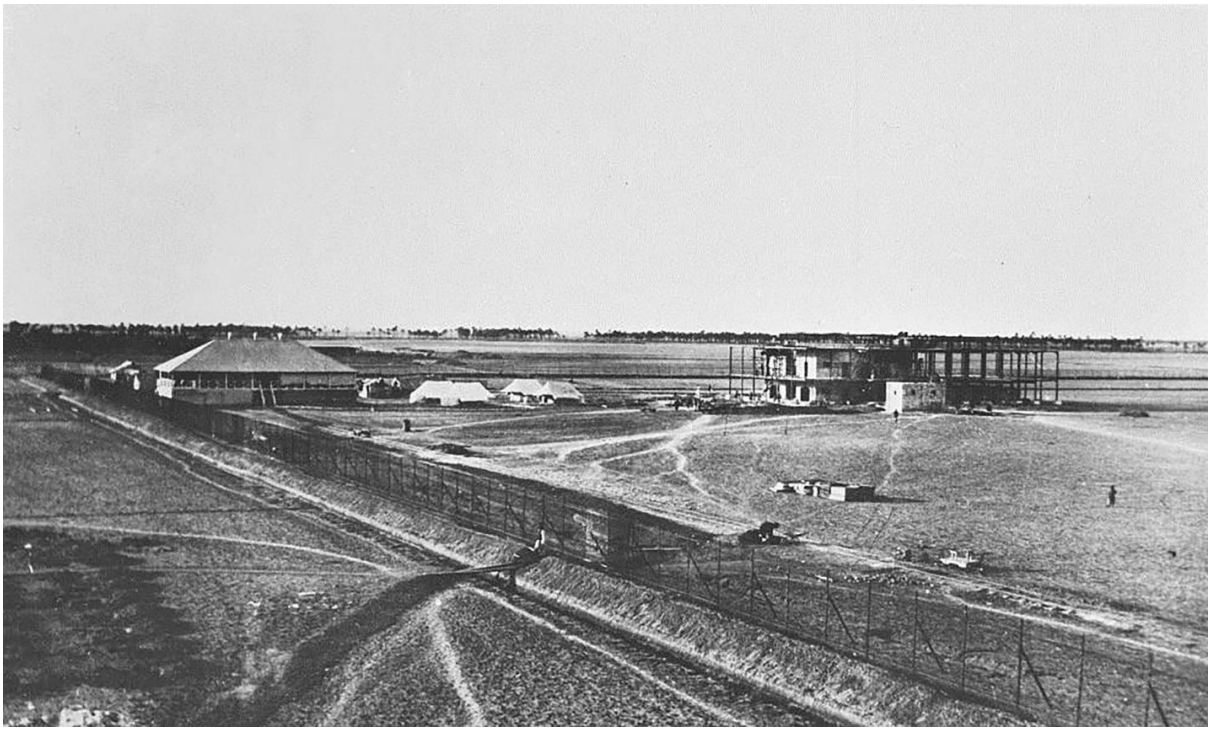

***Figure 3**. Constructing a bungalow in Braim Village in 1911. Source: British Petroleum (BP) archive*

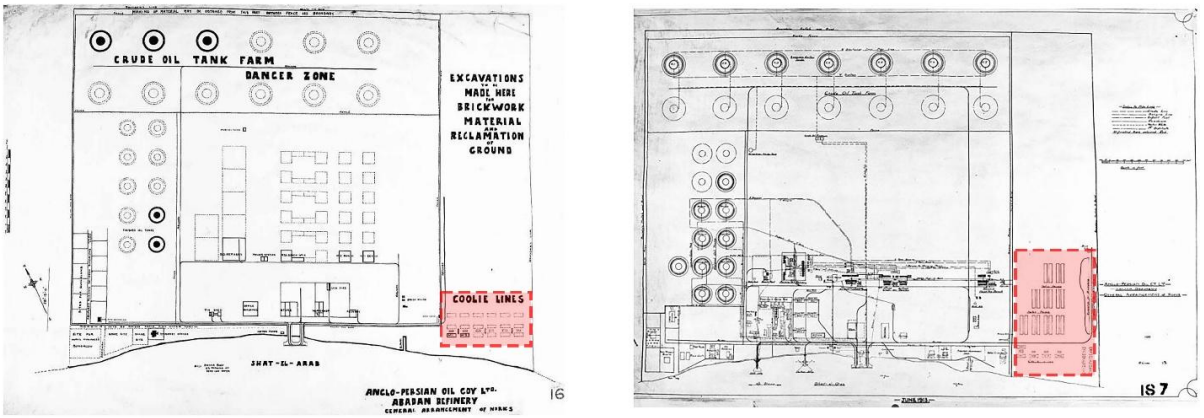

***Figure 4.** Maps of Abadan in 1910 (left) and 1913 (right) Source: BP archive*

Initial development period: expansion of discriminatory infrastructure

With the completion of the construction and equipment of technical infrastructure, a significant development occurred in the Company's activities. The years between World War I and the 1933 agreement can be considered the initial development period, which led to discriminatory infrastructure expansion. The population of workers employed in Masjed Soleyman (Masjid-i-Suleiman) clearly shows the extent of development in this area during this period. The town, founded in 1909 with two hundred to two hundred and fifty inhabitants, had about 20,000 local workers employed in the oil industry by 1922 (d'Ortigue, 2003). However, the cores of Masjed Soleyman's (Masjid-i-Suleiman) residential areas emerged partly in response to the location of oil wells and partly shaped by the topography. The town grew linearly along the uneven

slopes of the mountains, with the highest social classes settling in the best areas and the lowest classes in the worst ones (Abbasi Shahni, 2003).

Numerous infrastructures were established in Masjed Soleyman (Masjid-i-Suleiman) during this period, including new buildings, metalsmiths' workshops, carpentry workshops, electricity generation station, and gasoline manufacturing factories. Additionally, numerous warehouses filled with oil industry and construction supplies, drilling equipment, garages, telephone, telegraph, and wireless and wired communication facilities were established. A railway was also constructed from Dareh Khazineh into the town to transport heavy tools, pipes, and industrial machinery (Habibinejad, 2021). However, the developments mentioned appear scattered and practically show a lack of meaningful connections among newly established facilities. The dispersion of buildings and facilities in Masjed Soleyman (Masjid-i-Suleiman) is implicitly evident in the writings of Khosrow Khan Bakhtiari around 1921. Bakhtiari did not consider the buildings and facilities constructed as a cohesive complex, stating that the British people *built several buildings in Masjed Soleyman (Masjid-i-Suleiman)* (Bakhtiari, 1977). Additionally, according to Bāvar (2019), due to the topographical conditions of the area, the city's neighborhoods were disjointed, with each group of buildings separated from others by hills or valleys. The various neighborhoods were so hidden among the hills that they lost visual connection with each other (Bāvar, 2019). Therefore, it seems that Masjed Soleyman (Masjid-i-Suleiman) was a collection of separate neighborhoods formed from diverse components rather than a city composed of an intertwined whole (see Figure 5).

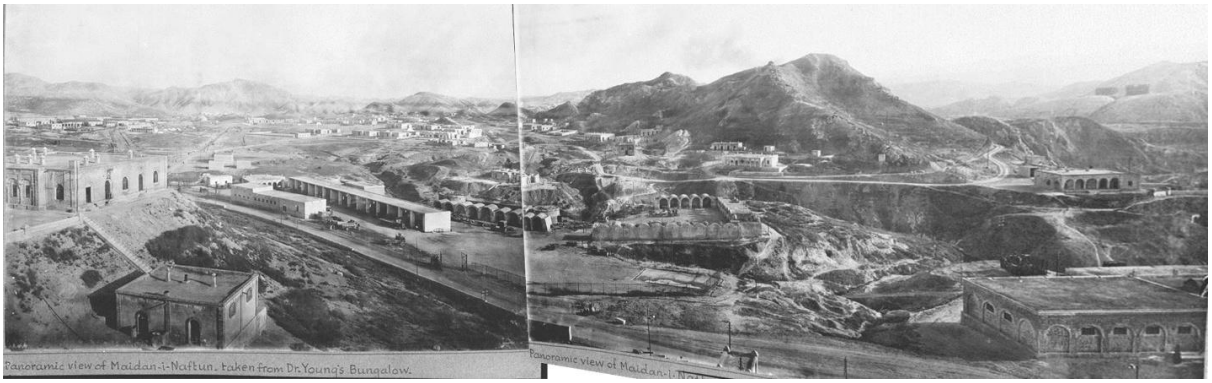

Figure 5. *A view of Masjed Soleyman (Masjid-i-Suleiman). Source: Iran Petroleum Museums and Documents*

The situation in Abadan was very similar; the infrastructure surrounding the refinery expanded significantly, particularly after Sir John Cadman, then the British government's oil advisor, visited Abadan in November 1924. He reported that by 1929, Abadan had greatly transformed regarding the quality and quantity of technical equipment, work regulations, and the camaraderie between workers and engineers (Forouzandeh, 2019). Despite this, there was a discriminatory situation between high-ranking employees and workers during this period. In the early 1920s, Braim village evolved from a collection of scattered buildings into a network of expandable streets, gradually including large two-story bungalows for senior employees, dormitories for foreign staff, and a range of public facilities such as equestrian clubs and numerous parks. Establishing Braim as a green oasis in the desert was a massive undertaking, requiring the transport of materials and a large workforce for gardening and irrigation, as well as hiring specialized gardeners who had formerly worked in Kew and New Delhi (Crinson, 1997).

In such a situation, many workers lacked company housing and lived in deplorable conditions in shacks. In parallel, the Company faced a persistent challenge in Abadan: the presence of a *non-company population*, a term used to describe Iranian job seekers, small vendors, and the homeless who settled informally near company townships. These groups, excluded from company services, often provided non-specialized labor and self-organized communities along the city's margins (Porteous, 1970; Zandieh, Hekmat, & Maghsoudi: 2021). According to the first drawn map of Abadan's non-company urban fabric from 1928, "Abadan City" was intertwined and separated from the workers' homes in the east of Coolie Lines by a newly built park (See Figure 6). This area was a very dense urban fabric consisting of indigenous buildings that existed before the refinery's establishment and a multitude of new houses for workers who worked inside and around the refinery, for whom the company had not provided sufficient housing (Crinson, 1997). Various forms of discrimination were evident in these areas. While Braim benefited from superior amenities and welfare services, prevailing westerly winds carried industrial pollution away from the neighborhood. After passing over Braim, these winds moved toward the refinery and subsequently transported polluted air over the Coolie Lines and Abadan City, disproportionately exposing these areas to environmental harm.

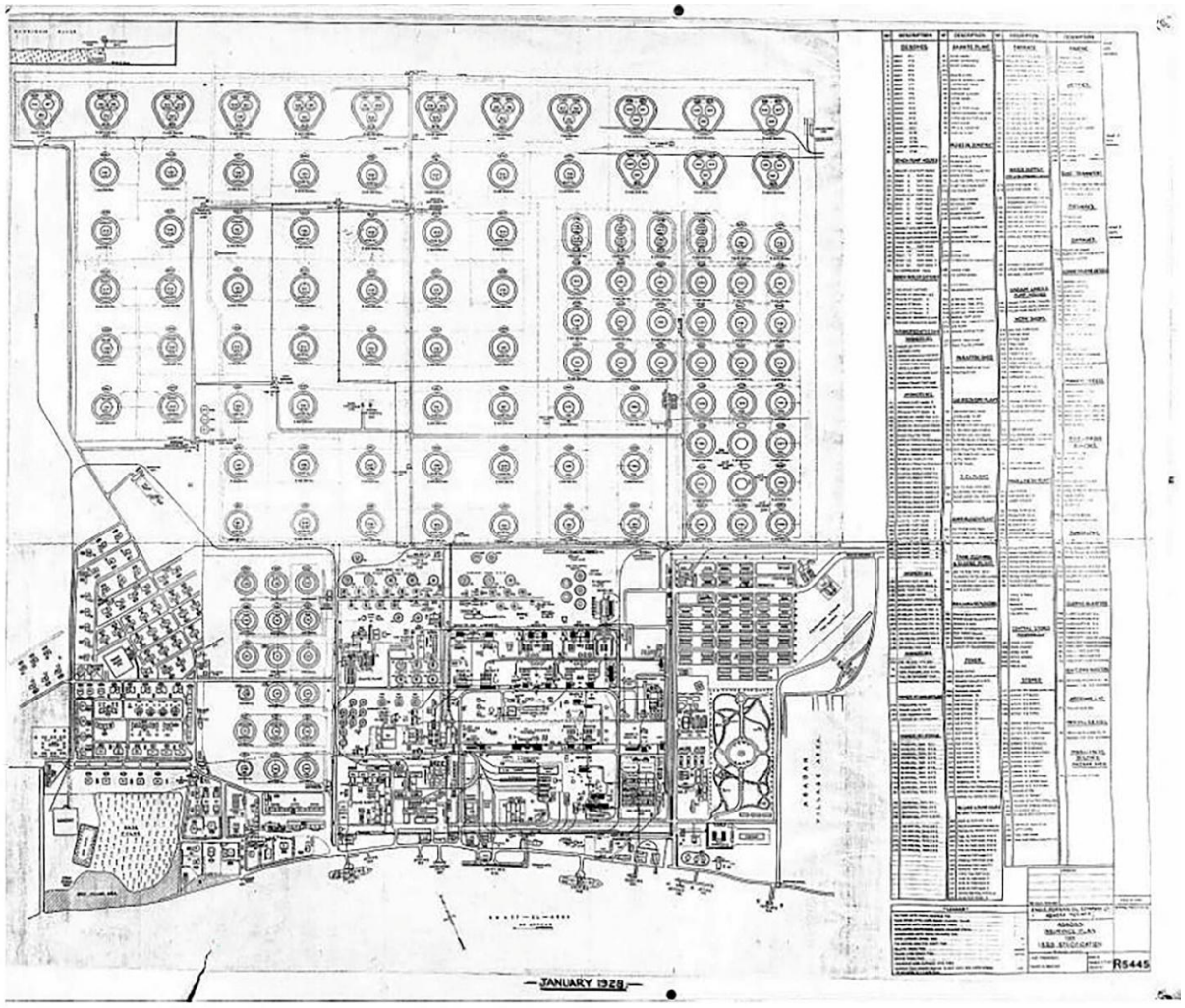

Figure 6. *Map of Abadan in 1928. Source: BP archive*

Secondary development period: Large-scale construction under the supervision of specialists

After the 1933 Contract was signed, new relations developed between the Company and the Iranian government, which included commitments related to construction, especially regarding employee housing. Consequently, construction took place at a faster pace and on a larger scale. Despite the Company's unwillingness to invest in housing projects, housing construction increased due to some governmental and Iranian worker pressures (Rostampour, 2016). In this period, the monopoly on designing large single residential units for senior managers ended, and the design of worker housing units was put on the agenda. Accordingly, with the increase in housing construction and the allocation of housing units to workers, the density of housing units per hectare also increased, and in addition to bungalows, a new type of housing unit called row houses emerged. These houses were located within structured urban grid networks and, in some instances, arranged radially along wide main streets. Approximately 4,500 housing units were built from 1934 to 1939 (Ferrier, 1982). Consequently, the scale of design extended beyond individual buildings. During this period, the employment of professional architects brought urban design issues and regional planning perspectives to the forefront. Accordingly, the latest technical and theoretical innovations were applied in designing new spots, making these areas, especially Abadan, a platform for implementing the latest urban planning theories of that era. Consequently, the concepts of streets and squares in their modern sense entered the Iranian urban planning field. In other words, from this time until the nationalization of oil, the built environment surrounding the oil industry changed from several single buildings to company towns (Rostampour, 2016).

In Masjed Soleyman (Masjid-i-Suleiman), specifically after the 1933 Contract, since 1934, a program for creating a township and providing welfare for employees was developed, and several elementary schools were established. During these years, the Company also established administration offices such as finance, gendarmerie, district office, and police (Abbasi Shahni, 2003). In Abadan, the Company established hospitals, schools, and training centers that were in line with service infrastructure development (Ehsani, 1999). However, the Company's buildings in Abadan before the 1930s were very utilitarian These buildings were primarily functional and lacked symbolic or monumental architectural features that might otherwise embody corporate authority, ideological intent, or cultural integration. The Company did not feel the need to show the unity of its industry-focused activities through architectural works, except in a functional administrative building (Crinson, 1997). Nevertheless, regarding the changes resulting from the 1933 Contract, the Company realized the need for extensive advertising through architecture and urban planning. Consequently, professional architects, including James Mollison Wilson, were employed in developing old neighborhoods and planning new ones. The planning of newly established areas in Abadan was influenced by the policy of population dispersion to counter threats and social disorders resulting from the city's population increase. These areas were designed as dormitory areas. Therefore, the design solution was to create separate townships (British Petroleum Archives, n.d.). In this period and until the late 1940s, considerable neighborhoods in Abadan emerged, forming like oases, piece by piece; these classified neighborhoods were connected only through pathways and practically lacked any overall plan for connection. Thus, Braim was expanded to house European employees, and South Bawarda also emerged for them. Segush Braim, Amirabad, and North Bawarda were also formed for non-European employees (see Figure 7). Bahar, Farahabad, Bahmanshir, Ahmadabad, and Jamshid emerged for workers. Except for Jamshid and Ahmadabad, all neighborhoods were designed by Wilson following the principles of the Garden City movement (Crinson, 1997).

Figure 7. *Left: Braim neighborhood in Abadan. Source: BP archive; also seen in Haghighi (2015). Right: South Bawarda, designed by Wilson based on the Garden City concept. Source: Wilson Mason and Partners; also seen in Crinson (1997).*

Leading to the nationalization of oil period: consequences of World War II, nationalism, and the shadow of communism

Despite the efforts to improve the status of Iranian employees and workers during the secondary development period, World War II changed the predicted equations. The war duplicated the need for fuel for Britain and its allies, increasing the necessary workforce for the Company. Consequently, the demand for housing for the increased workforce also rose, and the Company failed to meet this challenge in wartime conditions. Despite the widespread repression during World War II, which included the deployment of British marines in the Company after the Allies left Iran, Iranian employees, especially workers, expressed dissatisfaction with discriminatory conditions and living standards, particularly regarding housing and health-related infrastructure, culminating in the major strike of 1946 (Lesani, 1978). Moreover, the influence of the Tudeh Party among workers, who had communist visions close to the Soviet Union and anti-British colonialism sentiments, pushed the Company to provide housing solutions for them. During this period, the Company's actions initially focused on changing the internal structure of some existing houses from two bedrooms to three bedrooms and then constructing a type of quick and cheap house known as Arken. The Arken was a residential building that housed several units under a single roof. During this period, the Company's houses benefited from infrastructure services such as drinking water and sewage pipelines, electricity, and cooling devices. However, the Company's effort to provide housing for workers was still insufficient. According to reports from various visitors, housing was consistently identified as the Company's primary problem during the period from 1946 to 1950, including in discussions within the British Cabinet. In 1950, only 5,498 out of 30,521 Iranian company employees in Abadan lived in company houses, most of whom were high-ranking employees (Rostampour, 2016) (see Figure 8 and Figure 9).

This period was also shaped by broader historical forces. The Great Depression influenced British investment strategies, while Iranian state-led industrialization and military reforms under Reza Shah affected labor conditions and settlement policies. During World War II, the Allied occupation of Iran brought British military presence to Abadan, further complicating the urban landscape and intensifying geopolitical control over the oil-producing regions.

Figure 8. *European neighborhoods in Masjed Soleyman (Masjid-i-Suleiman). Source: Masjed Soleyman (Masjid-i-Suleiman) Oil Museum*

Figure 9. *Aerial view of Abadan. Source: Elling (2015)*

From tent to town: the evolution of oil company settlements

During the exploration period, temporary settlement was on the explorers' agenda, so they lived in tents or primitive shelters. Accordingly, there is no evidence of architecture beyond shelters and urban planning. During the formation period, scattered buildings formed the initial cores of the villages. Therefore, the scarcity of buildings clearly indicates a lack of urban planning concepts. During this period, the Company prioritized completing technical facilities, including the pipeline and the Abadan refinery. Despite the importance of the initial location of neighborhoods in separating European residential areas from Indian and Iranian workers, it seems the inner structure of the residential area was not considered especially important. Therefore, individual buildings were important during this period, so a specific type of residential building called a "bungalow" was used.

During the initial development period, welfare infrastructure was also considered in addition to the development of technical infrastructure. However, this development was practically limited to improving the living quality of European employees, so they lived in houses with amenities. In contrast, Indian workers lived in barrack-like buildings, and Iranian workers lived in primitive shelters resembling huts (Alam & Babadi, 2015). The discrimination between the income and living conditions of European employees and Iranian and non-Iranian workers even led to strikes by Indian workers in 1920 and 1922, the former resulting in an increase in their income and the latter in their dismissal (Ferrier, 1982). Additionally, with the rise of the new government in Iran and the increase of the influence and power of the central government in Khuzestan, Iranians also protested in 1921 and 1929, expecting support from the powerful new government against the discriminatory policies of the Company (Rostampour, 2016). In fact, from 1925, when the influence and power of the central government were established in Khuzestan, Iranian employees, who felt that the central government was their guardian, were no longer willing to endure the previous humiliating conditions (Fateh, 1976). The 1933 Contract effectively brought about a change in conditions. Thus, the initial development period can be named the period of discriminatory infrastructure expansion, which was still focused on single buildings or, more precisely, bungalows. During this period, neighborhoods formed primarily due to the juxtaposition of single buildings rather than as a result of comprehensive planning.

During the secondary development era, extensive construction under the supervision of specialists led to the structured formation of major neighborhoods in Abadan and Masjed Soleyman (Masjid-i-Suleiman). This period was about organizing the chaos and disorder from the previous era, resulting in scattered and exclusive neighborhoods for different classes of European and Iranian employees. During this time, the employment of professional and internationally experienced architects, particularly James Mollison Wilson, significantly influenced the formation of these neighborhoods, which followed the garden city idea and resulted in extensive greening. While earlier phases of greening in Braim included the establishment of parks in Abadan, it was in this period that Braim was consolidated as the city's most prominent residential enclave (Karimi, 2013). In fact, greening during this period was not limited to high-ranking foreign employees' neighborhoods but also occurred in neighborhoods built for Iranian employees and workers, resulting in much more extensive greening than in previous periods. Finally, the period leading to the nationalization of the oil industry was deeply influenced by the consequences of World War II, nationalism, and actions taken against communism. Construction in this era continued in the previous period despite changes in the internal space or type of housing used.

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Green oases and concrete barracks: the spatial politics of oil urbanism

The architectural evolution of the Company settlements, from bungalows to garden cities, embodies a larger history of colonialism, power, and inequality. Comparable modes of spatial segregation and company-planned settlements were visible in other oil cities across the region, including at Kirkuk (Iraq), Awali (Bahrain), and Ahmadi (Kuwait), where British or American companies emulated identical colonial urban policies. Such a paradigm, rather, might add a different dimension to understanding oil urbanism as a global phenomenon. This transformation was more than just an exercise in architecture or urban development but may lie at the heart of a Company's geopolitical and socio-economic agenda as a force for the British Empire, with oil as the focal point of British power in the Middle East. The physical structures and urban layouts of these towns mirrored and reinforced the hierarchical power relations between the Company and the Iranian workforce, often exacerbating social divisions and perpetuating systemic exploitation. Architecture was, in this manner, a control mechanism as much as a divider of populations. The building of bungalows, that iconic of colonial architecture, was the first phase of this exercise. Bungalows were markers of colonial architecture, built as abodes for British engineers and members of senior staff, reinforcing power imbalances between British elite and Iranian labor force. Such geographical segmentation, as a reality between living structures for workers in Iran and that for Iranian workers, served as a reinforcer between races or between classes, as it literally, as well as metaphorically, segregated British from Iranians, as a reality, between colonizers and colonized. This division was not an incidental byproduct of urban planning but a deliberate effort to maintain British dominance and control over Iranian workers. Housing high-level British staff members in relatively luxurious bungalows, with Iranian labor force as a result being allocated temporary abodes or overpopulated barracks, was a manifestation of wider colonial subjugation, as well as social ranking.

As the oil industry expanded, so did the company towns, moving beyond the simple bungalow villages into more complex urban arrangements. This, however, did not translate into a democratization of resources or space. Instead, segregation and disparity, which characterized early development, continued, manifesting as unequal access to amenities and infrastructures. While British employees benefited from modern housing, public facilities, and well-maintained green spaces, Iranian workers remained poverty-stricken with access to few services. Garden city inspired planning, which, albeit lauded in history of architecture for community well-being as its central tenet, was employed selectively in such company towns. The concept of the garden city, which aimed at optimizing living conditions, was practically reserved for almost exclusive application to residential areas for Europeans, further entrenching social inequalities and underlining exclusivity of British colonialism. The introduction of garden city planning did not merely reflect the Company's growing wealth or ability to invest in better infrastructure. It was a strategic concession towards calming growing unrest amongst workers. However, this strategy failed to address the underlying issues of systemic exploitation, inequality, and racial segregation. The "green oases" designated for British employees sharply contrasted with the overcrowded and poorly serviced areas where Iranian workers lived, fostering resentment and amplifying class conflict.

Furthermore, the spatial organization of these towns, particularly in Abadan and Masjed Soleyman (Masjid-i-Suleiman), was not accidental. The Company used urban planning as a mechanism of control, designing the towns in such a way that workers' movements could be monitored and contained. This urban spatial segmentation, coupled with Company control over housing, medicine, and other basic services, provided the Company with a form of paternalistic governance over the towns, maintaining order while optimizing work extraction.

Strikes during the 1920s and 1940s, instigated by grievances over housing, wages, and conditions of work, highlighted weaknesses in the Company's paternalistic approach. Iranian workers, emboldened by the nationalist movements, began challenging the discriminatory practices. The inadequacy of the Company's responses to these challenges is evident in the architecture and urban planning of the period. While continuing to construct new houses as well as enlarge existing installations, Company efforts were mostly stopgap measures that failed to address profound inequalities in the towns. Construction of rapid, inexpensive units such as the Arken, to accommodate several family units under a single roof, was indicative of Company desperation to fulfill housing needs of swelling workforces without changing fundamentally the hierarchical structure of the towns. Therefore, by 1951, when the Iranian oil industry was nationalized, the garden city neighborhoods that once stood as symbols of modernity and advancement were now emblematic of the deep-seated inequalities that had fueled decades of discontent. The spatial segregation, discriminatory practices, as well as unequal distribution of resources, which characterized architecture development of these towns ultimately contributed to their downfall.

Finally, the building process of the oil company towns of Iran was much more than a narrative of architectural progress; it was a complicated and disputed process inextricably linked with wider dynamics of imperialism, exploitation of labor, and opposition. While the evolution from bungalows to garden cities may suggest a trajectory of urban refinement and sophistication, this transformation was underpinned by deeply unequal power relations and a colonial logic that prioritized British interests over the well-being of Iranian workers. Therefore, the legacy of these towns is not one of architectural achievement but of social injustice. Future research could further delve into visual as well as spatial recordings of such enclaves in maps, plans, as well as photographs. Additional inquiries might also address infrastructure systems like healthcare, water, and waste management, as well as everyday lived experiences and the role of non-company actors in shaping urban development.

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