

IRANIAN CITIES OF THE SASANIAN AND EARLY ISLAMIC PERIODS

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This year marks the beginning of a new research project focusing on urbanism in Iran. This has become possible due to the initiative of Gil J. Stein in the return of the Persepolis tablets and the fruition of patience by Abbas Alizadeh in successful fieldwork in Khuzestan and now in the Marvdasht. Together, these factors open the study of Iran to a new era of contacts, access to scholarly production, and organization of genuinely joint archaeological fieldwork. In recent years (actually decades), I have pursued the problem of the origins of the Islamic city, first at Aqaba where the problem was a walled city (*misr*) imitating a late Roman legionary fort, and then at Qinnasrin, where a pre-Islamic Arab camp (*hadir*) transformed into a city, literally by the settlement of nomads, in the seventh century. It is not without some excitement that I return to my original field of research and dual problems of the nature of the Sasanian city and origins of the Islamic city, what one might label “from *shahr* to *medina*.”



Column in the mosque at Istakhr

The Pools of Persepolis

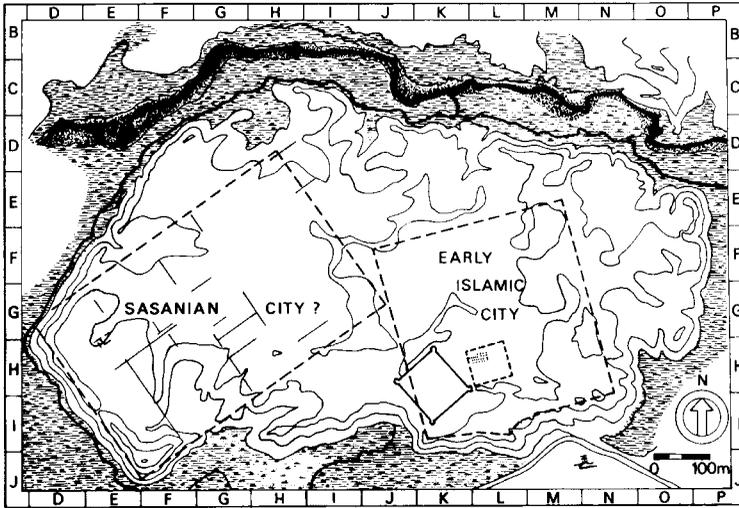
One of the principal examples of urban change in my dissertation, “Trade and Tradition in Medieval Southern Iran,” was the city of Istakhr near Persepolis. I might claim to know Istakhr as well as anyone due to my access to the unpublished excavations of the Oriental Institute by Herzfeld and Schmidt in the 1930s. This arrogance was recently tempered in discussions with Mr. Farhad Jafari, a young professor of archaeology in Iran; he was able to point out features, such as bridges outside the gates and details of the mosque, unnoticed by earlier archaeologists. He also produced a hypothesis on the location and nature of the Sasanian city which ought to be investigated.

The name would seem to come from the Pahlavi *stakhr* “the strong,” though a



Right to left: Farhat Jafari, Ahmad Assadi, and Don Whitcomb at Istakhr

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Plan of Istakhr showing hypothesized Sasanian and early Islamic cities

some archaeological study. This mosque was the first clue for my hypothesis on the early Islamic city: following the description of Muqaddasi, the mosque is in the center of the city, in a depression, with the bazaar on three sides. This conforms to the results of Schmidt's trenches and clear evidence of his aerial photographs, which show a square of 400 m on each side divided into residential blocks. But all this remains hypothetical without new investigations through geophysical prospection and excavations.

The Sasanian city eluded Schmidt (much to the disappointment of Breasted); it should be similar to Bishapur rather than Firuzabad, but, such is our understanding of Sasanian cities, we have little basis upon which to hypothesize its structure. Again, remote sensing will enable an innovative approach to solving aspects of urbanism in Late Antiquity.

more common meaning is a pond or pool (Jafari pointed out several depressions that might have inspired the name). We discussed the one remaining column of the mosque, which has been beautifully restored; this column had a double bull-protome, or as Muqaddasi described it, "each column of the mosque had a cow on it." This mosque, which may be one of the earliest extant in the Islamic world, has its complexities and would repay



The siphon-bridge at Jundi-Shapur

Two Cities of Jundi Shapur

In 1963 Robert McC. Adams surveyed this site and made some limited test excavations. Though he decided not to continue on this site, his report is a valued testimony to the remains of this great city. Well that he did so, since modern farming has leveled and obscured traces visible on the ground. This was the city and capital of Shapur in Khuzestan, a place of history and legends. The city was also

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Beth Lapet, seat of a Nestorian Christian Metropolitan for almost one thousand years. Its first western Christian came with Roman captives, brought from Antioch by Shapur to build his new city *bih az Andaw-i Shapur* “the better than Antioch of Shapur” in the middle of the fourth century. Medieval geographers noted its orthogonal form, “like a chess-board,” covering 3.0×1.5 km (5.0×2.5 miles) which Adams’ survey recorded. Apparently no one has compared the plans of Antioch and Jundi Shapur, which are so similar as to strongly support this legend.



Aerial photograph of Jundi Shapur, showing orthogonal and circular cities

In preparation for participation in the second season of the Oriental Institute Khuzestan project, under the direction of Abbas Alizadeh and Nick

Kouchoukos, I studied aerial photographs and new CORONA images of the site. These resources yielded an important discovery: the images showed a completely unknown city. This was a perfectly circular city with a diameter of about 2 km (over 3 miles), the same size as the city of Firuzabad in southern Fars province built by the Sasanian king Ardashir, the father of Shapur. Indeed, an early historical source notes that Shapur found his father’s cities in decline and reconstructed many of them.

Massoud Azarnoush, director of the Archaeological Research Center, and I walked around examining remaining mounds, picking up Islamic and even Chinese ceramics. The history of the city continued in Islamic times, when its school of medicine expanded and provided the early Caliphs with several famous physicians. The geographer al-Muqaddasi reports that in the tenth century, Jundi Shapur produced “most of the sugar of Khurasan and al-Jibal,” that is north and northeastern Iran. Several sherds in the Oriental Institute collections have indeed come from Nishapur in northeastern Iran and may testify to such commercial con-



Qal'eh Dukhtar, citadel of Kerman

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The center of the old city of Kerman, the Aramgah in center

ancient times as Bardasir, is a modern city but not known for its archaeological remains. A natural rocky hillock lies within the city, covered with the dissolving brick walls of a medieval palace, its graceful arches and domes still visible. From the summit, we looked down on the city and I produced some aerial photographs of the town that reveal the palimpsest of an original circular city. We determined the center of that circle must be near a grove of tall cypress trees, the Aramgah of Mushtaq; we then visited this cemetery, but it was difficult to find potsherds within the carpet of flowers. Again one has a complex urban history enticing archaeological research, and, as I found throughout this recent visit, Iranian scholars and officials eager to cooperate in joint revelation of this urban past of Iran. Kerman, as well as Jundi Shapur and Istakhr are cities of ancient and medieval Iran, the continuations of more remote historic periods, the study of which has been the established tradition of the Oriental Institute.

nections. The city became a capital once again in the late ninth century, the seat of Yaqub ibn Layth the Saffarid, whose tomb lies on the edge of the city, a beautiful domed shrine.

And Kerman to the East

Dr. Azarnoush was particularly interested for me to examine the site of Qal'eh Dukhtar, the citadel of Kerman in southeastern Iran.

The city of Kerman, known in