For convenience, location references are made to the Lonely Planet guide, Andrew Burke & Mark Elliott, Iran (Footscray [Victoria] 2008), and Hema Maps, Iran, 1:2,500,000 (Hema Maps, Brisbane, no date), and their spelling is used where possible.

\[\text{Think, in this batter'd Caravanserai} \]
\[\text{Whose Doorways are alternate Night and Day,} \]
\[\text{How Sultan after Sultan with his Pomp} \]
\[\text{Abode his Hour or two, and went his way}^{1}\]

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\(^{1}\) Fitzgerald, Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam, xvi.
introduction

haunted by those plains of amber, those peaks of amethyst, the dignity of that crumbled magnificence, that silence of two thousand years.¹

Iran is too big a country for simple generalisations to be very useful in explaining it. But it is helpful to start by thinking of it as the place where the great nomadic traditions of the steppes of central Asia washed up against the static cultures of the Mesopotamian valley. Its ancient wars were not so much in the Mesopotamian mould of rival city states rising and falling in power, while new barbarian invaders swept down at intervals from the north. They were more the east to west migrations of races such as the Aryans and the Mongols. But culture travelled in the opposite direction – that is, from Mesopotamia into the Iranian plain. Even when it was not under the same rule, early Iran tended to look like a provincial variant of Mesopotamia, adopting Mesopotamian forms such as cuneiform script. The ziggurat at Choqā Zanbīl is the only unequivocal example of the type outside Mesopotamia itself. At Hasanlu, in the north-west, some houses were lined with ceramic tiles which may or may not have been imported, but which certainly aped those of Assyrian palaces.²

The next important distinction, though one of which rather too much is made today, is that Iranians are Aryan rather than Arabic. The very word ‘Iran’ means Aryan, and it was in common use even before, on the last day of 1934, the government announced that the country was to be called Iran. As was then correctly stated, the province of Pars (Fars), from which the name Persia derived, was only a single section of the country. It was also more extravagantly claimed that the birthplace of the Aryan race was Iran. Not surprisingly, the suggestion for the change originated at the Iranian legation in Berlin.³

The reality is that Iran is not so very different from its neighbours. The Egyptians are not Arabs, and nor to a large degree are the Iraqis, but it is because those countries were more thoroughly assimilated into the Arab world that their culture became Arabic and they are perceived as Arabic today. Conversely Turkey, which is the close to Iran in many respects, is not really Turkish: the numbers of the Saljuq and Ottoman tribes cannot have been enough to submerge the genetic stock of their Hittite and other predecessors. The vast majority of the people of Iran are indeed of Indo-European origin, but their blood has been mixed with that of the Arabs, Turks, Mongols and other peoples. Some areas are still inhabited by tribes of Arab and Turkish race and speech. There are also the Kurds, who inhabit part of western Iran and are of Indo-European stock, with a language is akin to Farsi. But there appears to be no trace left of the primeval inhabitants who began,

¹ Harold Nicholson, quoted in Hobhouse, Gardens of Persia, p 18.
² Matheson, Persia, p 92, quoting the work of Prof R H Dyson.
³ Wilber, Riza Shah Pahlavi, pp 162-3.
six thousand years ago, to settle on the land and to practice a primitive form of agriculture.¹

_Persia has been left as it was before man's advent... Here and there he had scraped a bit of the surface, and scattered a little grain; here and there, in an oasis of poplars and fruit trees outlining a stream, he had raised a village, and his black lambs skipped under the peach-blossom; but for miles there was no sign of him, nothing but the brown plains and the blue or white mountains, and the sense of space....²_

Cyrus the Great once commented that at one end of his kingdom his subjects might be dying of cold, while at the other they were being suffocated by intense heat.³ But the heart of Iran is a vast desert covering many thousands of square kilometres at a height of between 500 and 1500 metres above sea level. This desert is crossed by few tracks, and is shunned even by the nomads. Yet on the edge of this desert most of the great cities of Iran have flourished, from Siyalk, in about 4000 BC, to modern Tehran. The desert and its raised rim constitute the Iranian plateau. It is bounded on the north by the Alborz range, on the west by the Zagros mountains, and on the south by the wide belt of mountains that shut off Kerman from the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman.⁴ On the higher mountains the snow falls in winter, building up a reserve of moisture for the dry summer months; there are also winter and spring rains. All of the larger centres of population and the majority of the smaller ones are situated near or in the mountains because of the availability of water, and many settlements obtain this by means of the qanats discussed below.⁵

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¹ Lockhart, _Persia_, pp 6-9.
² Vita Sackville-West, quoted in Hobhouse, _Gardens of Persia_, p 18.
³ Blunt, _Isfahan_, p 23.
⁴ Beazley & Harverson, _Living with the Desert_, pp 1-2.
⁵ Lockhart, _Persia_, pp 5-6.
Iran is effectively landlocked, for while it may have access to the Caspian, the Aral Sea, the Black Sea and the Persian Gulf, these act less as outlets than barriers, and historically all commerce followed overland routes. In the centre of the Iranian plateau are two desolate salt deserts the Dasht-i Kavir and the Dasht-i Lut, which act as a barrier between east and west and divert migrating peoples either east towards India or west towards Mesopotamia. The plateau looks east across the less dramatic highlands near the modern boundary of Iran to the bleak, ominously named Dasht-i Naumid and Dasht-i Margo (deserts of hopelessness and death) in Afghanistan, and most travellers between Central Asia and the Near East have had to endure the rigours of the Plateau. The merchants on the Silk Road and the Mongol hordes alike followed in the footsteps of the Aryan Iranians who, early in the second millennium BC, entered the plateau at its north-eastern corner and moved westward into Iran along the northern fringe of her central desert. There are strong historical links between the plateau and the similar country of western Afghanistan and Turkmenistan. Herat, Balkh and Merv were important cities of Khorasan, the greatest province of medieval Iran, and Farsi is still widely spoken throughout the region between the Hari Rudd and the Oxus. In the nineteenth century Turkmen raids and Russian incursions south over the Oxus, together with moves in the ‘Great Game’ involving Afghanistan, broke the political unity of the Khorasan, but the way of life of the indigenous peasants remained unchanged.

The population is heterogeneous. E G Brown, on his visit in the 1890s, found that Persian [Farsi] was not even spoken in the north-east, where a version of Turkish was used. Only when Qazvin was reached did Persian predominate, and even as far as Qom Turkish was generally understood. He repeatedly commented on the different racial characteristics of each region, and even more tellingly quoted the attitudes of one group to another. The Isfahanis were regarded as mean by other Persians, and the merchants of Isfahan were said to ‘put their cheese in a bottle, and rub their bread upon the outside to give it a flavour’. The ‘Persian’ view of Tabrizis was expressed in a couplet:

Zi Tabrízí bi-juz bízí na-bíni
Haman bihtar ki Tabrízí na-bíni
[From a Tabrízí you will see nothing but rascality
Better if that you see no Tabrízí at all]6

But really a similar account could be given of racial attitudes within, for example, the British Isles.

The Iranian identity is defined by religion as well as by race. Today 93% of Iranians are Shiahs, whereas in the Moslem world as a whole Shiahs are only

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1 George Salles in Ghirshman, *Persia from the Origins*, p ix.
4 Browne, *A Year Amongst the Persians*, p 52.
5 Browne, *A Year Amongst the Persians*, p 214.
6 Browne, *A Year Amongst the Persians*, p 84.
10% of the population, and Iran is surrounded by Sunni states. The four official faiths are Islam, Christianity, Judaism and Zoroastrianism, but there is strong discrimination against the minorities. The language has changed little in the last thousand years, and Iranians can still read such works as Firdausi’s Shah-Nameh, or Book of Kings, completed late in the tenth century, or Jalal ad-Din’s Mathnavi:

Nightly the souls of men thou lettest fly
From out the trap wherein they captive lie.
Nightly from out its cage each soul doth wing
Its upward way, no longer slave or king.
Heedless by night the captive of his fate:
Heedless by night the sultan of his state.
Gone thought of gain or loss, or grief and woe:
No thought of this, or that, or so-and-so.

ancient history

As early as the sixth millennium BC the inhabitants of Sialk had domesticated oxen and sheep and were practising rudimentary horticulture, and a little is known about their buildings. But for our purposes the history of Iran really begins with Elam, which emerged in the 3rd millennium BC in the region close to southern Mesopotamia, and which is arguably more Mesopotamian than Persian. The Khuzestan Plain is an extension of the great Mesopotamian Plain, and the Elamites predate the great immigrations which were to create the Persian identity. They succeeded, in association with the Amorites from the north-west, in overthrowing the third dynasty of Ur in Mesopotamia. Within Mesopotamia the conquerors merged into the local population, and as their power waned what is called the Isin-Larsa period began, during which individual city states existed side-by-side in Mesopotamia, struggling for supremacy (Isin and Larsa being the most prominent). Likewise Elam itself became increasingly Mesopotamian, and specifically Sumerian in character, adopting a script inspired by Sumerian, and taking up Sumerian devices such as the cylinder seal.

The Aryans were fair skinned raiders who swept across from what is now southern Russia in about 1800 BC, followed by a second wave in about 1200 BC, but we know little about the bulk of Persia at this time. Of the Indo-Aryans, the Hittites, who settled in Anatolia in about 1800 BC, the Kassites, who passed across the Zagros Mountains and established the Kassite Kingdom in Mesopotamia, and the Mittanians, in the Khabur region, all had metalworking skills and have left behind bronze objects. In the Elborz...

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1 Kremmer, The Carpet Wars, p 368.
3 Lockhart, Persia, p 18.
4 Lockhart, Persia, p 19.
5 Pope, Persian Architecture, p 15.
6 Frankfort, Ancient Orient, pp 107, 334.
Mountains the Marlik culture (previously referred to as Mazandaran) flourished from about the 14th to the 10th century, and produced fine articles in silver and gold. So such inhabitants as there were in Iran may have been not only nomadic or semi-nomadic pastoralists, but also miners and metalworkers, for metals were exported to Mesopotamia.

Invasions and settlement of the Iran Plateau in the late 2nd and early 1st millennium, BC. Ghirshman, Persia from the Origins, p 5

Conditions became very unstable, and from about 1000 BC further groups of mounted men speaking Indo-European languages pressed in from central Asia. The Medes and Persians were among them, but moved too far to the east to be observed in any detail by the Assyrians, our main source of information. They seem to have been part of the second wave of immigration, after which the Medes established their kingdom in western Persia, followed by a related people who settled further to the south-east, in the region which they termed Parsua. The king of these Persians (as we now term them) was Teispes, the son of Achaemenes.

The Cimmerians, who had lived north of the Black Sea, were driven from their homeland by the Scythians, horsemen of the Eurasian plains, who were themselves under pressure from the Huns. While many of the Cimmerians moved into Armenia and Anatolia, others seem at some time to have moved southwards, into the Zagros mountains which form the border between Persia and Iraq in Kurdistan and Luristan. But the Scythians also moved into Persia, and stayed for some considerable time in the area extending southwards from

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2 Frankfort, Ancient Orient, p 337.
3 Lockhart, Persia, p 9.
Lake Orūmīeh. The Scythians, and probably the Cimmerians, spoke an Indo-European language, like the Medes and Persians, but these peoples, while they shared linguistic origins and a nomadic or semi-nomadic mode of life, were far from homogeneous. They may have been comparatively insignificant in numbers, yet they dominated the native population. The most distinctive aspect of their culture (or that of their subjects), was the distinctive bronze and other metalwork which was being produced by the seventh century BC in western Persia.¹

Relief of the town of ?Arbèles: an episode from the campaign of Elam against Te-umman, in c 645 BC, gypsum alabaster. Louvre, Paris, AO 19914. Miles Lewis.

The Elamites re-enter history in the seventh century BC as a conglomeration of principalities related to Assyria either in friendship or in war.² In 646 BC Assurbanipal, the last major Assyrian king, was able to conquer the Neo-Elamite Empire and annex nearer Elam, the only real consequence of which was that further Elam fell into the hands of the Achaemenids, and contributed to their rise.³ The Medes first emerged at the dominant power, winning independence from Assyria and in 612 BC actually taking Nineveh,⁴ and an alliance of Medes, Scythians and Babylonians succeeded in destroying

¹ Frankfort, Ancient Orient, p 337.
² Frye, Heritage of Persia, p 61.
⁴ Pope, Persian Architecture, p 21.
Assyria, delivering Mesopotamian hegemony to Babylon, though eighty years later this power passed to Persia.¹

Persia was established as a world power by the Achaemenids. 'An obscure mountain tribe confined to the plains and mountains of what is now southern Iran,' as Tom Holland puts it, 'in the space of a single generation ... swept across the Middle East, shattering ancient kingdoms, storming famous cities, amassing an empire which stretched from India to the shores of the Aegean.' Cyrus, of the family of the Achaemenids, had begun his chieftainship as a vassal of the Medes in 559 BC, but ten years later he defeated the Median ruler, Astyges. In 546 he defeated Croesus of Lydia, in 539 Nabonidus of Babylon. This was the decisive conquest, for Babylon was the Rome of the ancient world, and the dignity of 'King of Babylon' carried implications far beyond the scope of political power.² This also this ended the exile of the Jews, though some remained and Babylon was centuries one of the more important centres of Judaism outside the homeland.³ Cyrus died in 529, and his successor Cambyses, a violent and unbalanced man, conquered Egypt in 525. With Darius I (522-486 BC) the Achaemenid Empire resumed the course set by Cyrus the Great. For two centuries it was ruled with efficiency, justice, and (for most) tolerance.⁴

It was also a true world empire, and the art and architecture which resulted was - as we shall see - an extraordinary synthesis created by a semi-nomadic people, with almost no artistic tradition, by using the traditions, the materials, and the actual craftsmen of their neighbours and subjects. Darius's account of constructing his palace at Susa [Shush] is an astonishing demonstration of this:

A great god is Ahuramazda, who created this earth ... who made Darius king, one king of many, one lord of many.
I am Darius, great king, king of kings, king of countries, king of this earth ... what was done by me, all that by the will of Ahuramazda I did.
This is the palace which at Susa I erected. From afar its ornamentation was brought. Down the earth was dug until rock bottom I reached. When the excavation was made, rubble was packed down, one part 40 ells in depth, the other 20 ells in depth. On that rubble a palace I erected.
And that the earth was dug down, and that the rubble was packed down, and that the brick was moulded, the Babylonian folk, they did that.
The cedar timber, this – a mountain named Lebanon - from there it was brought; the Assyrian folk, they brought it to Babylon; from Babylon the Carians and Ionians brought it to Susa.
The Yaka wood from Gandara was brought from Carmania.
The gold from Sardis and from Bactria was brought, which was used here.

¹ Frankfort, Ancient Orient, p 348.
² Frankfort, Ancient Orient, p 348.
⁴ Frankfort, Ancient Orient, p 348.
The stone – lapis lazuli and carnelian which was used here, this from Sogdiana was brought.  
The stone – turquoise - this from Chorasmia was brought which was used here.  
The silver and the copper from Egypt were brought.  
The ornamentation with which the wall was adorned, that from Ionia was brought.  
The ivory which was used here, from Ethiopia and from Sind and from Arachosia was brought.  
The stone pillars which here were used – a lace named Abiradush, in Uja – from there were brought.  
The stonemasons who wrought the stone, those were Ionians and Sardians. The goldsmiths who wrought the gold, those were Medes and Egyptians. The men who wrought the ishma, those were Sardians and Egyptians. The men who wrought the baked brick, those were Babylonians. The men who adorned the wall, those were Medes and Egyptians.  

Says Darius the king: at Susa, here, a splendid task was ordered; very splendidly did it turn out.  

May Ahuramazda protect me; and Hystaspes who is my father; and my country.¹

¹ Frankfort, Ancient Orient, p 349.

At first the Achaemenids were very tolerant of all religions. The empire founded by Cyrus was not officially Zoroastrian, and the Persians continued to
worship their ancient gods, to honour mountains and streams, and to sacrifice horses before the tombs of their kings. But Darius took up the standards against 'the Lie', or the worship of any deity other than Ahura Mazda. In 520 BC he undertook his first holy war against the Elamites, who had revolted, and whom he accused of failing to worship Ahura Mazda. He was able to assure his troops of glory on earth and eternal life in heaven, and had thus perhaps initiated the concept of the holy war. The religion was based upon the teaching of Zoroaster, who taught that after death the soul would be weighed in scales, the good deeds against the bad ones.

The Aryans had brought with them to Persia a Magian religion with deities like Varuna, Mitra [Mithras] and Indra, who are known from the Sanskrit Rig Veda, composed mainly in the Indus Valley between about 2000 and 1500 BC. Varuna, the spirit of light and goodness was eternally opposed by Angria Mainyu. spirit of evil and darkness. In the seventh century BC the prophet Zoroaster [Zarathushtra] reformed the religion, and Varuna was renamed Ahura Mazda, the supreme god. The Zoroastrian dualist struggle was now between being and non-being, in which the world created by the 'Wise Lord' (Ahura Mazda) was the forum for a struggle between the creator and an uncreated 'Evil Spirit' (Ahriman). The original document of the religion is the Avesta, also known as the Zend-Avesta, still used by the Parsees in India.

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1 Holland, Persian Fire, p 35.
2 Holland, Persian Fire, p 55.
4 Lockhart, Persia, p 15.
The Zoroastrians’ experience of the world was shot through with divinity, and they made animal sacrifices to Ahura Mazda and paid reverence to fire. But the religion was puzzling even to its own adherents, and it was unclear when and where the prophet had lived, though it was known that his teachings reached Persia from the East. Of his life it was known or believed only that he was the first baby to laugh rather than cry at birth; that he received his first vision of Ahura Mazda at the age of thirty, as he emerged from a river; and that he was killed by an assassin’s knife at the age of seventy-seven.\(^2\)

From 449 there was war between Greece and Persia, ending after half a century with the defeat of Persia by a coalition of Greek city states led by Athens. Herodotus wrote an account of the wars in the form of a historia or inquiry, seeking also to establish as much as he could about the people.\(^3\)

In early spring 334 Alexander began his campaign against the Persians in Asia Minor, and by good luck crossed the Dardanelles without opposition, although Darius had a Phoenician navy three times as large as his.\(^4\) Alexander won the Battle of Granicus against Persian forces under Arsites, which sustained 2500 casualties, a thousand of whom were native Persians and Alexander lost at most a few dozen.\(^5\) The Great King [Darius] appointed Memnon, a Greek mercenary, to command his forces at Halicarnassus, but ultimately Memnon took his army into Greece, and Darius himself confronted

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5. Green, *Alexander the Great*, p 98.
Alexander at the battle of Issus.\(^1\) Alexander won the battle and Darius fled ignominiously.\(^2\)

Alexander pursued him in a leisurely fashion, taking the main centres of Phoenicia and then the whole of Egypt before turning north again through Syria, reaching Thapsacus on the Euphrates in July 331.\(^3\) Darius chose to stand at Gaugamela, near Nineveh, but on 30 September 331 Alexander overcame against Persian forces five times the size of his own.\(^4\) Now resistance largely crumbled. Susa surrendered without a battle, as did Persepolis, which Alexander entered on 31 January 330,\(^5\) there was, therefore little justification for its partial sacking. Alexander moved in pursuit of Darius to Ecbatana where he paid off his league troops, and re-engaged as many as possible in what now became effectively a private army.\(^6\) Darius was was in Bactria where he was deposed by the satrap Bessus, who declared himself Great King under the name Artaxerxes IV.\(^7\) Alexander reached Kandahar in February 329 and began crossing the Hindu Kush at the beginning of April. His activities after passing through Iran do not concern us here, but as is well known his ambition for conquest proved insatiable, his manners became increasingly orientalised, and his followers increasingly

\(^1\) Green, *Alexander the Great*, pp 109-115.
\(^2\) Green, *Alexander the Great*, p 125.
\(^3\) Green, *Alexander the Great*, pp 134-153.
\(^6\) Green, *Alexander the Great*, p 177.
\(^7\) Green, *Alexander the Great*, p 183.
disaffected. He finally died at Babylon on 10 June 323, of what may or may not have been natural causes.

Route of Alexander the Great. Loveday, Iran, p 32.

Alexander’s route from Asia Minor to Iran, by way of Phoenicia, Egypt and Mesopotamia. Green, Alexander the Great, p 132.
After Alexander's death the Seleucids ruled Persia for some seventy years. According to Ghirshman the overriding concern of the early Seleucid monarchs was to safeguard the unity of their far-flung dominions, which were as heterogeneous as those of the Achaemenids. By peopling them with Greeks and Macedonians, and developing a vast programme of town planning to house and settle these exiles from their native lands, they hoped to establish a nation-wide culture which would lend itself to Hellenisation. In the event things worked out differently, as the conquerors themselves became Iranised.¹

The country next came under the dominion of the Parthians, a rude, unpolished and warlike Aryan people.² Alexander had established a line of fortifications along the Jaxartes, which the Seleucids were unable to defend, and in the third century a group of nomadic Iranian tribes extending from the Caspian to Chinese Turkestan began pressing forward in three waves.³ Of these, the Parthians emerged in the northeast of Persia, in what is now Russian central Asia, and pushed westward, gaining a great deal of Seleucid territory, but continued to co-exist with the Seleucids for a long time.⁴ They unified much of the original Persian empire, and by 138 BC they made their capital at Ctesiphon on the Tigris. The Parthian period, which lasted for five centuries, was one of almost ceaseless conflict with Rome; although each

¹ Ghirshman, Parthians and Sassanians, p 15.
² Lockhart, Persia, p 10.
³ Ghirshman, Parthians and Sassanians, p 16.
⁴ Pope, Persian Architecture, p 47.
power won important victories from time to time, neither could subdue the other.\footnote{Lockhart, \textit{Persia}, p 10.}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{parthia_map.png}
\caption{Map showing Parthia in lighter green with the hatched region normally under Parthian rule. The dark green Kushana with hatched region not conquered but closely connected. Ultimately from A S Hermann, \textit{An Historical Atlas of China} (Edinburgh 1966). Curatola & Scarca, \textit{Art and Architecture of Persia}, p 48.}
\end{figure}

The Parthian Empire was the only organized power on Rome’s borders, for elsewhere her neighbours were petty kings or barbarian tribes. The Parthians wiped out a Roman army under Crassus in 53 BC, and a strong Parthia threatened Rome’s rich eastern provinces.\footnote{Kelly, \textit{The Roman Empire}, p 24.} Julius Caesar in his turn planned an expedition against Parthia, to avenge a signal disgrace, to win military glory and to escape from Rome. Part of the army was mustered for this purpose at the great military base at Apollonia in northern Greece.\footnote{Earl, \textit{The Age of Augustus}, p 18.} Caesar’s assassination in 44 BC thwarted this plan, but in the summer of 36 BC Mark Antony marched into Parthia by way of Armenia. He had with him several of Rome’s client kings, and his forces estimated at 60,000 Roman infantry, 10,000 Iberian and Celtic cavalry, and 30,000 allied troops, but his campaign was marked by general maladministration. He reached the Median capital, Phraaspa, and besieged it in vain, after which the Parthians cut two legions to pieces. Antony’s chief vassal-ally, the King of Armenia, deserted with 16,000 cavalry, upon which Antony was relying heavily. As the summer came to an end, Antony was forced to retreat, under a pledge of safe conduct which the Parthians broke. The army got back, but the casualties were horrendous.\footnote{Kelly, \textit{The Roman Empire}, pp 24-5.}
A change of ruler in Parthia and a consequent infringement of Roman rights in Armenia in or around 110 gave Trajan reason to intervene, and war broke out in 113. The details of the campaign are vague, but Armenia was reduced to a province and by the summer of 116 Trajan had reached the Persian Gulf and carved out of the Parthian Empire two new provinces, Assyria and Mesopotamia. However a revolt of the conquered areas and a Parthian invasion from the territory they still held caused concessions to be made and conquered territories returned to client rulers, including a Parthian prince. Trajan died in 117, and it was left to Hadrian to finally abandon Trajan’s conquests in the East.\(^1\)

In 226 the Parthians were superseded by the Persians under Ardashir, grandson of Sasan and founder of the Sassanian Dynasty, eager for revenge upon Greece and Rome for the humiliations inflicted on Persia by Athens and the Hellenistic monarchs after Alexander the Great. It was in this spirit of nationalism that the he took the name Ardashir [Darius]. He inherited the long war with Rome, and in 260 his son Shapur captured the emperor Valerian in battle. Valerian subsequently died in captivity. But by and large the powers of Persia and Rome – and then Persia and Byzantium - remained evenly matched, and the contest so weakened both sides that both Persia and a large part of the Byzantine Empire fell easy prey to the invading Arabs in the seventh century.\(^2\) The great achievement of the Sassanians was the creation of a stable bureaucracy dependent on the central power, and maintaining direct relations with each province, for under the Parthians Iran had been split up into a multitude of small kingdoms. By successfully imposing a central authority, the Sassanian empire laid the foundations of its greatness.\(^3\)

The Zoroastrians despised Christian and Manichean asceticism, which were developing in Syria just as the Sassanians seized power.\(^4\) The prophet Mani was born c 216 near Seleucia-Ctesiphon, capital of the troubled Parthian empire, but travelled as far as India and encountered Buddhism and Hinduism. He experienced his own revelation, and created a synthesis of other faiths the Manichean cult,\(^5\) which combined Gnostic and Christian elements, and placed extreme emphasis on the duality of good and evil.\(^6\) After the Persian conquest he gained favour with the new rulers for a time, writing seven books in Middle Persian and dedicating one of them to the Sassanian king Shapur, who supported him. But he was condemned and crucified by his successor Bahram I.\(^7\) The Manichean faith extended in one direction to the shores of China, and in the other penetrated Western Europe. The faith was loathed by Christianity, which it rivalled in many respects, and was particularly threatening to Syriac Christianity. Diocletian (r 284-305) detested Manichees as much as he did the Christians, initiating a policy of

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6. Zieme, ‘Religions of the Turks’, p 34.
burning them alive, even before he and his colleagues had yielded to the impulse to begin brutal persecution of Christianity.¹

The flow of knowledge to Nisibis was not just from the west. It was a Christian scholar from Nisibis, Severus, with a Persian surname, Sebokht, abbot and bishop of a monastery on the Euphrates, who in the mid-seventh century first described a system of mathematical signs invented by the Indians, which were then absorbed into Islamic culture and are therefore known to us as Arabic numerals.²

The Turks became an important factor in the sixth century. Their ancestors came from what used to be known as 'Tartary'. the Turko-Mongolian steppe on inner Asia.³ An Iranian-Turkic symbiosis, which was to be a major factor in developing Turkic culture, developed in Mongolia in the Scythian period (about the ⁴th to ⁹th centuries BC) and Xiongnu period (³rd century BC to AD mid-⁴th century).⁴ By the ⁶th century AD there was a distinct Turk people in contact with Persia.⁵ In the late ⁵₅₀s, in alliance with Persia, the Turks crushed the Hephthalite state on Persia's northern steppe borders and pushed into the western Eurasian steppes, driving the Hephthalites and Avars before them. By ⁵₆₈ they had made contact with Constantinople by sending an embassy led by Soghdians. This resulted in a Turko-Byzantine entente against Persia, but in ⁵₈₉ the Sassanians defeated the Turks near Herat.⁶ By the late ⁶th and early ⁷th centuries the western Turk qaghans were becoming semi-independent, and in alliance with the Byzantine emperor Herakleios (r ⁶₁₀-⁴₁) defeated the Sassanians in ⁶₂₈, so weakening them to the extent that they were overrun by the Arabs in ⁶₃₀s and ⁶₄₀s, and their state expired in ⁶₅₁.⁷ In the eighth century the Turks were overborne by the Oghuz, another Turkic people of more northerly Mongolian origins, who began to adopt Islam, mainly in the tenth century.⁸

In ⁶₂₈, the year of the defeat, the Sassanian Shah Khusrau II was murdered by his own son, crown prince Shiroy, who took the precaution of murdering all Khusrau's other male children as potential rivals, and took the name Kavad II. Kavad was backed in his palace coup by several prominent Dyophysite Christian families, and because his father's military successes against the Byzantine Empire had dramatically extended Sassanian territories westwards, for the first time in the Sassanian Empire's history it is likely that the majority of the Shah's subjects were Christian. Already the late Khusrau, whose two successive wives were both Christian, had shown fitful strategic favour to the Church. Now there was a moment when the new shah or his successors might well have decided to make the sort of turnaround to Christianity which had seized Trdat, Constantine and Ezana.⁹ The new reign proved to be brief,

¹ MacCulloch, History of Christianity, p 171.
² MacCulloch, History of Christianity, p 246.
⁵ Golden, 'The Turks', p 20.
⁷ Golden, 'The Turks', p 22.
⁹ MacCulloch, History of Christianity, p 252.
brief, as Shah Kavad died only a few months after his coup, but significant goodwill gestures to Christians and their advance into the centre of action in the empire continued. Kavad had quickly ordered that a new Catholicos should be chosen for the Church, ending a hiatus of twenty years in which Shah Khusrav had prevented the office being filled. The man singled out, Ishoyahb II, proved an outstanding diplomat of wide vision, who gave official encouragement to those taking Christianity into China.¹

**Islamic history**

Conversion to Islam was not so much by the sword as by persuasion,² and nor was the faith a homogeneous one. Late in the seventh century Islam was split. Sunnis believed in the democratic election of the Caliph, and recognised Abu Bakr, Omar and Othman as the rightfully appointed successors to Mohammed. The Shi’ā (Shi’at Ali, or party of Ali) did and do not, and consider Ali, son-in-law of the prophet, to have been his rightful successor. The Persians were used the principle of divine right in the Sassanian dynasty, and were predisposed to Shi’ism,³ but for the present the two persuasions competed. The more general conversion of Persia to Islam took place under the Qarakhanids, who ruled in Transoxania in about 992 to 1212, and the Seljuks, in Iran and Transcaucasia from the eleventh to thirteenth centuries.⁴

The Samanid dynasty (874-999) established a centralised bureaucratic state in the old Persian tradition, and ruled from Bukhara, where they established a vibrant court culture and patronised learning and literature, and especially prose and poetry written in New Persian. By far the most important element in the initiation of the native Persian revival was Firdausi’s [Firdawsi] poem, the Shahnāmeh [Shah Nama, the book of kings], completed in 1010, one of the world’s greatest epics, which entered immediately and permanently into the heart of the nation.⁵

In the tenth century, however, Khorasan and Transoxania were being slowly wrested away from Samanid control.⁶ During the turbulence associated with the fall of the Khazar empire two Turko-Islamic dynasties arose, the Ghaznavids (977-1186) and the Qarakhanids (c 992-1212), the former based in Afghanistan and northern India, but seeking control of eastern Persia.⁷ Late in century an Oghuz sūbashi or army commander called Saljuq [Seljuk] converted to Islam, and in about 985 settled with his retainers in Jand, on the Jaxartes. The Sunni Abbasids sought Saljuq help to free themselves from

⁴ Zieme, ‘Religions of the Turks’, p 37.
Shiite Iranian Buyids who had dominated the Caliphate since 945. In the 1030s a group of Oghuz led by the Saljuq clan moved into Ghaznavid-controlled Khorasan, and when the Ghaznavids reacted they were unexpectedly defeated on 23 May 1040 by Seljuk’s grandsons Chaghri Beg and Toghrul Beg. In 1042 the brothers crushed the Oghuz yabghu Shah Malklik, and then rapidly extended their power in Iran and Transcaucasia, attracting to them a mass of Oghuz tribes, commonly referred to as ‘Turkmen’. The oasis cities were preserved by the surrounding deserts from invasion by the Uzbeks or Turkmen. Toghrul (or Tugrul) (1031-63) captured Baghdad in 1055 and established himself as the sultan of Sunni Islam and protector of the Abbasid caliphate.

During the reigns of Toghrul Beg, Alp Arslan and Malik Shah (r 1073-92) the Great Saljuq Sultanate consolidated its military power and established a bureaucratic government on traditional Persian lines under Persian officials as such as the vizier Nizam al-Mulk (active 1063-92). Al-Mulk aimed to create a centralised state under an autocratic monarch, in the Persian tradition, and to support Sunni Islam. He also encouraged and personally invested in madrasas, or schools of higher theological and other learning. The madrasa was an earlier Iranian tradition, but it was its adoption by the Saljuqs which made it an important institution, though in fact none older than the fourteenth century survives in Iran today. Al-Mulk was assassinated in 1092, and the sultan died soon after. Henceforward Great Saljuq power, which was centred in Iran-Iraq, but extended to Syria and parts of Afghanistan and Turkestan, steadily declined. Iran enjoyed material prosperity under the rulers of the Seljuq dynasty but before the middle of the twelfth century a decline had set in and by the end of the century the Turkish Khwārazm Shahs (originally vassals of the Saljuqs) were supreme. The last sultan was killed in 1194 during the Khwarazmsha incursion into Iran.

Around the middle of the twelfth century the eastern regions of the Great Saljuq empire saw a flowering of metalwork in bronze and brass, inlaid with gold and silver inscriptions. In Khorasan especially ‘animated inscriptions’ appeared, in which human heads or figures were incorporated into the vertical letters. In the later twelfth and early thirteenth century Iran especially developed the ceramic arts. The reddish clay fabric of earthenware pottery gave way to fritware, a technique probably imported from Egypt, using quartz with a lesser proportion of clay, and giving a finer finish and greater freedom of form and decoration.

2 Tom Holland, Persian Fire: the First World Empire and the Battle for the West (London 2005), pp xv-xvi.
7 Wilber, The Il Khanid Period, p 75.
Iran, like the rest of the world, was caught unprepared by the sudden rise of the Mongols. Temujin, who later took the title of Ghengis Khan, had united the warring tribes of Mongolia into a single power by 1206, conquered a great part of China in his campaigns of 1220 and 1221, then overran much of the Khwarizm Shahdom in eastern Persia, and penetrated southern Russia and Georgia before his death in 1227. But the western rump of Khwarizm regrouped sufficiently to take Azerbaijan and Georgia, before an alliance of the Abbasids and Ayyubids blocked the shah’s further advance.\(^1\) The renewed attack of the Mongols extinguished the Khwarizm Shahdom in 1231, and in 1243 defeated the Saljuqs, turning the Saljuq Sultanate of Iconium into a vassal state in Asia Minor. Baghdad was savagely sacked by Hülegü, a grandson of Genghiz Khan, in 1258, destroying the already declining Abbasid Caliphate, as a result of which Iran, Iraq and Azerbaijan became a subordinate (or theoretically subordinate) Mongol khanate, the Ilkhanate, extending from the Mediterranean across modern Iran into loosely defined regions of south central Asia.\(^2\) Whole populations were depopulated by savage massacre, cities were obliterated, and precious libraries consumed in the campfires of the invaders,\(^3\) and about two-thirds of the population of Persia is thought to have perished.\(^4\) Marāgha and Tabriz surrendered and escaped destruction.\(^5\)

The principal wife of Il-Khan (‘Subordinate Khan’) Hülagü, belonged to the Church of the East, and the establishment of the new khanate heartened the Dyophysites, and raised sanguine expectations among the Western Latin Christians, whose Middle Eastern Crusades against Muslim powers were looking increasingly hopeless, that a new Christian empire could be established under these spectacularly brutal warriors.\(^6\) In 1241 the Georgien princes had sent the Rabban Simeon to Ogotai to plead for the protection of all those who had not opposed the Mongols. This petition was granted and churches were soon built in such fanatically Moslem cities at Tabriz and Nakhichevan. Simeon himself baptized numbers of the Mongols into the Nestorian faith.\(^7\)

Öljeitü, a brother of Ghāzān (see below), came to the throne at the age of twenty-three. By his mother he had been baptized as a Christian and named Nicholas but later, under the influence of one of his wives, he embraced Islam, taking the name of Muhammad Khudabānda. Once he was a Moslem, he did everything in his power to promote the creed. Jews and Christians were separately taxed and required to wear distinctive garments.\(^8\) By the fourteenth century, however, the Persian khanate had declined, and a Mongol

\(^{1}\) McEvedy, \textit{Medieval History}, p 74.
\(^{2}\) McEvedy, \textit{Medieval History}, p 76.
\(^{5}\) Lockhart, \textit{Persia}, p 10.
\(^{7}\) Wilber, \textit{The Il Khanid Period}, p 4.
\(^{8}\) Wilber, \textit{The Il Khanid Period}, p 23.
dynasty, the Jalayrids, exerted limited power in Iran over native provincial
governments. However in 1368 the Turkish noble Timur, known to the West as
Tamerlane (c 1330-1405), succeeded in ousting the khan from
Transoxania, then in twenty years of war overcame the whole of Persia and
Mesopotamia to establish the Timurid Emirate. The campaigns of Timur were
were in some ways more destructive than those of the Mongols, and it is
alleged that in Baghdad the population was reduced by 99%.

Timur established his capital at Samarqand where he erected a new citadel
and an enclosing wall in 1370. Not only Samarqand but other great cities of
the period, like Herat, were to the east of modern Iran, and traditional centres
like Shiraz, Esfahan and Tabriz became somewhat provincial in character.

But fine buildings were built and canals were extended – indeed it is thought
that this reflects an expansion of agriculture during the Timurid period.

Wholly unperceived, a major threat to Iranian mercantile prosperity was on the
horizon. In 1497 Vasco da Gama rounded the Cape and opened up the sea
route from Europe to India. Though this brought maritime trade to the ports of
the Persian Gulf, it was the first blow against the old overland routes, and the
coup-de-grace was to come about four hundred years later with the opening
of the Suez Canal.

Timur’s death in 1405 was followed by four years of contention within his clan,
until his son Shahruhkh emerged victorious. During the reign of Shahruhkh
(1409-1457) there was yet further assimilation of the Turko-Mongol political
elite with their Persian subjects, further consolidation of the Islamic faith, and
sustained patronage of art and architecture. The general picture is one of
great prosperity especially in the early 15th century, and of population growth
in most of the towns. The last effective ruler, Sultan Husain, still maintained
his capital at Samarqand and, like the Ilkhanids, assigned family members to
govern his conquests, and relied upon a bureaucracy of Persians. Indeed a
central Asian proverb, quoted in the eleventh century, ran ‘There is no Persian
except in the company of a Turk [just as] there is no cap unless there is a
head to put it on’, and this reflects the symbiosis of the two nations at least
until the early sixteenth century. Sultan Husain died in 1506, the Timurids
having already succumbed to the Uzbeks in central Asia in 1500. Khorasan
followed in 1507.

1 McEvedy, Medieval History, p 78.
2 McEvedy, Medieval History, p 80.
3 Golombek & Wilber, Timurid Architecture, p 10.
5 Golombek & Wilber, Timurid Architecture, p 16.
6 Blunt, Isfahan, p 24.
8 Golombek & Wilber, Timurid Architecture, pp 16-17.
In medieval times the taxes of the Mongols bore heavily on a peasantry whom they had already terrified, decimated and ruined, for they required the survivors to pay twice as often as the nomadic tribes. And not much was to change for the better. During the Timurid period:

In the countryside agriculture was varied on by peasants paying exorbitant rents to the lords of the fiefs, the elite classes. Not only land, but water usage was parcelled out. The peasant population had little protection from the excesses of tax-collectors or their demands for forced labor, except through religious leaders. Shaykhs were occasionally able to intercede with government on behalf of the lower classes … \(^1\)

Later the standing army of the Qajar shahs and the armed retainers of the great landowners took what they wanted and against their depredations the peasants had no redress.\(^2\) Even in the 1920s little had changed. The peasant’s income consisted of a share of the crops at harvest time and whatever additional sums he might get from the sale of homemade rugs. He was habitually in debt to the landlord for advances until the harvest was divided and was, in practice, virtually tied to the land. The nomadic or semi-nomadic tribesman was little better off. The bulk of the profits from tribal activity accrued to the leaders, while the ordinary tribesmen receiving scarcely enough for a bare subsistence.\(^3\)

After a period of strife between contending Turcoman tribes in Persia, Shah Isma‘īl I, who was descended from the Prophet through the Shi’a Imams and Shaikh Safi, a saintly character of Ardabil, founded the Safavi dynasty in 1501.\(^4\) This was the first truly Persian dynasty for many centuries, and was to rule for more than 200 years.\(^5\) Isma‘īl’s capture of Tabriz in 1501 was a pivotal pivotal event, bringing in a new dynasty and a new religious persuasion.\(^6\) Isma‘īl was a fervent supporter of the Shi’a and imposed the creed on the people, whom he eventually succeeded in uniting.\(^7\) For Shi’ism was adopted partly for political reasons, so as to distinguish Iranians from Arabs, and from other Muslim regimes including that of the Ottoman Turkey.\(^8\) Isma‘īl I (1501-24) was a patron of the arts, and the greatest artists of the day thronged to his court, but though many buildings produced under his reign, most have been destroyed. He was followed Shah Tahmāsp I (1524-76), who enjoyed a long and eventful reign (1524-76) but whose patronage extended mainly to the decorative arts, not architecture. After Tamasp came Shah ‘Abbās I \[^{‘the}^\]
Great’] (1587-1629), under whom Safavid Persia reached its political and economic zenith.

Contrasting impressions. Shah Abbas and a pageboy, by Muhammad Qasim, 1627, Musée de Louvre. Shah Abbas the Great, from Thomas Herbert, A Relation of Some Years Travaile (1634). Blunt, Isfahan, pp 18, 50.

Father Paul Simon, a Carmelite in Isfahan in the reign of Abbas the Great, wrote:

The good treatment and favouritism afforded the Franks [ie Europeans] by the King of Persia is the more marked because, notwithstanding what the Christian princes have said to him, and notwithstanding the injuries inflicted on his people in Hormuz, he has never allowed the slightest injustice to be done to our merchants on their way overland to India, nor has he lost the respect he used to pay to Franks who came to this country. Where some of them, and Italians too, have caused no small scandal, and committed many follies, such as to get drunk and when drunk to dash about the Maidan at a gallop, striking this and that Persian, and killing one or other of them, of which the city of Isfahan made complaint to the King – all the same the King did not wish them to be condemned to death because they were Franks, although he is very severe with his own people, even when they be governors and nobles of the realm …

1 Kleiss, ‘Safavid Caravanserais’, p 27.
The Portuguese Alfonso de Albuquerque had taken the island of Hormuz in the Gulf and constructed a great fortress in 1507-15, himself dying there by the end of that year. Half a century later it was revamped and extended by the architect João Baptista Cairato, who is better-known for his work in India, until it was about 20,000 metres square.\(^1\) However, assisted by the English ships of the East India Company, ‘Abbās took Hormuz from the Portuguese in 1622, after which he conquered Baghdad, Najaf and Karbala in 1623, then occupied Georgia. Moreover he had the main roads completed and partly paved, and caravanserais and bridges built.\(^2\) After the death of Abbas the country ran steadily yet peacefully into decline for more than twenty years, under the feeble rule of Sultan Husain. Then, suddenly, there was trouble on every hand. The Kurds revolted; the Özbegs revolted; the Arabs of Muscat seized the island of Bahrein and threatened the mainland, and the wild Afghans grew bold and insolent on the eastern frontiers.\(^3\) The dynasty gradually declined, and was finally overthrown by the rebel Ghalzai Afghans under Mahmud, who in 1722 captured Isfahan, the capital, after a terrible siege. Both the Russians, under Peter the Great, and the Turks took advantage of the troubles in Persia to invade the country and annex large portions of it.\(^4\)

Finally the Afghans were expelled by the forces of a former bandit named Nadir, the Safavi dynasty temporarily restored, the Turks were driven out and the Russians were induced to give up their conquests. Moreover, in 1739 Nadir made a spectacular invasion of India. He usurped the Persian throne in 1736, but was assassinated in 1747.\(^5\) The brutal Agha Muhammad, founder of the Qajar dynasty and perhaps the most hated of all Iranian monarchs, was proclaimed Shah in 1787.\(^6\) He first chose Sari on the Caspian coast as his capital, but in 1788 moved it to Tehran.\(^7\) Less than ten years later he was murdered by his personal attendants.\(^8\) During the reign of his successor Fath Ali Shah (1797-1834), in consequence of two wars with Russia, Persia lost Georgia, Daghistan, Armenia, and part of Azarbaijan.\(^9\)

As Ali Alizadeh puts it, the Qajar era was a dismal age of royal autocracy, colonialism and religious fanaticism:

> The Qajar kings, who had supplanted the benevolent Zand shahs in the late eighteenth century, were known for their avarice, their apathy, and their inability to halt the rapacious British imperialists and Russian expansionists. During this period Iran lost most of her northern

\(^2\) Kleiss, ‘Safavid Caravanserais’, p 27.
\(^3\) Blunt, *Isfahan*, p 159.
\(^8\) Blunt, *Isfahan*, p 178.
territories to the Tsar, and much of her eastern provinces to the Queen. Iran’s kings fell under the sway of foreign powers, and unfair industrial contracts and trade concessions granted to the European companies damaged local industries and obliterated the country’s farming sector. The majority of Iranians, most of them rural farmers, descended into poverty and despair.¹

modern history

The sanctions imposed upon the minority religious groups were extensive and petty, but eased somewhat in the later nineteenth century. Nonetheless, the Behāī sect of Moslems were regarded as heretics, and were massacred in 1903. Napier Malcolm gives a good account of the situation in Yazd. The jaziya or tax upon infidels varied, but was always high, and the collector could demand it on the spot, without letting the individual go home to get the money, and beat him if it was not paid immediately. A Zoroastrian who converted to Islam had priority over his siblings in inheriting family property. Up to 1860 Zoroastrians could not engage in trade, and after that they could sell only in caravanserais and hostelries, but not in the bazaars, and they could not deal in linen drapery. Only after 1870 were they allowed to have their own children’s schools. Up to 1891 they were not permitted to ride within the town, and outside they had to dismount if they met any Moslem.

Up to 1880 Zoroastrians were required to wear shoes with turned-up toes, and self-coloured tight knickers rather than trousers. Up to 1885 they were forbidden from wearing rings, and were required to wear a tom cap and only a rough canvas girdle. Up to 1896 they had to wear their turbans twisted, not folded. Up to 1898 their main garments had to be brown, grey or yellow, but after that date most colours were permitted. A man in his seventies who wore canvas trousers to the bazaar in about 1860, had them removed and was beaten. In about 1891 a Zoroastrian merchant was caught wearing white stockings in one of the public squares, and was beaten. These restrictions extended to architecture as well. Neither Zoroastrians nor Jews could build houses higher than a Moslem could reach with his arm up. The walls had be splashed with white around the doors. The usual double door was forbidden, and there could be no more than two windows in any room. Bad-girs or wind towers were forbidden to them, but in 1900 a rich Zoroastrian gave large presents to the governor and the chief Muslim cleric and was allowed to build one.

The Jews suffered fewer restrictions, but they included a requirement, particularly sinister to modern ears, to wear a distinguishing patch on their coats. Shah Nāśirud Dīn remitted the jaziya and attempted to remove the building and clothing restrictions, but in relation to clothing, this was ignored. In 1898 Shah Muzaffar ad-Din Shah gave the Zorastrians a firman revoking the remaining disabilities but again it reportedly had no effect. By 1905 a

¹ Alizadeh, Iran my Grandfather, p 9.
number of the Zoroastrians were becoming rich, but the Jews, who were fewer in number and subject to fewer restrictions, were poorer and therefore effectively more oppressed.¹

The oil industry is often seen as the prime example of western exploitation of Iran, but it was to be the country's most lucrative industry, and a major agent of change from 1901, when under Muzaffar ad-Din Shah, the D'Arcy Oil Concession was granted.² In 1906 a new constitution was adopted in which, amongst other things, a legal system had been entirely religious, was replaced with one modelled on that of France.³ But in 1907 Muhammad Ali Shah, who had succeeded to the throne, attempted to suppress the new constitution. He failed and was forced to abdicate two years later. Upon the outbreak of World War I Iran declared its neutrality, but this was soon violated by Great Britain, Russia, and Turkey. The British moved up from the Persian Gulf, the Turks struck east into Azerbaijan and the vicinity of Hamadan, and Russian forces came down into northern Iran.⁴

By the end of 1920 Iran seemed to be on the verge of collapse, and about to disintegrate into a number of separate parts, some of which might be absorbed into neighbouring states. Hunger, poverty, insecurity, despair, and apathy reigned, and Ahmad Shah, who was something of a playboy, was unable and unwilling to cope with the many problems.⁵ It appeared that Iran would survive only if this served the interests of Great Britain and Soviet Russia.⁶ The two powers were locked in competition for influence, though Lord Curzon recognized something else at work:

Since the war we have been exposed in Persia to the most relentless and unscrupulous propaganda [by Russia] … But the real cause of the setback to the British position [is] that spirit of … nationalism which is spreading everywhere throughout the East … The ferment of all these new ideas is at work particularly in the veins of a singularly sensitive and proud people like the Persians …⁷

Nevertheless, no-one believed that any efforts by the Persians themselves could alter their situation.⁸ They were wrong. A gifted soldier, Reza Khan, rose to power and finally in 1921, in association with the political leader Sayyid ad-Din, overthrew the government in Tehran. He soon ousted Sayyid Zia and became effective ruler, though he was unsuccessful in an attempt to establish a republic with himself as president.⁹ In April 1925 the scholar Professor Arthur Upham Pope gave a lecture at the house of Ja’fa Quli Khan on ‘The Art of Iran in the Past and the Future’, attended by Reza Khan, the

cabinet and members of parliament. Pope’s vision of the glory days of Achaemenid, Sassanid and Islamic Iran, and his call for a revival, inspired Reza Khan. He ordered that the text of the lecture be disseminated to all schools and incorporated into the history curriculum, and two weeks later he changed his name to Pahlavi.

On 12 December 1925 the Majlis officially declared Reza Khan Pahlavi as Shah, and he became a promoter of a new unified Iran, without ethnic differences or local rivalries, which would unite the glories of the Persian past past with the modern science of the West. By 1921 practically every tribal group in Iran had reasserted its independence from central government control, although only one or two were in active rebellion. Indeed for many years the central government’s control of the Shaykh of Muhammarah and the Bakhtiar Khans had been more or less nominal, and to protect its operations the Anglo-Persian Oil Company had entered into a variety of agreements with these leaders, almost as if they were sovereign rulers.

According to the CIA spy Donald Wilber:

> Personal insecurity throughout society was the product, basically, of the prevalent difficulty of making a bare living, which had resulted in a national trait of rapacity ... In personal self-defense, the Persians had developed over the centuries an elaborate system of etiquette, including modes of speech and dress, which reduced the outward appearances of friction within the society by establishing easy means of recognizing the ethnic, religious, or social status and the occupation of every individual. At the same time, screened and protected by these conventions, the individual Persian developed his own life. In this effort he was helped by the seclusion of the women of his household, and by the bleak exterior that the traditional walled garden presented to the outside world.

Some of the Shah’s policies were half-baked, but he abolished the capitulations, banned the veiling of women, fostered industrialisation, built the Trans-Persian Railway without foreign loans, and improved roads. He not only suppressed dissentient tribes but attempted to turn them to a modern lifestyle, telling those of Borujerd and Luristan in 1925:

> My brave sons, no trace of barbarism is left in our world in this present age. Even the wild, black Africans are on the road toward progress and improvement. It is not becoming that you, the sons of an ancient country like Iran with its illustrious historical civilization, should wander over desert and mountains like predatory animals. You must give up that

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nomadic and tent-dwelling life. Follow the proper and noble way of life of your ancestors who built, furnished, and improved their surroundings and who, lived in towns.\(^1\)

In early 1932 the government was pressing for a renegotiation of the D'Arcy Concession under which the Anglo-Persian Oil Company operated, and on November Persia informed the Anglo-Persian Oil Company that the concession was cancelled. But in the event the dispute was submitted to the League of Nations, after which direct talks between the company and the Iranian government resulted in a new concession.\(^2\)

During World War II the Shah refused to expel the German technicians in Persia, who were seen as a threat by the allies.\(^3\) About 690 Germans were employed by the Iranian government or by German firms, and the German colony, including wives and children, totalled between 1,200 and 2,000. On July 1 the British minister demanded that four-fifths of the Germans in the country be expelled immediately.\(^4\) Freya Starke wrote:

> The general feeling in the country is that of a rabbit hypnotized by a snake – we are not masters of events and things have gone beyond ordinary methods. None of the two thousand or more technicians of the Axis here are over thirty-five!\(^5\)

On 25 August 1941 British and Russian troops entered the country.\(^6\) On 7 September Britain and the USSR demand immediate expulsion of all Germans, Italians, Rumanians and Hungarians.\(^7\) On 9 September Iran accepted all demands of the Allies and signed an agreement placing most of the country under the control of British and Soviet forces. Nonetheless, on 14 September Britain and USSR announced that they would occupy Tehran.\(^8\) This resulted in the abdication of the Shah three weeks later, in favour of his son Muhammed Reza Pahlavi,\(^9\) who took the oath in the Majlis [parliament] on 17 September.\(^10\)

However, the British were now concerned about the influence of Russia. Starke wrote in 1943:

> If something is not done soon, the whole place will go Russian; it is already going anti-British at a great rate. In Isfahan the consul told me that there is a large industrial population now beginning to become self-conscious; also a number of rich and eager young men with nothing to

\(^1\) Wilber, Riza Shah Pahlavi, p 99.
\(^2\) Wilber, Riza Shah Pahlavi, pp 147-150.
\(^3\) Lockhart, Persia, p 12.
\(^4\) Wilber, Riza Shah Pahlavi, p 205.
\(^5\) Stark, Dust in the Lion's Paw, p 85.
\(^6\) Lockhart, Persia, p 12.
\(^7\) Wilber, Riza Shah Pahlavi, pp 147-150.
\(^8\) Wilber, Riza Shah Pahlavi, p 207.
\(^9\) Lockhart, Persia, p 12.
\(^10\) Wilber, Riza Shah Pahlavi, p 207.
do; if these two sets of people are not attended to, they will soon drift away into some other camp.

Her somewhat naive answer to the problem was that an arm of the British Institute should be established, as the Persian were clamouring to learn English, and thousands had to be turned away from classes.\(^1\)

In the election of 1950 the centrist Nationalist won many seats, and their leader Dr Mohammad Mosaddeq formed a coalition with the secularist centre and the religious right to create the National Front, with the major objective on nationalising the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. On 7 March 1951 the Shah’s prime minister, notorious for his pro-British stance in the oil negotiations, was assassinated, and on the same day the Majlis voted to nationalise the oil industry. In April Dr Mosaddeq was elected prime minister, and on the 28\(^{th}\), at Mosaddeq’s insistence the nationalisation law was ratified. The British took the issue to the United Nations, and then to the International Court of Justice, but Mosaddeq was intransigent. Finally Britain enlisted the cooperation of the United States, which was persuaded that Mosaddeq was a closet communist, and a coup was orchestrated by Donald Wilber, the CIA spy.\(^2\)

By spending as little as US$1 million, the CIA was able to stir up enough unrest in Iran to present Iranians with a choice between anarchy and support for the Shah. It distributed ‘gray propaganda’, passing out anti-Mossadeq cartoons in the streets and planting unflattering articles in local press. So as to paint Mossadeq as a communist, CIA operatives posing as communists threatened Muslim leaders with savage punishment if they opposed Mossadeq, and the house of at least one prominent Muslim was bombed by these CIA communists. The CIA tried to orchestrate a call for a holy war against Communism and on August 19 a journalist employed by the CIA led a crowd toward Parliament, inciting people to set fire to the offices of a newspaper owned by Dr Mossadeq’s foreign minister. The Shah’s disbanded Imperial Guard seized trucks and drove through the street, and by 10.15 there were pro-shah truckloads of military personnel at all main squares. At the US embassy, the General Zahedi was brought out of hiding and a tank found to drive him to the radio station, where he spoke to the nation. Now Mossadeq and other government officials were rounded up, and officers supporting General Zahedi were put in command of all units of the Tehran garrison. The progressive regime of Dr Mossadeq, almost the first government in Iran to have enjoyed the explicit support of the populace, had fallen.\(^3\)

The consequences for Iran of this brutal intervention speak for themselves. But the consequences for the world were even greater, for it set the pattern for what Ali Alizadeh sees as a series of anti-democratic interventions by the USA into resource-rich third world nations,\(^4\) each of which successfully

\(^1\) Stark, *Dust in the Lion’s Paw*, pp 149-50.

\(^2\) Alizadeh, *Iran my Grandfather*, pp 120-3.


installed a puppet or collaborator, but nearly all of which turned sour and presented the west with unforeseen problems:

- 1954, Guatemala, replacing the democratically elected Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán with a corrupt military junta
- 1961, Congo, bringing down the anti-colonial Patrice Lulumba and delivering the country to the psychopathic military dictator Joseph Mobutu.
- 1963, Dominican Republic, overthrowing the democratically elected president Juan Bosch and inciting an atrocious civil war
- 1963, Iraq, toppling Abdl Karim Qassimn and installing the Ba’ath party with its future leader the mass murderer Saddam Hussein
- 1973, Chile, replacing the elected president Dr Salvador Allende with the sadistic General Augusto Pinochet.

It would not be politic to continue this account up to and beyond the Islamic Revolution of 1979, but it is obvious that a considerable distrust of the West was the inevitable result of this history. And it can reasonably be said that the occupation of the US Embassy in Tehran was not so much a brutal violation of diplomatic protocols as a prudent and necessary measure to prevent its use, once again, as the base for a ruthless intervention into local politics.

**time line**

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<td></td>
<td>c 2350</td>
<td>fall of Akkad</td>
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<tr>
<td>Akkad annexes Susa</td>
<td>c 2300</td>
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<tr>
<td>Susa becomes part of Elam</td>
<td>c 2300</td>
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<tr>
<td>First occupation of northern Persia and the introduction of deities such as Mithras, Viruna &amp; Indra</td>
<td>c 2200</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C 2000-1500</td>
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<td>2065-1785</td>
<td>reign of Hammurabi, king of the first Babylonian Empire</td>
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<td>C 1730-1680</td>
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<tr>
<td>king, Artabanus, and establishes the Sassanian dynasty</td>
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<td>death of the Byzantine Emperor Julian the Apostate during his campaign against Shapur II</td>
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<td>AD reign of Alfred the Great</td>
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<td>AD 821-873</td>
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<td>AD Saffārid</td>
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<td>AD 928-1077</td>
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<td>AD the Arabs defeat the Persians At Nehāvand</td>
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<td>AD Umayyad Caliphate</td>
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<td>945-1055</td>
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<td>1271-1295</td>
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<td>collapse of the il-Khânid dynasty</td>
<td>1336-1453</td>
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<td>Timurid dynasty</td>
<td>1405-1506</td>
<td>Ottoman Turks capture Constantinople and menace Europe</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shah Ismâ’il I founds the Safavid dynasty</td>
<td>1501</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ottomans defeat Isma’il’s forces at the Battle of Châldirân</td>
<td>1514</td>
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<tr>
<td>Portuguese under Albuquerque seize the island of Hormuz</td>
<td>1520-1566</td>
<td>reign of the Ottoman sultan Soleimân the Magnificent</td>
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<tr>
<td>accession of Shah Tahmasp I</td>
<td>1587-1629</td>
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<tr>
<td>reign of Shâh Abbâs I; reconstruction of Esfahân begins in 1598</td>
<td>1602-25</td>
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<td>Event Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>East India Company begins trading in Persia</td>
<td>1617</td>
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<tr>
<td>Persian forces with East India Company assistance expel the Portuguese from Hormuz</td>
<td>1622</td>
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<tr>
<td>anti-Safavid uprising by Afghāns in Qandahār</td>
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<td>Siege and capture of Esfahān by the Ghalzai Afghans under Mahmud: collapse of the Safavids</td>
<td>1722</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ottoman Turks invade; Russians take Baku</td>
<td>1723</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tahmāsp drives out the Afghans</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nāder defeats the Turks and recovers most of the lost territory</td>
<td>1730</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reign of Nāder Shāh</td>
<td>1736-47</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nāder invades India and sacks Delhi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zand dynasty; capital moved to Shirāz</td>
<td>1747-79</td>
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<td>British expansion in India under Clive</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1794-1925</td>
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<tr>
<td>Qājār dynasty; capital moved to Tehran</td>
<td>1794-1925</td>
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<tr>
<td>Treaty of Gulistan forces Persia to cede Georgia and Baku to Russia</td>
<td>1813</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1815</td>
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<td>1827-8</td>
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<tr>
<td>signature of the D'Arcy oil concession</td>
<td>1861-5</td>
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<tr>
<td>American Civil War</td>
<td>1901</td>
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<td>adoption of a constitution</td>
<td>1906-7</td>
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<tr>
<td>death of Muzaffar ad-Din and accession of Muhammad Ali Shah</td>
<td>1907</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reza Khan and Sayyid Zia ad-Din march on Tehran</td>
<td>1921</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attātūrk abolishes the Ottoman Sultanate and proclaims the Turkish</td>
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<tr>
<td>reign of Rezā Shāh Pahlavi</td>
<td>1925-41</td>
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<tr>
<td>construction of the Trans-Persian Railway</td>
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<tr>
<td>British and Russian troops enter Persia, 25 August</td>
<td>1941</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reza Khan abdicates 16 September</td>
<td>1941</td>
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<td>reign of Mohammed Rezā Shāh Pahlavi</td>
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<td>Tripartite Treaty between Persia, Soviet Russia and Great Britain</td>
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<td>Tehran Conference 28 November</td>
<td>1943</td>
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<td>Persia declares war on Germany</td>
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<td>nationalisation of oil; Mosaddeq becomes Prime Minister</td>
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<tr>
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<td>October 1971</td>
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<td>October 1978</td>
<td>Ayatollah Khomeini arrives in France</td>
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<td>Proclamation of the Islamic Republic</td>
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<td>October 1979</td>
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<td>refugees enter Iraq</td>
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<td>pull-out; emergence of the Taliban</td>
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<td>September 1980 – July 1988</td>
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<tr>
<td>Khomeini issues a death sentence on the writer Salman Rushdie</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ayatollah Hashemi</td>
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</table>
Persian Christianity

By the second century Christianity had begun to spread from the Roman Empire into the Sassanian. The Jewish communities in Adiabene, northern Iraq, were receptive, and from here the faith proceeded down the Tigris to the Persian Gulf and the island of Kharg. In the north Christianity made inroads in Azerbaijan in the early third century, and hence to Media, Khusestan, Gilân, (south of the Caspian); and into the Kushan Empire. This was possible because of the ideological indifference of the Parthians. ¹ The Christians themselves were by no means homogenous. They included, for example, the followers of Marcion, a heretic who had established his own community in Rome and was excommunicated in 144, but established a presence across much of the empire. Although most of the Marcionites were absorbed into the rising sect of Manichaeism by the end of the third century,² there is evidence that congregations with Marcionite beliefs survived into the tenth century in the borderlands of Iran and Afghanistan. Marcion's writings were all

¹ Christopher Baumer in Loveday, Iran, p 256. See also Matheson, Persia, p 134, who suggests that Khosrowâbad is on the site of a Sassanian palace, and may be the Tazar mentioned in the thirteenth century
² Cross, Dictionary of the Christian Church, p 870.
destroyed, but it is known that he treated the bible literally, except that he simply rejected as spurious any aspects the found unacceptable.\textsuperscript{1}

With the advent of the Sassanians in 224 the situation changed in Persia, because the new rulers sought to associate themselves with the Achaemenian past by revitalizing Zoroastrianism and making it the state religion.\textsuperscript{2} The Zoroastrian high priest Kartir, who held office from about 240 to 294 under six different shahs, systematically persecuted Christians, Manicheans and Buddhists. This phase of persecution ceased under king Narses (293-302), but once Rome had adopted Christianity the Sassanians became remorselessly opposed to it, and the persecution was revived more savagely in the fourth and fifth centuries.\textsuperscript{3} From the beginning of the 340s Bishop Simeon (Shem'on) of Seleucia-Ctesiphon led opposition to separate taxation for the Christian community in the Sassanian Empire, and that provoked Shah Shapur II to a massacre of the bishop and a hundred of his clergy. This developed into a persecution whose atrocities outdid anything done by the Romans in the third century. There was a sickening attention to prolonging individual suffering which has rarely been equalled.\textsuperscript{4} There were about 200,000 casualties in the Great Persecution of 339-83, including dozens of bishops.\textsuperscript{5}

But the church continued to grow, and in 410 was restructured with the bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon as its catholicos or patriarch and the Nicean as its creed.\textsuperscript{6} During the fourth and fifth centuries the east Syrians reached out beyond the Sassanian Empire and established Christian outposts among the peoples of Central Asia.\textsuperscript{7} However the sustained condemnation by western church councils of the two Greek bishops Diodor of Tarsus [d 392] and Theodorus of Mopsuestia [352-428] steadily alienated those who adhered to their Christology and scriptural exegesis, and created what has become widely known as the Nestorian Church.\textsuperscript{8} It would be more appropriate to call them Theodoreans, since Theodorus was the prime source of their theological position, and in view of their insistence on the two (dyo) natures of Christ, they have also been called 'Dyophysites'. MacCulloch prefers the term 'the Church in the East'.\textsuperscript{9} They emphasised the human dimensions of Christ while western churches (especially monophysites like the Jacobites or Copts) stressed his divine nature.\textsuperscript{10}

Nestorius (died c 451) was a native of Germanicia in Syria Euphrates, who entered a monastery at Antioch, and probably studied under Theodorus. He acquired a reputation as a preacher. In 428 Theodosius invited him to take the see of Constantinople. As patriarch he opposed the developing cult of the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1} MacCulloch, \textit{History of Christianity}, p 126.
\item Christopher Baumer in Loveday, \textit{Iran}, p 256.
\item Christopher Baumer in Loveday, \textit{Iran}, pp 257-8.
\item Christopher Baumer in Loveday, \textit{Iran}, pp 257-8.
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\item Christopher Baumer in Loveday, \textit{Iran}, pp 257-8.
\item Christopher Baumer in Loveday, \textit{Iran}, pp 257-8.
\end{itemize}
Theotokos, or Mother of God, which he saw as a concept incompatible with the full humanity of Christ, but the opposing forces led by St Cyril of Alexandria were successful, and Pope Celestine condemned his teaching. The Council of Ephesus (431) pronounced a sentence of deposition on Nestorius, who was sent back to his monastery at Antioch, then in 435 had his books condemned, and in 436 was exiled to upper Egypt. Completely isolated from public affairs, he endured his humiliation at the hands of his enemies with stoicism.

The Council of Chalcedon (451) largely upheld the Cyrillian position, but also contained a strong element of compromise. Nestorius himself was sent a message inviting him to participate, but is reported to have died the day before it arrived. Although the Council’s agreement talked of the Union of two Natures, and took care to give explicit mention of the Theotokos, it largely followed Nestorius's viewpoint about 'two natures', 'the distinction of natures being in no way abolished because of the union'. However to satisfy his enemies Nestorius was condemned once more, and the Emperor then ordered his writings burned, and children bearing his name were rebaptised and renamed. Those who adhered to a more robust affirmation of the two natures of Christ and who felt that Nestorius had been treated with outrageous injustice were labelled Nestorians by their opponents, and their churches have been referred to in this way by outsiders ever since.

After the Council of Ephesus many eastern bishops began to constitute themselves into a separate church centred in Persia, where the Christian community known as ‘East Syrians’ claimed to have its roots in Apostolic times, and had been recognised in 424 as independent of Antioch. After the Council of Chalcedon the hostility of the Monophysites caused many Nestorianisers to migrate to Persia. But there was no secure refuge for them among Syrian Christians in the Sassanian Empire, and the mid-fifth century saw renewed pogroms of Christians by the Zoroastrian authorities.

On the other hand persecution was not a consistent Sassanian policy, and several of the shahs, such as Peroz (457-84) actively supported the Nestorians. The Church survived and consolidated; and because the Byzantine Empire reaffirmed Chalcedonian Christianity or tried to woo the Miaphysites, it was not surprising that east Syrian Christianity took on an increasingly explicit commitment to the Diophysite cause. A significant shift took place in 489, when the Byzantine Emperor Zeno in his drive to placate the Miaphysites finally closed the School of the Persians in the city of Edessa (now Urfa in Turkey), which had been the major centre of higher education for

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1 Cross, *Dictionary of the Christian Church*, pp 960-1, 1365.
Christians throughout the East. A new school was established at Nisibis, Turkey.\(^1\) The synod held at Seleucia in the reign of the Sassanian king Valash (496-499) finally placed Iranian Christians under the jurisdiction of the Nestorian Church.\(^2\) By the sixth century the Church of the East was fully established both in its independence of any bishop in the Byzantine Empire and in its firm adherence to the theology condemned at Chalcedon.\(^3\)

Christians, who were approaching a majority in the Sassanian Empire, were not unhappy with the Arab invasion of the seventh century, for a repressive Zoroastrian regime was replaced by an Islamic one which at least accepted Christians and Jews as People of the Book.\(^4\) The Caliphate considered the Christians to be an *ahl al dhimma* (‘people of protection’), whose religious freedom was theoretically guaranteed, in return for the payment of a poll tax.\(^5\) The Nestorians, as opposed to Jacobites and others, constituted about 75% of them. But their situation became more difficult during the reign of the zealous Mohammedan Omar II (712-29), under the so-called Covenants of Omar, which guaranteed their life and property but imposed burdens such as double taxation, a ban on the construction or repair of churches, a ban on Christians testifying against Muslims in court, a ban on the conversion of Muslims to Christianity, and a requirement for both Christians and Jews to wear a special belt or yellow or red patch on the front and back of their clothing.\(^6\)

Things improved under the Mongols, who treated all faiths as equal, especially as many il-Khans had Nestorian wives or mothers, such as Hulagu’s mother Sorqoqtani and his chief wife Dokuz Khatun, who prompted him to build many churches. But the Mongol dynasty converted to Islam in 1295, and with the abandonment of the Crusades the prestige of Christianity decreased and Mesopotamia and Persia became permanently Muslim. Under persecution by Tamerlane after 1380 a large proportion of Nestorians either converted to Islam or sought refuge in the mountains of Kurdistan and Azerbaijan, or at Hakkari in Turkey.\(^7\) When Protestant missionaries arrived in the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century, they were surprised and delighted by the Nestorians’ lack of images and declared the Church of the East ‘the Protestants of Asia’.\(^8\)

Abbas I’s in general tolerated Christianity, and in his reign Roman Catholic missions were established in Isfahan and Julfa – first the Augustinians (1603), then the Carmelites (1608) and later the Capuchins.\(^9\) Not long after his accession, Abbas entered into correspondence with the newly elected Pope Clement III. Negotiations had also opened between the Shah and Philip III of Spain and Portugal, which led to the arrival of Italian Carmelite and

\(^1\) MacCulloch, *History of Christianity*, p 246.
\(^2\) Ghirshman, *Parthians and Sassanians*, p 288.
\(^4\) Christopher Baumer in Loveday, *Iran*, p 261.
\(^6\) Christopher Baumer in Loveday, *Iran*, p 261.
\(^7\) Christopher Baumer in Loveday, *Iran*, pp 262-3.
Portuguese Augustinian missionaries at Isfahan at the beginning of the
seventeenth century. Philip promised to send gunners, engineers and artillery
to the Shah if he allowed the Gospel to be preached.\(^1\) However the
Portuguese Augustinian Fathers in Hormuz used force to convert reluctant
Muslim children,\(^2\) with the results already described.

Through the troubled years of the eighteenth century the Christians in Isfahan
and Julfa (the adjoining Armenian colony) fared badly. The Armenians in Julfa
were vigorously persecuted by Nadir Shah, who forbade Christian worship,
extorted savage penalties and taxes, and imposed social ostracism. The
town steadily dwindled. On the death of the Shah in 1747 more inhabitants
fled to Georgia, India and Baghdad, and by the end of the nineteenth century
the population had shrunk to two or three thousand.\(^3\) At the time of the siege
the Carmelites had moved out of Isfahan to Julfa, and by 1724 community life
in the convent had come to an end. Three years later the Carmelite convent
was seized and taken by a Persian. By 1765 there was not in Isfahan itself
‘one single baptised soul, Catholic or Armenian’.

After the 1840s the Muslim Kurds committed several massacres of Nestorians
(or Assyrians as they now called themselves).\(^4\) In 1843 there was a series of
massacres of Diophysite Christian mountain communities by Kurds in what is
now Iranian Azerbaijan, provoked by anger at Western missionary activity and
Russian military advances.\(^5\) The Kurdish persecution culminated during
World War I in the death of half of the Nestorians people and the
assassination of their patriarch. Many later fled to the British Protectorate of
Iraq, and further emigration was prompted by the Islamic Revolution of 1979
and the first Gulf War of 1991.\(^6\)

**vernacular architecture**

There are many architectures in Iran, but the distinctive one is the vernacular
of the desert. Towns like Nishapur, Damghan, Saveh, Qum and Kashan grew
up on the routes connecting the principal settlements. And scattered thinly
near the foot of the mountains, and where the distance on a caravan route
across the desert demanded that travellers should find shelter and
refreshment, are villages. The various settlements knew little of each other
until the second half of the twentieth century, which brought electric light and
television to their tea-houses and linked them with the large towns by bus and
lorry.\(^7\) Another reason for the sparseness of settlements on the eastern edge
of the plateau is the nineteenth-century Turkmen raids, which ravaged villages
more slowly and systematically but just as effectively as those of their Mongol
predecessors. The supine attitude of the peasantry and of the Qajar

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\(^1\) Blunt, *Isfahan*, p 115.
\(^3\) Blunt, *Isfahan*, p 176.
\(^6\) Christopher Baumer in Loveday, *Iran*, pp 262-3.
\(^7\) Beazley & Harverson, *Living with the Desert*, p 2.
government enabled these horsemen to sweep down from Khiva on razzias for several hundred miles across the Persian frontier, carrying off animals and prisoners to the slave markets of central Asia.

Since raiders depended upon surprise they travelled too fast to transport artillery, so the crenellated mud brick towers of Bam, for example, were able to withstand several Afghan attacks in the 1840s. In smaller villages the peasants would roll into place a across the entry a great stone disc, like a giant millstone. Unlike wooden gates this could not be set alight nor easily battered down by determined bandits. Moreover it required neither heavy timber nor elaborate hinges and ironmongery. But it is by no means a distinctly Iranian element. Such rolling stones were used to defend the underground settlement of Kaymakli in Cappadocia, which dates back probably to the sixth century AD, and possibly very much earlier. The rolling stone or Abu badd, at Mount Nebo in Jordan is Byzantine in date and about three metres in diameter. The ornamental qualities of the buildings derive from such elements as the bad-girs or wind towers, discussed below, and the perforated grilles which are the local manifestation of the decorative screens found across the Islamic world.

In the Caspian provinces north of the Alborz mountains, such as Gilan, the conditions are very different from those of the dry and largely treeless central plateau. Accordingly the roofs of the houses, instead of being flat and made of dried mud, are high-pitched and covered with wooden shingles, tiles or

thatch.\textsuperscript{1} Indeed wood is the main structural and decorative material, and the frame contains no metal components but is assembled with bark fibre bonds, with the components rebated and interlocked.\textsuperscript{2} In appearance the buildings and villages are not unlike some found in the Balkans and elsewhere in Europe. But in the Alborz spurs, step villages are situated on the slopes exposed to the south and are built following the contour lines. Houses are made of unburnt brick, their foundations and outbuildings of stone. The beams rest directly on the walls and are covered with a grid of branches; the whole of the building is covered with pug. The flat roofs of the lower houses are used as terraces and streets for the upper houses.\textsuperscript{3} E G Browne entered from the Turkish border and was struck by difference in the houses, which were ‘surrounded by gardens of poplars, [and] were neater, cleaner, and better built than is usual in Turkey’.\textsuperscript{4}

![Timber construction using framing lashed with bark fibre and pole and pug with rebated or ‘angle-clamped’ corners. Khansari & Yavari, *Espace Persan*, p 45.](image)

But elsewhere the population is nomadic, in the central Asian tradition. The Yamut Turcomans, in the region east of the south-east corner of the Caspian, live in yurts. These are circular like all yurts, but their form and construction are distinctive. The frame is of wicker or wood, which is vertical for about 1.8 metres, then curves inwards to a ring or hoop at the centre, leaving a circular opening which functions as a chimney and ventilator. The structure is clad in thick felt and the inside lined in carpet or felt. The door is left open in summer, and in winter is swathed in thick rugs or felt.\textsuperscript{5}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Lockhart, *Persia*, p 36.}
\footnote{Yavari, ‘Traditional Architecture’, p 28.}
\footnote{Yavari, ‘Traditional Architecture’, p 29.}
\footnote{Browne, *A Year Amongst the Persians*, p 54.}
\footnote{Lockhart, *Persia*, p 36.}
\end{footnotes}
ancient architecture

Historical architecture in Iran, as opposed to the vernacular, tends to be episodic in the sense that there is less continuity between the major periods than in most parts of the world. The earliest discernible remains are those at Sialk, of the sixth millennium BC, and have nothing to do with anything later, but there must have been pretensions to style, as the rooms were painted red with iron oxide mixed in fruit juice.¹ Elamite architecture was essentially Mesopotamian, but by the ninth and eighth centuries, in north-western Persia and eastern Anatolia, an interesting stone and brick architecture is said to have developed, and there were irrigation canals, some of which were very large and strengthened with masonry.² We know nothing of Median architecture, beyond a few rock-cut tombs.³ The first really local efflorescence was the Achaemenian, and even that – as will appear - was an extraordinary synthesis of imported traditions.

However Pope claims to find design elements which have persisted in Iran for more than three thousand years, such as

- a marked feeling for scale and a discerning use of simple and massive forms, a rather amazing consistency of decorative preferences, the high-arched portal set within a recess, columns with bracket capitals, and recurrent types of plan and elevation. .... The columned porch, or talar, revealed in the rock-cut tombs near Persepolis; the dome on four arches; the vast ovoid arch of Ctesiphon may still recur in a twentieth century farm building; the four-ivan court, anticipated in Parthian times .... ⁴

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¹ Pope, Persian Architecture, p 15.
² Pope, Persian Architecture, p 21.
³ Ghirshman, Persia from the Origins, pp 3ff.
⁴ Pope, Introducing Persian Architecture, p 1.
This is largely wishful thinking. There is no substantial link between the ziggurat at Choqā Zanbīl and the Achaemenid synthesis at Persepolis, and there is very little from Persepolis to what follows, except in later years when some self-conscious nationalistic attempts were made to evoke a connection.

Late in the sixth century BC, as we have seen, the centre of world power moved eastward, out of the Tigris-Euphrates valley and into Persia. The new power was that of the Achaemenians, who were a nomadic people, and therefore had little established artistic tradition. Their architecture draws most of all upon the traditions of Babylon, and of Mesopotamia generally, but they quickly synthesised a mature style of architecture by importing artists and craftsmen from all the surrounding regions under their rule, and from some others as well. These included Ionian Greeks from Asia Minor (modern Turkey) - and there is a strong connection with the Aeolic and proto-Ionic architecture of that area, illustrated, for example, by the use of rosettes. Rosettes are ubiquitous in Achaemenian work, and common enough elsewhere, but Nylander makes a telling comparison between specific examples from Parargadae and from Samos. They are of a very distinctive design and almost identical, with broad slightly concave petals alternating with thin pointed sepals.¹ It is impossible to doubt the connection between the two.

Lydia was conquered by Cyrus in 546, and soon most of western Anatolia was under Persian rule.² There are clear indications of Ionian and Lydian Greek involvement in the construction of Pasargadae- an involvement which foreshadows the wider international contribution to Susa and Persepolis. This Greek connection is evidenced at Pasargadae by the [imputed] use of claw-toothed picks and chisels, by anathyrosis, by metal dovetail clamps, by drafted margins (at the Tall-i Takht), and by the horizontally fluted torus. The base of the columns at Palace P, Pasargadae, is a torus with horizontal flutings: this is the Ionian form of base and no other building outside Greece

¹ Nylander, Ionians at Pasargadae, pp 140-1.
² Villing, 'Persia and Greece', p 236.
and Ionia is known to have used it. At Persepolis and Susa bell-shaped bases with flower or plant designs replaced the fluted torus. But the fluted shaft of the columns at Persepolis is derived from Ionia, although the Greeks never used so large a number of flutings (40-48), and at Pasargadae the shafts of the columns are smooth.

Early column base with horizontally fluted torus, Samos, c 560-550; Archaic column base with the greatest diameter transferred upwards, Samos. Archaic column base with the greatest diameter transferred downwards, Croesus Temple, Ephesus. Nylander, *Ioniens at Pasargadae*, p 108.

Stone with proto-aeolic spirals from the South Temple at Tarxien, Gozo, c 3600-2500 BC, National Museum, Valletta. Miles Lewis

Fragment of an Egyptian vase in rose limestone, c 3000 BC, showing cattle in their stable and sacred trees with spiral volutes, Musée du Louvre, Paris. Miles Lewis

The ultimate sources of the rosettes and the fluted bases are open to debate, but volutes are of more ancient origin, and are the first unequivocally Mediterranean elements to appear in Persia. Spiral ornamentation is found on stones from the South Temple, Tarxien, Malta, c 3600-2500 BC though its

religious or other significance is unknown. One form consists of a pair of spirals opening out symmetrically, sometimes from a central triangular fillet, and this emerges widely in the Near East. It is found in an Egyptian vase fragment in the Louvre, supposed to be of c 3000 BC (though I think at least a thousand years later), and elsewhere in Egypt, including a fresco showing a symbolic tree, in a tomb at Deir al-Modina, Egypt, of about 1200 BC.

Closer to Iran, however, are ivories from Arslan Tash, of the 9th and 8th centuries, and other forms of this general type are found around the eastern Mediterranean in Syria, Palestine and Egypt, and even in Mesopotamia, but they are scattered until they begin to be used in a reasonably consistent way in what has now been called the Aeolic style or order.
Early Phrygian terra cotta antefix from Gordion, Turkey, showing leopards flanking a sacred tree, c 700 BC Sams & Temizsoy, *Gordion Museum*, p 38
Detail of an unidentified Hittite-Aramaean column base, probably from Tell Tainat, Syria, 8th Century BC, Pergamon Museum, Berlin. Miles Lewis.

Head of a basalt column from Assur, c 1050 BC, but recycled from an earlier structure, Pergamon Museum, Berlin. Miles Lewis.
Aeolic capitals from Cyprus, C7th BC, Musée du Louvre, Paris. Miles Lewis
The Aeolic capital itself does not appear in Persia, but its influence certainly does. The essential Aeolic characteristic is that a pair of volutes branch out from the centre, like horns (whereas in the Ionic a pair of volutes is linked horizontally, like a sort of pillow). In simple terms, the history of the branching volute motif in the Mediterranean goes back to about 3000 BC in Malta. In Egypt and Mesopotamia it appears on vertical elements which can be described sacred trees, from which one or more pairs branch out, often springing from the upper sides of an equilateral triangle. Then in Syria and Palestine it appears separately in the form of a capital with two volutes branching out of a triangle, and in Cyprus this form becomes rather sophisticated. This can be called proto-Aeolic because the triangle disappears in the form which finally emerges in Aeolis itself, the island and coastal region off the west of Turkey.
Stone relief showing a winged sphinx [and a sacred tree]. Originally on a facade of Palace G, Persepolis, constructed by Artaxerxes III, later transferred to the north staircase of Palace H, uncovered by Colonel John Kinnear MacDonald in 1826. British Museum ANE 129381. Curtis & Tallis, Forgotten Empire, p 84.

The Cypriot form of an aeolic capital with a central triangle appears on the column base from the Apadana at Susa, now at the Louvre. The sacred tree relief at Persepolis is like a stack of these aeolic motifs, each with its central triangle. Cyprus was occupied by the Persians in about 525 BC, and remained under their loose control until the invasion of Alexander.\(^1\) It therefore seems reasonable to postulate a Cypriot influence when the volute and triangle form appears at Susa and Persepolis.

The Achaemenian palaces follow Mesopotamian usage in many respects. They are built on artificial terraces; the walls are of mud brick, sometimes embellished by carved slabs of stone and panels of polychrome glazed bricks. At the same time, however, the doorways of the palaces were crowned by an Egyptian cavetto moulding; and this rested – as it never did in Egypt – on the Greek astragal. Columns of both timber and stone are used, as they were in Mesopotamia, with ornamental capitals. But in Mesopotamia the evidence is mainly from illustrations in reliefs rather than from archaeology, and columns seem to have been used much less profusely than in Persia. The bases and shafts of the earliest Persian columns are Ionian, as has been discussed, but the double-headed capital is not normally found outside Persia,¹ and has been compared with a forked sapling used in traditional houses in northern Iran to support the rafters, which suggests its origin.² The one example outside Persia is a double bull capital discovered at Sidon in 1880, which is taken as evidence of the existence of a Persian apadana in Sidon - a rare instance of Persian influence elsewhere.³

¹ Frankfort, Ancient Orient, p 349.
² Frankfort, Ancient Orient, p 358.
³ Curtis & Tallis, Forgotten Empire, p 41.
The tomb of Cyrus introduced the gable roof form to Iran, a development which from today’s perspective might seem trivial enough, but which is really a matter of some significance. Although many primitive structures must have had a V-section, the idea of a triangular roof deliberately constructed over vertical walls is one which had emerged quite recently in Urartu, Phrygian and Ionan buildings. That it had been used on earlier ziggurats, as asserted by Pope,¹ seems questionable.

Stone door frames, window frames, and niches are best preserved in the residential palace of Darius, but all are treated in the same way. They are not built up logically, as was done in Egypt or Greece, from four separate pieces,

lintel, sill, and two jambs. They are sometimes carved in a single block. At other times parts, one-half or three quarters of the circumference, were cut from one block and the rest from one or more separate pieces. In other words, stone was treated in the manner of a sculptor, not that of a mason. The same odd treatment is observed in staircases. The use of rebates in door frames has been considered in great detail by Roaf, who seems to see them as purely ornamental, and perhaps related to the function and status of the building. That they are used ornamentally is beyond doubt, especially as some appear around the frames of blind niches. But the fundamental purpose of a rebate in a doorway is to prevent the weather from penetrating around the door leaf. A second purpose may (though probably not in Iran) be to accommodate a timber frame.

An investigator ought to begin by looking for pivot holes in the threshold and lintel (for all ancient doors worked on the pivot principle), and continue by examining the rebate for any traces of fixings in the rebate itself. At Pasargadæ, for example, the Tomb of Cyrus and the Zendan both have the pivot holes well preserved in the lintel. In the case of the Zendan Stronach has inferred that the sill was made of removable timber or other elements, and a limestone fragment indicates that door was of solid stone, into which ornamental limestone strips were set. These stone doors, with the pivots carved integrally, are common in ancient architecture, and continued in Roman and Byzantine architecture in Syria until at least the 6th century AD, where some are still in use today.

1 Frankfort, Ancient Orient, p 357.
3 Stronach, Pasargadae, pp 25, 37,125-6.
We have seen that Darius’s Palace at Susa drew upon materials and workmen from all over the known world, but it is not so much the importation of rare jewels and ivory which is surprising, but that of large building components like timber beams and columns, which came from Lebanon and elsewhere. We know that timber had long been imported to Mesopotamia, but - though we have no clear information - columns seem to have played a much lesser role than they were to do in Achaemenian architecture. Moreover the major Mesopotamian buildings were within striking distance of the Tigris and the Euphrates, so that a combination of sea and river transport took care of most of the trip. Susa was more remote from water, and Persepolis much more so, and it is difficult to imagine how these large timbers were got to the site.

According to Frankfort, Insistence on square rooms is a lasting feature of Achaemenian architecture, established in the reign of Darius (for while Cyrus was king, both architecture and sculpture were still in an experimental stage), and much has been written on the origin of the Achaemenian pillared halls, but to little purpose. Matheson, and Curtis & Razmjou after her, suggest that the columnar hall type, examples of which have been excavated at Hasanlu, may well have been the prototype of the apadana. But all this is very misleading. The type had been established by the Hittites and later taken up by the Urartians. Hasanlu is no more than a minor instance of a broader regional tradition.

These halls were – so far as we can tell - the first interior spaces in which a large number of people could gather and debate or interact, for the Egyptian hypostyle hall, as at Karnak, is largely filled with thick stone columns and does not really function as a single space. So we are talking about something much more momentous than square halls. If the basic function of architecture is to enclose space, then the creation for the first time of a communal space is one of its central achievements, and one so far quite unrecognised. The implications for culture and politics are far-reaching.

It would be wrong to overstate the case. Nomadic peoples could well have had multi-posted tent-like structures, and these could well have inspired the Hittites - whose capital was in a mountainous part of Anatolia which can be bitterly cold – to translate the form into permanent architecture. And of course the Achaemenid halls are the better part of a millennium later than the Hittite ones – but even in the sixth century they were unparallelled in Greece, Egypt, or the Mediterranean cultures in general.

**post-Achaemenid architecture**

One could say that after the Achaemenian the next period, the Seleucid, is almost devoid of architecture – certainly devoid of the rich Hellenistic work found in the countries around the eastern Mediterranean. Pope claims that cities were laid out according to geometric Greek plans, temples were built on Greek models and characteristic elements of Greek design were used for ornament. But there’s not much surviving evidence of this, and Pope himself concedes that it applies only to areas with concentrations of Greek and Macedonian personnel. He cites the scanty ruins of Kangavar, which date
from about 200 BC, but they would barely rate a footnote if they were found elsewhere in the Hellenistic world.

Parthian architecture is not much richer, though it seems to be the medium by which vernacular brick and vaulting traditions were brought to bear upon mainstream buildings. It is claimed that Parthian architecture introduced the dome on squinches and the vaulted ivan – both of which were to be important in subsequent Iranian building. But according to Ghirshman the very existence of Parthian art, as distinct from Sassanian Art, is a recent discovery, and if that is so, Parthian architecture is even more elusive, for most of the examples cited by Ghirshman are rock reliefs or fragments, or buildings outside the present boundaries of Iran. The first is at Hatra, in Iraq, built under Mithridates II, of the Arsacid dynasty, in 123 BC. The palace at Assur, another Arsacid construction, dating from the first century AD but with additions made up to the third century, is the first known example of four ivans opening onto a central court.

Pope describes Parthian architecture as combining Greek and Persian elements, but the façade at Assur clearly derives from the Roman triumphal arch form, and the piers, the superimposed orders, and the idea of a represented structure, are all Roman or at least Hellenistic. Ghirshman claims that stucco first appeared under the Parthians and that there was a rapid development of wall painting, under western influence. But these assertions deserve to be treated with a degree of scepticism in view of the dearth of information about Parthian architecture, and the almost complete lack of information on the Seleucid architecture which preceded it. After all,
both stucco and mural painting were widespread in the ancient cultures of the Middle Eastern and Mediterranean worlds.

From this point we can begin to entertain Pope’s view about design elements which have persisted in Iran, even if only from Parthian rather than from Elamite times. The four-ivan court, and possibly the dome on squinches persist from this period. The Parthians did not use the Achaemenian talar, but it reappears in Sassanian times, presumably as part of the Sassanian nationalistic agenda, and continues in later Islamic work in the porticoes of palaces or mosques. The Sassanians sought to bypass the alien rule of the Seleucids and Parthians and to situate themselves as the indigenous successors of the Achaemenids. Thus they also borrowed decorative detail from Persepolis, including the Egyptian gorge cornice, incorrectly referred to by Pope as a cavetto. The main element of continuity through the Parthian and Sassanian periods is the fire temple, but few examples are dated, most are known from their plans rather than their superstructures, and what superstructures survive are relatively simple. The fire temple tends to be squarish and organized about a courtyard, characteristics which were to persist in much later Iranian architecture, and indeed many fire temples were incorporated into or rebuilt as later mosques.

Sassanian architecture is an enigma, having emerged from the Parthian, which is itself a mystery. A survey by Reuther in 1938 has fallen by the wayside as monuments have been re-examined and re-dated. About a hundred structures have now been attributed at one time or another to the Sassanians, but in most cases it is not even known for certain in that the building is Sassanian in date, for very few of the well-known examples can

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actually be proved to belong to the period. And despite references to them as ‘palaces’, ‘pavilions’, and ‘temples’, very little is known of how they were actually used. In many cases the published plans bear little relationship to what actually remains, especially in the case of the so-called palace of Sarvistan. Terms like ‘typical Sassanian masonry’ are used but are undefined.¹

But setting these objections aside for the present, it does seem that the Sassanian was a major source upon which Islamic architecture was to draw, not only in Iran but elsewhere. But according to Pope, Sassanian architecture, on the whole, ‘was not a fully realised art. It was to be the destiny of subsequent periods to refine what was ambiguous or clumsy.’² The most remarkable building of the period was a fire temple, the Takht-i-Takdis, built in 618 under Chosroes II, and destroyed by the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius only ten years later. It was reportedly a large pavilion on rollers, which could be set in exact correspondence with the rotating sky.³

But this does not make this architecture unimportant, and it seems to be a major source for subsequent Islamic architecture. The squinch, for example, is widely used in Sassanian (or what is taken to be Sassanian) work, and it later becomes the norm in Islamic architecture. Biers defines three types. The squinches at Firuzabad, which are perhaps the earliest known, are half cones. The second type is found in a number of char tags in Fars which Huff designates as post-Sassanian and is conical, but with a short lintel across the corner which appears as a semicircular element at the end of the cone. The third type found at Sarvistan which is in effect the corner of a cloister vault.⁴

It is easier to define the Sassanian by what it is not, rather than what it is. There are no classical orders of precisely defined columns and capitals, and nor are there the elegant factitious orders of Achaemenid architecture. There are cylindrical columns and rectangular piers, but they have no regular bases (though sometimes there are ad hoc ones), no taper, no entasis, no fluting (except on rare occasions as a crude surface decoration), and normally no capitals of any recognisable type. What is used is an abacus in the form of a flat square plate, a form unknown in classical arcading except for one obscure example (the House of Amor & Psyche, Ostia). At Sarvistan the plate is extended into a rectangle so that one abacus can cap a pair of columns.

The pediment seems to be unknown, though so few buildings have any portion of their roof surviving that one cannot be certain. Barrel vaults and domes are used, but they are rudimentary. There is none of the mass concrete vaulting of Rome, and none of the beautiful stone stereotomy of Syria (certainly not the raking, stepped and conical vaults of Syrian theatres); there is some work approaching the rubble concrete shells of Syria and Anatolia, but baked and unbaked brick vaulting is much more common. Vaulting forms are rarely true half cylinders or hemispheres, because vaults

¹ Bier, Sarvistan, p xiv.
² Pope, Persian Architecture, p 75.
³ Pope, Persian Architecture, p 74.
⁴ Bier, Sarvistan, p 42.
are commonly of pitched or other types designed to eliminate or reduce the need for formwork. But in any case, the semicircular arch was not greatly favoured.

The arch is perhaps the key to Sassanian architecture, and especially the parabolic arch. These arches are not geometrically exact, but they approach the form of a parabola or a catenary, which are not very different from each other. They do not approach the form of an ellipse, and those writers who refer to them as elliptical are misguided. Although the parabolic arch is widely used in Sassanian work, the semicircular arch is found as well, whereas in the ancient world the reverse was true: the semicircular arch was the norm and the parabolic arch the exception. Diaphragm arches are found in some examples, and the dome was used in major Sassanian buildings, whereas it had been almost unknown in Parthian work.

Ironically, while it is hard to pin down reliably dated Sassanian structures in Iran, it is possible to find structures elsewhere – and quite outside the area ruled by the Sassanians – which are Sassanian in character. One of these is the Qasr Karaneh in Jordan, generally thought to be from before 710 AD, but undocumented.
Ghirshman makes extraordinary claims for the influence of Sassanian architecture in the west. According to him the outstanding creation of Sassanian architecture is the palace form with cupolas and parallel barrel vaults. Architects in Egypt, Syria, and Asia Minor, took them as models when they developed their own form of basilica, a massive, ill-lighted building whose three naves were roofed with contiguous barrel vaults and buttressed against each other. From the fifth to the eleventh century this type of church proliferated along the shores of the Adriatic and the Mediterranean, as far west as Spain. Tenth century churches are still standing today in Catalonia, as at Santa Maria d’Amer, Santa Cecilia de Montserrat, and Saint-Martin du Canigou. The prototype of the transverse barrel vaults over the nave of St Philibert, Tournus, was be the palace of Eiwan-i-Kerkha, a Sassanian city founded by Shapur II (309-379). The transition from the timber-roofed basilica to the vaulted, longitudinal edifice of Mesopotamian and Iranian origin was made by way of the system of construction seen in the Hauran, in Syria, as early as the third century, in which transverse diaphragm arches were roofed with stone slabs.¹

In other words Sassanian barrel vaulted buildings influenced Syrian flat-roofed buildings, which in turn influenced western European barrel vaulted examples. And this influence not only spread from one end of the known world to the other, but skipped a few centuries in the process. Such assertions make Strzygowski seem tame, but it does not stop there. According to in Ghirshman

¹ Ghirshman, Parthians and Sassanians, p 289.
the oratory of Theodulf, at Germigny-des-Prés in central France, combines
certain features of Sassanian monuments with others derived from 'the old
Oriental churches'. However, considering its close similarity to Spanish
eamples like Santa Comba de Bande, we may be wiser to trace the building
to Visigothic Spain, particularly as Theodulf himself was a Visigoth.

Christian architecture, which must have been extensive in the brief period
when Christians constituted the majority of the population, has been almost
entirely expunged. This is why the Mar Gewargis Church at Khosrowabad is
— potentially at least — so intriguing, as discussed below. Even the early
Islamic period is sparsely represented in Iran, and except for a few
archaeological traces the oldest existing Islamic building in Iran is the little
Tarik-Khana in Damghan, built toward the end of the eighth century.

**Islamic architecture**

The history and culture of Iran and central Asia during the first centuries of
Islamic rule are still poorly known. Nominally this vast area consisted of
several provinces ruled by governors appointed from Baghdad. From the
ninth century, however, dynasties of governors such as the Tahirids (821-73),
or the aristocratic native Iranian Samanids (819-1005) and the more popular
Saffarids (867-963), exercised effective control over generally ill-defined
areas. The real growth of an Islamic western Iran began only with the Buyid
dynasty (932-1062), which occupied Baghdad itself in 945.

With the arrival of Islam we can no longer avoid two critical truths: Iranian
architecture is one in which the architects are mostly unknown, and it is also
one largely lacking in theoretical writing or practical instruction. Thus it is both
anonymous and uninformed. As Blair and Bloom put it, the perpetuation of a
style relied on individual experience and visual memory. A rare instance of
architectural writing was Rashīd ad-Dīn’s work Kitābu’l-Ahyā wa’l-Āthār (Book
of Animals and Monuments). The twentieth chapter dealt with the rules to be
followed in building all types of buildings and the twenty-first chapter included
information on the construction of tombs. But no copy of this manuscript has
survived, and it cannot have been very detailed.

In the whole of the Islamic world there are no true architectural drawings
before the thirteenth century, and in Iran there is only one piece of evidence
for architectural drawings, again from Rashīd ad-Dīn, who writes of the
erection of Ghāzān Khān’s tomb at Shenb, west of Tabriz, that ‘He himself [Ghāzān] drew the plans’. Though Ghāzān would not have actually

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1 Ghirshman, *Parthians and Sassanians*, p 290.
5 Wilber, *The Il Khanid Period*, p 42.
drawn anything, this does seem to indicate that plans were prepared. But no drawing of a true plan, elevation or section is known to have survived from the Il Khânid period or earlier, and in the absence of documentation Wilber questions whether structures of the period were precisely designed in advance of construction or whether they were the products of day by day work on familiar plan types with specific variations introduced by the experienced craftsmen. There is some, but not much, evidence of standard proportional ratios which might have guided the development of a building.

Ghâzân Khân, who had come to power two years earlier, had begun construction of his tomb in October 1297, and it is reported that the Khan reputedly supervised the work and the architect asked him whether low windows should be put in the structure to light the great underground vault. This not only conflicts with the claim that Ghâzân drew the plans: it is if anything evidence that the design was not predetermined and the ‘architect’ was not an architect in the normal sense. Indeed, according to Wilber the Il Khanid period craftsmen whose self-descriptions have been variously translated by others as ‘builder,’ ‘engineer,’ or architect are actually designated in the inscriptions only as ‘builder’ or as ‘master workman’, and the specific terms for ‘architect’ have not been found in any of the inscriptions of catalogued monuments. We do know of al-‘Urdi, who is described as an architect, engineer and astronomer. He was a retainer of Nâşîr ad-dîn, who was in turn some sort of courtier and savant to Hulagu. But it is really in the capacities of astronomer and engineer that al-‘Urdi is recorded, for he was responsible for the observatory at Maragha. In the Timurid period in 1416 the masjid-I jami’ of Gawar Shad had funds for a mi’mar or architect. Golombek and Wilber have found five inscriptions recording a mi’mar, meaning architect or builder.

Before Islam it is possible to ignore the anonymity and the lack of a theoretical basis for Iranian architecture, because these characteristics were common in other cultures – though Egypt had Imhotep and Senmut, Greece had Iktinos and Kallikrates, Rome had Vitruvius, Trajan and Apollodorus; the Byzantines had Anthemios and Isodorus, the Carolingians, Odo of Metz; the Armenians had Trdat, and so on. Even in the Islamic world the Ottomans had Sinan, as well as having building treatises which survive. However the anonymity of most Islamic architecture in Iran is common to other Islamic areas. It is hard to regard this as just a matter of chance – that historical accident has deprived us of the information which would otherwise enable a fuller and more conventional analysis. On the contrary the implication is that the architecture itself is somehow different - so is Iranian Islamic architecture more vernacular, or more like the crafts of carpet weaving and tile design? This does seem to

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1 Wilber, The Il Khanid Period, p 42.
2 Wilber, The Il Khanid Period, p 42.
3 Wilber, The Il Khanid Period, p 43.
4 Wilber, The Il Khanid Period, p 17.
5 Wilber, The Il Khanid Period, p 47.
6 Wilber, The Il Khanid Period, p 10.
7 Golombek & Wilber, Timurid Architecture, p 66.
be the case, because the periods merge into one another without dramatic change. Period names derived from the ruling dynasties do not correspond to major upheavals in style. And there was no equivalent here to the big egos and passionate reformers of the post-Renaissance tradition in Europe.

The dominant role of geometry in building design is consistent with this craft tradition in architecture. That geometry was very important no-one can doubt who has looked at the complex patterns of tiling or the elaborately formed vaulting. But that it has some deep relationship to Sufic mysticism or Islamic philosophy is questionable: it relates more to the virtuosity of craftsmen with no more fulfilling outlet open to them. According to the tenth century philosopher, Abu Nasr al-Farabi, the fundamentals of architecture belonged to the mathematical sciences, and the basic science of architecture was the knowledge of hiyal ['skill, art or cunning, here in reference to the manipulation of geometric forms]. Geometry was the foundation of an architect's training, and the highly skilled architect was known as a muhandis, a 'geometer' Early Arabic treatises on mathematics pay special attention to the needs of the architect: there are texts dealing with geometry for the architect, geometric designs for craftsmen, and comments throughout general texts on mathematics relevant to architectural practices. Of particular reference to Timurid architecture is the Key to Arithmetic by Ghiyath al-Din Jamshid al-Kashi, chief mathematician and astronomer of Ulugh Beg. Bulatov has written a complete book on geometric harmony in central Asian architecture of the 9th to 15th centuries.¹

Islamic structures of a religious character include the mosque, the madrasa and the mausoleum. Secular structures, other than domestic and vernacular, include palaces, the traces of one Il Khanid observatory, and caravanserais dating from the Il Khanid period onwards. The standard mosque, although it began to take shape in the Saljūq period, and the first complete example dates from 1135, did not become common until after the end of the fourteenth century, in monuments of the Timūrid and Safavid periods. In its fully developed Iranian form it is characterised by a longitudinal axis from the entrance to an ivan portal opening a courtyard. The arcades surrounding the court are interrupted by three more īvāns, on the longitudinal cross axes, and there are prayer halls in back of the arcades. The elevations of the Seljūq īvāns are massive and broad, while in the Il Khānid period they become narrower and higher. The major īvān, on the longitudinal axis opposite the entrance opens into a square sanctuary chamber crowned by a dome and with a mihrāb, or prayer niche, in the rear wall of the chamber at the end point of the longitudinal axis.

The standard plan of the madrasa is so close to that of the mosque, in spite of the different functions of the two types, that the Iranian version has been called the madrasa-mosque plan. The normal plan of the caravanserai is very like the madrasa-mosque, but with a larger court, around which are living chambers (of which more below). Mausolea include two categories, the square chamber crowned by a dome, and the tomb tower. Most, of both

¹ Golombek & Wilber, Timurid Architecture, p 137.
types, are imamzadas, – an imamzada being a tomb shrine in honour of a so-called ‘son of Islam’. More than half contain mihrabs, and burial is in a central sarcophagus or in a crypt beneath.

The first Islamic mausoleums were erected in the tenth century, presumably for the glorification of princes and the celebration of Shi’ite imams. They were either towers or square buildings covered with cupolas on squinches, but with the arrival of the Turks and the subsequent triumph of Sunnism they were transformed in function and in shape. Instead of descendants of Ali, it was holy men, legendary Companions of the Prophets, and often Old Testament figures who were accorded true martyria, which were to become the foci of popular cults and beliefs.¹

The renaissance of architecture under the Samanids, such as it was, was transmitted to their successors, the Ghaznavids. Mahmud of Ghazna (997-1030), though a ferocious conqueror, amassed enormous wealth and was a passionate devotee of architecture, on which he lavished immense sums and great energy. His nobles too, according to Abu Nasr al Utibi, ‘built magnificent palaces, mosques, pavilions, gardens, reservoirs, and aqueducts in provincial capitals’.² But we are not dealing with a unified and homogeneous Iran. While Khurasan under the Samanids and Ghaznavids took the lead in the evolution of a national Islamic culture, central Persia under the Buvayhids was simultaneously developing more important architectural solutions, as shown in the oldest standing example, the Shrine of the Duvazdah Imam at Yazd, discussed below.

The Saljuq period is a little different from others, in that the change of dynasty did carry some significant architectural implications. On the one hand the Saljuq leaders were already familiar with the Persian culture established in central Asia,³ and so were not simply alien intruders. But on the other their dominion extended to Anatolia, where their architecture (in my view at least) absorbed many Armenian characteristics. Indeed how could it not? If they were to build in stone they had to employ masons, and in eastern Anatolia that meant Armenians. The Armenians had a tradition of beautifully compact geometric plans, conical stone roofs, and surface relief decoration resembling carving in ivory. Some of this was transmitted into Saljuq architecture, in the particular conical roof form which was used in the polygonal shrines of rulers and notables, which evolve into the tomb towers of Iran.

In the field of architecture, Wilber asserts, the Saljuqs encouraged or directed the erection of imposing structures which worked to give a precise character and quality to the earlier experimental forms of Islamic architecture in Iran. Thus, this royal patronage served to crystallize and formalize architectural types which might otherwise have remained at a less monumental level for a

² Quoted in Muhammad Nazin, Mahmud of Ghazna (Cambridge 1931), and in turn in Pope, Persian Architecture, p 99.
³ Pope, Persian Architecture, p 105.
much longer period of time. The Saljuqs also, in exerting control over their extensive territory, were great builders of fortified hans, or caravanserais, spaced a comfortable day’s journey apart along the major trade routes, which would contain accommodation and stabling, a mosque, baths, medical facilities, and a library. These too were now to appear in Iran. Pope singles out the Masjid-i-Jami of Isfahan as the building which best exemplifies ‘the power and nobility of Seljuk architecture’.2

For several generations after the Mongol invasion the country, devastated and demoralised, had neither mood nor capacity for building.3 The Mongols themselves ‘continued in their nomadic way of life long after they had decided to remain in Iran.’4 The Ilkhanids used tents of horsehair and felt,5 and until almost the end of the Il Khanid period, the rulers seem to have spent only a limited time in urban courts and palaces, and instead held their court, according to season, on the warm plains or the cool mountain slopes, sheltered by spreading tents and canopies or living in open pavilions constructed of wood.6 Only the last of them took a personal interest in constructing various monuments.7 The architectural beginning of the Il Khanid period is therefore considerably later than the date of the invasions, and it effectively continues not to the death of the last Il Khanid ruler in 1335 but through the life of a number local dynasties to the conquest by Timur just before 1400.8

The revived Persian architecture of the fourteenth century took on new scale and magnificence, still based upon Saljuq forms and construction,9 though the four centred arch is especially characteristic of the Il Khanid period.10 And consistent with the brief Il-Khanid rapprochement with Christianity, in 1300 the patriarch resolved to complete the Baptistery of John the Baptist at Marāgha, dedication ceremonies for which were held less than a year later.

The buildings were handsome, the doors were things to be admired, and its superstructure was raised above on worked slabs [or pillars?], and its foundations of dressed stones were truly laid. Thus it was, he made its doors of dressed slabs, ornamented with designs, and its stairways were also of dressed stones. … The whole of the outside of the dome of the altar is inlaid with green glaze [kāshāni] tiles, and on top of it is placed a cross.11

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1 Wilber, The Il Khanid Period, pp ix - x.
2 Pope, Persian Architecture, p 106.
3 Wilber, The Il Khanid Period, p v.
4 Wilber, The Il Khanid Period, p v.
5 Blair & Bloom, Architecture of Islam, p 5.
6 Wilber, The Il Khanid Period, p v.
7 Wilber, The Il Khanid Period, p v.
8 Wilber, The Il Khanid Period, p v.
9 Pope, Introducing Persian Architecture, p 75.
10 Wilber, The Il Khanid Period, p 68.
Timur once again levelled whole cities and massacred entire populations, but his actions were less random than those of the Mongols and he spared many cities and sacred monuments.¹ The architecture of the fifteenth century continued the principal – and largely Saljuq - forms of the Mongols, but with greater refinement and consistent skill.²

In considering Islamic Iran a typological approach is more rewarding than a chronological one, but there are some imported elements inherited from the past. The Iwan, the great open alcove which typically faces into the courtyard of a mosque or medreseh, seems to derive from Parthian or Sassanian precedents. The squinch is at least Sassanian in origin, and gives rise muqarnas (at its best not only in Iran but in Turkey and Egypt) and hence ultimately to the stalactite ceiling of the Cappella Palatina, Palermo.

In the Saljūq period the surfaces of the vaults had been given interest by the pattern of the armatures or by the use of elaborate brick bonding in the compartments of the vaults. In the Il Khānid period the inner surface was frequently coated in white plaster cut with geometric patterns, which were heightened by the addition of colour. After the middle of the fourteenth century all vaults were covered with a smooth coat of hard, white plaster and some years later this device became one of the most characteristic features of Timūrid architecture.³

The prayer niche which had appeared in early monastic cells,⁴ was taken over to become the mihrab of the mosque or masjid. The chief religious building in a town of any size was its masjid-i jami’, which was large enough to accommodate the entire male population at the time of the obligatory Friday prayer. The khatib gave the sermon (khutbah) in the name of the ruling monarch, and prayer was led by the imam. The masjid-i jami’ was therefore closely associated with government: public announcements were made there, and eminent scholars might be attached to the mosque. In larger towns there was more than one Friday mosque, but the oldest of them retained the affection of the people. Small quarter masjids were supplementary chapels of ease, but few of these have survived from before the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. There were also funerary masjids at cemeteries, and open air masjids for the great Muslim festivals these might have no more structure than a freestanding qibla wall containing the mihrab, with the minbar in the open, but again these, with one exception, do not survive.⁵

Although the earlier madrasahs in Iran do not survive, it can be inferred from the later ones that they were courtyards surrounded by teaching rooms, with one or more iwans.⁶ By the Timurid period the role of the madrasah as the main institution for teaching orthodox religious sciences was well developed.⁷

¹ Pope, Persian Architecture, p 192.
² Pope, Introducing Persian Architecture, p 75.
³ Wilber, The II Khānid Period, p 60.
⁴ Dalrymple, From the Holy Mountain, p 304.
⁵ Golombek & Wilber, Timurid Architecture, pp 45-6.
By contrast with the orthodox madrasah, the kanaqah was associated with Sufic practices, teaching esoteric religious knowledge, and it might have some limited accommodation for staff and followers, hence the occasional but misleading translation of the term as ‘monastery’. There were also hospices for particular groups, such as descendants of a saint, or for the use of travellers. A hospice open to travellers was called a ribat and was like a caravanserai, but was funded by endowment rather than designed for profit.


Caravanserai near Kerman. Khansari & Yavari, Espace Persan, p 106.

1 Golombek & Wilber, Timurid Architecture, p 47.
2 Golombek & Wilber, Timurid Architecture, p 48.
3 Golombek & Wilber, Timurid Architecture, p 49.
Commercial buildings included caravanserais, khans, timchehs, bazaars, shops, and chabar su (domed street crossings). The caravanserai or khan was a combination of motel and wholesale house. Merchants brought goods for sale and might remain with them, especially in the caravanserai, which was often in an isolated situation along one of the great trade routes, as opposed to the khan, which is a more condensed urban form, usually with trading spaces grouped around a smaller court. The timcheh seems to have been a smaller kiosk form, exclusively for shops. E G Browne believed that De Sacy was the first to draw the attention of the west to the caravanserais presumably referring to Antoine-Isaac Silvestre de Sacy (1758-1838), an authority of Islamic topics.

Shah 'Abbas I (1587-1629) developed an extensive road system with caravanserais a day's journey apart. Caravansaries were simple unpretentious buildings. The typical caravansery is a squarish plan around a courtyard with four iwans, an elaborate portal at the front, and stables at the back. Four long, tall, windowless walls, four corner towers, and occasionally two towers in the middle of its long walls, gave a caravansary a fort-like appearance. The building's only decorated exterior element was its portico, a tall, protruding or recessed, structure. The portals are said to imitate Roman triumphal arches and Parthian arches. In colder mountainous regions there might be no courtyard, but a complete vaulted roofing system. Octagonal courtyard plans occur but are rare, and circular caravanserais are extremely rare.

![Isometric diagram of the Deh-Namak Caravansaray, Gamsar. Haji-Qassemi, Caravansaries, p 40.](image_url)

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Behind the portico stood the hashti, the main entrance vestibule, which was the caravansary’s most important and most elaborate area. The hashti usually formed an independent structure flanked by guard rooms and other lodgings. This area was usually covered by a tall and ornate ceiling. The heart of the caravansaray was the sahn, or main courtyard, which had a regular, geometric, usually rectangular, shape. The sahn was encircled by chambers and each chamber was usually fronted by an eivancheh, a semi-open area at the disposition of its residents. In almost every caravansaray, eivans rose in the middle of the courtyard’s four sides. Behind the attractive regular facades of the courtyard stood the stables, which were usually reached from the corners of the courtyard.¹

The decorative tendencies and the faience tradition already apparent in prehistoric Mesopotamia and Persia blossomed in the Islamic world into elaborate patterns, sometimes based upon stylised Koranic script, and exquisite glazed tile cladding used both internally and externally.

¹ Haji-Qassemi, Caravansaries, p 9.
Timurid tilework of the Friday Mosque, and Safavid tilework of the Royal Mosque, Esfahan. 

‘In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate’: in (left) Kufic, square Kufic, eastern Kufic, thulth; (right) nakshi, muhaqqaq, rihani, ta’liq. Hillenbrand, *Islamic Art and Architecture*, p 59.

Angular motifs of geometric interlacing are called band-er-rumi (literally ‘band of Rum’) or gereh-bandi (‘tying / closing knots’. The Arab cursive styles had been reinvented and codified in Baghdad in the tenth century by the calligrapher Ibn Muqla, and were known as thuluth, naskh, muaqqaq, rayhan, tawqi’ and riqa’.1 ‘Kufic’ is an umbrella term for types of calligraphy which are

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1 Porter, *Palaces and Gardens*, p 156.
angular and commonly omit diacritics. Variants are floral and plaited Kufic, or laying the characters out linearly or the form of a maze.¹

Examples of cut tile mosaic (kashi-ye mo'arraq): left, panelling from the Vakil Mosque, Shiraz; muqarnas from the entrance to a house at Shiraz; panelling from the Mozaffari Mosque at Kerman. Porter, Palaces and Gardens, p 187.

Lustre tiles were produced in quantity in the eleventh century,² but the interiors of tombs from the Ilkhanid period in Qum and Kashan indicate that the production of lustre tiles ceased in 1339-40, to be replaced by revetments of carved and painted plaster.³ Faience mosaic, consisting of a jigsaw of cut monochrome tiles was cheaper than lustre tiling, more durable, and better suited to the decoration of large area. This was developed largely under the Timurids. The first self-colour was a turquoise; then mirror black, white, and lapis lazuli; in the fourteenth century rich buttercup yellow was developed into shades from pale buff to deep saffron. Finally came emerald green and an aubergine which varied from garnet to near black, and in the fifteenth century some use was made of bright red unglazed clay in very small quantities. Such true tile mosaic, with with one colour per tile, was characteristic of Timurid and early Safavid work. But there followed a labour-saving innovation, the haft-rangi [seven colour] tile, which was usually square and combined a number of colours. It was a cheaper and quicker cladding which lacked the brilliance of mosaic. In the portal of the Royal Mosque, and in the Lutfullah Mosque, Esfahan, the two types can be seen side-by-side.⁴

Napier Malcolm gives a good account of the usual ornamental glazing:

The semi-circular fanlight consists of pieces of glass fixed together in a wooden lattice. The lattice at a distance resembles fret-work, but is

¹ Porter, Palaces and Gardens, p 161.
² Blunt, Isfahan, pp 54-5.
³ Blair & Bloom, Art and Architecture of Islam, p 14. These authors refer to 140 years of continuous production, which is inconsistent with an eleventh century origin.
⁴ Blunt, Isfahan, p 87.
really elaborately pieced together. Some of the older windows contain exceedingly fine work, but even when it is well done it is not very durable … The French window itself consists of two doors which are supposed to meet in the middle. There are no hinges, but each door has a wooden foot which turns in a mud socket. The arrangement of the coloured glasses which form the panes is extremely artistic. The same sort of wooden lattice is used but the pattern is much larger than the pattern of the fanlight.¹

We are not here much concerned with the Qajar period, but under Fath Ali Shah, who ruled nearly forty years from 1797, new gardens, palaces, public squares, government buildings and private houses were built, and work began on the Golestan Palace in Tehran.²

According to Modarres there developed during the twentieth century an anti-Arab Iranian nationalism. The Zoroastrians, who until now had been second class citizens, prohibited even from building any structure taller than those of the Muslims, were rediscovered as source of national symbolism. Indeed everything pre-Islamic was thought to represent higher culture, and modern evocations of Achaemenid and Sassanid architecture appeared in many Iranian cities.³ There was also a seemingly inconsistent admiration of

¹ Malcolm, Five Years in a Persian Town, pp 18-19.
² Wilber, Persian Gardens, p 65.
³ Modarres, Modernizing Yazd, p 3.
western boulevards, and dusty traditional streets were replaced by Haussmannic avenues.¹

The first two of the new main streets of Yazd, cutting through the old walls and the bazaar, and named, as in many other cities, Palhavi and Shah Streets. Modarres, *Modernizing Yazd*, p 91.

In 1940 Tehran was undergoing a forced modernization on the orders of the Shah. New regulations had been issued to the effect that all buildings on designated avenues must be two stories or more in height; owners who did not comply were to be forced to sell to proprietors who would promise to do so. Not long after the regulations came out Reza Shah was walking through the streets of Tehran, accompanied by the acting mayor, and asked, ‘Why do these ugly, one-story shops remain? I have told the military to force the owners to add another story or have their shops destroyed. ..’ [he asked the acting mayor to take it in hand]. Within a few weeks sections of the avenues looked as if they had been bombed from the air.²

Today much of this seems unnecessarily destructive, but it is too easy to deplore it in retrospect. At the time Robert Byron, on observer very sympathetic to the historic past, commented:

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At present, though the Governor has ambitious plans, only one boulevard has been driven through the old labyrinths. Lovers of the picturesque deplore even this. But it is a boon to the inhabitants, who now have somewhere to walk, breathe, meet each other, and survey the distant mountains.\footnote{Byron, \textit{Road to Oxiana}, p 180.}

While Tehran was dreaming of London and Paris, major provincial cities dreamt of Tehran.\footnote{Modarres, \textit{Modernizing Yazd}, p 4.} According to Modarres these cities (and especially Yazd, of which he writes), see the opulent west through its manifestation in their capital, and reproduce it in a sort of second order caricature – tall buildings without adequate sewerage systems, lifts which don’t operate, an electricity supply which frequently fails, and kitchens unequipped for local cooking practices.\footnote{Modarres, \textit{Modernizing Yazd}, p 6.}

\textit{construction}

Iran is one of the great earth building nations. The great poet, Firdausi, in his epic, the \textit{Shahnameh} describes how the hero Jamshid (son of the first man) ‘taught the unholy demon tribe to mingle water and clay, with which formed into bricks, the walls were built, and then high turrets, towers and balconies, and roofs, to keep our rain and cold and sunshine’.\footnote{Quoted by Simpson, ‘Mud’, 1892, p 698, and in turn in Beazley & Harverson, \textit{Living with the Desert}, pp 12-13.} Consistent with this the oldest physical remains of buildings at Sialk, which in the sixth millennium replaced huts made from tree branches are of mud brick. These are not rectangular, but oval and irregularly formed by hand, with thumb prints which Pope naively interprets as a device to improve the bond of the mortar.\footnote{Pope, \textit{Persian Architecture}, p 15.} They are broadly comparable with examples from Jericho, of the seventh millennium, and Mureybet, of the sixth millennium BC.

Pope is even more at sea when he says that ‘heavy clays ... at various places ... encouraged the development of the most primitive of all building techniques, \textit{pisé} – moulded mud, compressed as solidly as possible and allowed to dry.’\footnote{Pope, \textit{Persian Architecture}, p 9.} Firstly, clay is the one material which cannot be used for \textit{pisé} (because it shrinks and cracks); secondly, \textit{pisé} is not a primitive method, as it relies upon extremely sophisticated carpentry for the formwork, and thirdly it is not common in Iran, and especially not at early dates, for it originates in north Africa.

Mass mud (or cob) and mud brick (or adobe) are the usual forms of earth building, as rammed earth (\textit{pisé}) is a method rarely used on the plateau. For cob walls (\textit{gel}) the earth is very thoroughly mixed with the water and with
short bits of straw by being trodden by bare feet. Or the mud may be made
into balls which are tossed up and packed together on the wall (and in rare
instances in the Khorasan the mud balls are contained in timber formwork).\textsuperscript{1}
Surprisingly, this system of tossing up mud balls is much the same as was
traditionally done in the Marche region of Italy.\textsuperscript{2}


\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{1} Beazley & Harverson, \textit{Living with the Desert}, p 17.
\textsuperscript{2} Enrico Quagliarini, ‘Earth Constructions in the Marche Region (Italy): Building
\end{footnotesize}
The rectangular mud brick, formed in a mould, appeared in the fourth millennium, and Pope claims it as an Iranian invention, which is quite erroneous.\(^1\) Moulded slabs of earth, so large as to need two men to lift them, have been found in the remains of houses at Catal Hüyük, southern Turkey, dating from about 5700 BC, and also at Eridu in Irak.\(^2\) In the north of Mesopotamia the first sun-dried bricks appear in about 5,000 BC, and in the south they appear in the Ubaid period.\(^3\) Iranian mud bricks are shaped more

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1. Pope, *Persian Architecture*, p 15; Pope, *Introducing Persian Architecture*, p 5. Leonard Woolley, ‘Recent Excavations at Ur’, p 579, claimed to have found flat square bricks in Mesopotamia of a date earlier than the plano-convex ones, but the silence of subsequent scholarship on the matter indicates a lack of support for this unlikely proposition.
like thick square tiles than western bricks.\(^1\) This tradition of flat squarish plates was the dominant one in Mesopotamia and most of the Middle East, though not in northern Anatolia or the bulk of Europe, where block-like forms, sometimes resembling the modern western brick, predominate. The flat plate form is much better adapted than the block for the construction of pitched vaults. The standard or commonly employed bricks were square, in the Il Khanid period 200-210 x 50; and in the Timurid 240-270 x 40-70.\(^2\) One of the earliest detailed illustrations of Persian construction is a painting by Bihzad of the building of the castle Khavarnaq at al-Hira, Eastern Iran, around AD 1495, and it appears to show the mixing and placing of mud brick of the square plate type (visible at the top right).\(^3\)

Earthen walls are particularly vulnerable to attacks of various sorts. From ancient times until the Qajar era buildings were constructed without excavated foundations, and with no protection against rising damp. This resulted in salt penetration and the destruction of the mortar, and sometimes the bricks, causing the gradual ruin of many buildings.\(^4\) Earthquakes have been a major source of destruction, and for this reason lengths of timber are sometimes built into adobe walls to take tensile stresses,\(^5\) just as is done in southern Turkey.

Roofs of the Plateau buildings are of two kinds. Where timber is available they are flat, with timber joists supporting thick layers of mud on boarding. Elsewhere mud brick or baked brick have been used structurally to roof buildings of every kind.\(^6\) A similar timber-framed flat roof is found in the step villages, discussed above, as well as the very different steep shingled roof of the Caspian region.

Baked bricks generally follow the form of unbaked bricks. The standard or common bricks, continuing into the twentieth century were square, though with a considerable variation in sizes as well as variations in colour.

Earthen walls need to be surfaced on the inside if they are not to produce dust, and on the outside if they are subject to wet weather or other attacks (such as cattle licking them for salt). At Sialk, in the fifth millennium BC, the interiors were finished with iron oxide mixed in fruit juice.\(^7\) It was the Parthians who first made widespread use of stucco, both carved and painted, and these techniques were to more fully developed under the Sassanians and later in Islamic Persia.\(^8\) In 1905 Napier Malcolm (writing from his experience in Yazd) wrote:

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You will find three styles of wall in Persian houses. Sometimes the rough mud is coated over with a smoother surface, either clay and chopped straw, or clay and sand, and the brown colour is left unchanged. In fairly good houses this style is often thought good enough for the summer portico. Very often the angles of the mouldings are pointed with white gypsum, and when ornamental designs in the same fashion are added, the effect is exceedingly pretty. But generally the living rooms in a Persian house are entirely whitened with gypsum, and a moulded design, about an eighth of an inch thick is made in the centre of the ceiling. These complicated and accurate designs are produced by the natives with no better tools than a chisel and a bit of string...".


Historically gypsum (plaster of Paris) or *gach* was apparently much preferred to lime for mortar, partly because it gave a more rapid set for arches and vaults, and that preference continue into modern times. But lime was also used, and Jean Chardin described a durable waterproof mixture:

In all houses, and even in the meanest, there are Basons of water, the Make whereof is very strong, build with Bricks, overcast with a cement call’d *Ahacsia* [*ahak e siyah*], i.e. black Lime, which, in process of time, becomes harder than Marble; They make that Cement with very fine Ashes, taken out of the Hearths of Baths, mix’d with half the Quantity of quick Lime, and with a kind of Down beaten very well together for a whole day, as tho’ they would make an Amalgamation; that Down grows on top of some Reeds, and it is so light, that it is carry’d away with a Breath.2

Stone construction is the exception rather than the rule, though black and white limestones of high quality are used at Pasargadae and Persepolis.3 Predominant at Persepolis was the local bluish-grey marly limestone of the Kuh-i Rahmat mountain.4 The tools used in the quarries are said (on the basis of insufficient evidence, but convincingly enough) to have been mainly powerful picks or pick-hammers and strong points struck by hammers of varying weights. Trenches, some 400-500 mm wide, were cut down to the desired depth on three or four sides of the block which was to be detached. Then, it is claimed, slots were cut in the bottom of these trenches, often in a special groove, in order to ascertain the direction of the split – whatever that may mean. In these slots, it is claimed, wooden wedges were inserted, which were made to swell by soaking them with water.5

In fact it is doubtful whether there is any evidence of this technique in Iran: it is simply that since Clark and Englebach claimed to have found it in Egypt, others (in this case Nylander) have persuaded themselves of its existence elsewhere.


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Before the time of Cyrus finely dressed and jointed stone was unknown. In the 8th to 6th centuries BC large boulders or roughly dressed stones were laid directly on the ground to form a low wall. Flat stones were placed under each column and the rest of the column base made up of mud brick and plaster. Wood was used for columns, rafters and door lintels; mud brick for upper walls, arches and vaults; baked brick seldom used. At Pasargadae, for the first time, the stones of the Tall-I Takht were fitted without mortar, using anathyrosis. Smooth bands are left around three sides of each joining surface, and the central parts left rough and slightly recessed. Vertical joints were bridged by a pair of iron clamps set in lead in a dovetail recess. There were lifting bosses on the vertical faces, designed to be struck off as the work was dressed to its intended finish, consisting of a drafted margin about 50 mm wide and a slightly raised, carefully pecked central panel. These techniques are essentially those which had evolved in Greece and Ionia, and to some extent even earlier in Palestine, Syria, Assyria and Urartu, where bossed and drafted masonry was quite common throughout the first millennium BC. The standard claw or toothed chisel, which had appeared in Greece in about 570 BC, was not yet in general use in Iran. The first evidence of it appears at Palace P, Pasargadae, in about 540-30, and there are also some some doubtful indications on the north-west gable of the Tomb of Cyrus.

As has been indicated, little survives of the Seleucid, or even of the Parthian period. According to Pope one of the reasons is that after the third century comparatively inferior materials were used, and there was a break in the tradition of stone construction and design, which hampered Sassanian builders. Until the end of the third century, buildings were still built from neatly bonded large-sized stones. From the beginning of the Sassanian dynasty, however, there also evolved construction techniques using plastered hardcore rubble, as at the palace of Firuzabad, built under Ardashir in 226-41.

1 Stronach, Pasargadae, p 11.
2 Stronach, Pasargadae, p 11.
3 Stronach, Pasargadae, p 11.
4 Nylander, Ionians at Pasargadae, pp 53-6.
5 Stronach, Pasargadae, p 89.
6 Pope, Persian Architecture, p 75.
The technique was also use in the palace of Shahpur I (241-72) at Bishahpur.1

This is an important question, because dressed masonry construction is not something which can be taken up at will. It depends upon a craft tradition which, once lost, can only be revived, as it was in seventh century Europe, by importing masons from elsewhere. This means that examples of ashlar construction in the Sassanian period – and there are a few – particularly demand explanation. Some ashlar construction seems to be the result of Syrian influence. In studying Palace B and the fire temple at Bishapur Ghirshman claims to recognise Roman workmanship resembling that at of Shahba (Philippopolis).2 But this is a fairly isolated example. The earlier portion of the Kalhor bridge at Mamoolan is of cut stone and thought to be Sassanian, but is a confusing structure. The pier bases are enlarged into oval plan fenders or cutwaters built of squarish stones, which may or may not be original, whereas the superstructure is crudely built of smaller rectangular blocks with wide and irregular mortar joints, and the blocks are not even tapered to form the arch.3 To the extent that this is indeed Sassanian work it is perhaps a crude continuation of the building techniques used for bridge building the fourth century by the Roman troops who had been captured by Shapur. In some cases Christians, forcibly dispersed through the Seleucid Empire, may have brought their own building traditions from Syria or Anatolia. To my eyes at least the Mar Gewargis Church at Khosrowābad, allegedly founded in 520, suggests such connections.

In the Islamic period masonry construction is still a local speciality rather than a part of the general repertoire. With the single exception of the structure within the court of the Masjid-i-Jami at Shiraz, the ten Il Khanid monuments identified by Wilber as using dressed stone are all in Azerbaijan, and were erected between 1300 and 1333.4 Supports in the eleventh and twelfth centuries in Iran are comparatively simple. Columns as such are almost non-existent; piers, circular or polygonal, are more common, frequently so massive that they come close to being walls, or rather sections of walls.5

Bier discusses the means of centering and constructing arches in the Sassanian period,6 and his diagram deserves examination – but only as a joke. It presumes the use of curved pieces of timber as the principal supports of the formwork, which is totally impracticable. It presumes that the boards which actually carry the weight of the masonry are supported in some way from the underside of the curved members – which implies fixings which can take tension, presumably screws, and in prodigal quantities at that.

The more important issue is the construction of the vault (which, in my belief, is an earlier form than the detached arch). In a desert region without much

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2 Ghirshman, *Parthians and Sassanians*, p 75.
3 Information and illustrations courtesy of Mohammad Reza Bazldjou.
timber or stone, as is true of much of Mesopotamia and Iran, the roofing of a space the biggest technical challenge – far harder than the spanning of a door or window. A barrel vault is effective in brick, or even in mud brick, but requires centering of timber or other materials. The solution is the pitched barrel vault, which is self-supporting during construction. It is not surprising that it is found in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, and at later dates in Iran and elsewhere in the Islamic world. Rather more mysterious is the alleged use of standard planks made of gypsum plaster stiffened with reeds in Iranian vaulting.1 Ribbed groin vaults set over walls are rare in Iran proper.2 Vaults consisting or radial gores are said to have suited low rooms – these ‘accordion-pleated’ domes appeared in the late fourteenth century additions to the Masjid-i Jami at Yazd.
actual roof, and this type continued in parallel with newer forms.¹ During the period the polyhedral drum gave way to the cylinder which became standard in Timurid architecture.² Quadripartite vaults built without centering are said to be unique to Iran.³ Lack of wood prohibited the systematic use of centering in general, so the masons created a network of brick ribs – generally covered up on the outside – which was slowly filled with bricks laid in a different direction. In the smaller domes, according to Ettinghausen and Grabar, the ribs were probably erected first, whereas in the larger ones they were constructed and filled at the same time. This seems somewhat dubious, and even more so is the nonsensical argument of these writers that the ribs are not ‘functional’ [meaning structural] because in the finished work they are integral with the web. While sometimes the network of ribs is simple and straightforward, leading from the base of the dome to its apex, at others it forms decorative patterns of varying complexity.⁴

¹ Golombek & Wilber, Timurid Architecture, p 112.
² Golombek & Wilber, Timurid Architecture, p 113.
³ Michell, Islamic World, pp 115, 140.
⁴ Ettinghausen & Grabar, Art and Architecture of Islam, p 286.
In classical Roman, Byzantine and Renaissance architecture, the usual way of effecting the transition from a square (or polygonal) plan to a circular dome is the pendentive. This is defined by its shape, the spherical triangle – not by its construction, which may be of corbelled stones, of voussoirs, or of monolithic concrete.

![Diagram of a pendentive; dome of the baths at Jerash, Jordan
Stewart, *Early Christian &c Architecture*, p 50; Andrew Hutson](image)

The Islamic solution, in contrast, is the squinch. This is not so much a geometric term, because squinches vary considerably in form, but a general way to describe the idea of spanning across the angle of the square plan. The idea is very basic and presumably timeless, but the Islamic source is probably the Sassanian architecture of Persia.

![Squinches of various forms.
Muqarnas work is a little difficult to explain, but it can be considered as a development of the squinch, which is a device used in the Islamic world to convert a rectangular plan into the circular base of a dome (as distinct from the Byzantine pendentive or spherical triangle). The Islamic squinch is commonly hollow in the inner exposed face, and if you build one upon another you get the decorative form known as muqarnas, and if continued across a ceiling this becomes a stalactite vault Stalactites had been used in a rudimentary form on the Gunbad-i-Qābūs of 1007, and stalactite vaults increased in popularity in the Il Khanid period. They even reached the west as in the Cappella Palatina, Palermo. They seem to have been uncommon in monumental architecture in Persia itself. The inverse of the stalactite vault is a more simple and abstract form looking like origami, and this more closely resembles the cellular Gothic vaults of central to eastern Europe.

**environmental design**

No country is more interesting than Iran in its traditional methods of trapping wind, ventilating, cooling spaces, supplying water, and storing ice.

An ice house near Yazd in plan and section. Beazley & Harverson, *Living with the Desert*, pp 51, 52

The history of irrigation begins (so far as the Middle Eastern and Mediterranean region is concerned) in Mesopotamia. Simple ‘fan irrigation’ was in use at Choga Mami on the western side of the Zagros Mountains by the first half of the sixth millennium BC, and substantial lateral canals were drawn off the river by 5000 BC. But by the Achaemenid period sophisticated water management had reached Iran. Deep canals, a stone causeway-weir and other works are found in the Marvdasht, the Plain of Persepolis, and open channels, partly rock-cut, at Achaemenid sites throughout Fars. But there is no ground for Hobhouse’s claim that the ancient Persians and Medes invented qanats. The qanat has also been claimed to have developed in north-western Persia (part of ancient Armenia) to drain mine workings, and to have become common by the C6th BC.
Whether or not this is true, it is a limited interpretation. Tunnels dug in such a way, by boring between vertical shafts, were widespread in the ancient world. Roman aqueducts are largely of this type, and the arcaded superstructures to cross valleys actually account in most cases for a small proportion of their length (those supplying the city of Rome are the exception). Some of these aqueducts, such as that at Palmyra, are in all material respects qanats. They must have continued in use in the post-Roman period, but it is not easy to indentify examples. Alastair Northedge refers to underground channels of about the 9th century AD, using the ‘same technology’ as the Iranian qanat, running off the Tigris above al-Daur near Samarra, Iraq.¹ But these tunnels did not start in the hills and are clearly not qanats. Authentic qanats seem to be later still.

¹ Northedge, ‘Creswell, Herzfeld, and Samarra’, p 74. Northedge also illustrates ‘qanats’ in a plan of the hunting palace at al-Musharrahat, p 85.
Qanats are typically five to eight kilometres in length, but one at Yazd extends 120 km from its source well, 116 m deep, to its mouth. A water finder locates a source, a trial shaft is dug, and the successful shaft becomes the mother well. A depth of fifteen to twenty-five metres is considered reasonable, and ninety metres the maximum, but at Gonabad there are three wells dug in the 13th century which are said to be 300 metres deep. A surveyor supervises the digging of guide shafts at 200-300 metre intervals. Then the diggers begin burrowing between them, bringing the soil up the vertical shafts by bucket and windlass. The tunnel usually begins at the outlet so that diggers can work in dry conditions. It is reported that very deep qanats

1 Hobhouse, Gardens of Persia, p 19.
2 Porter, Palaces and Gardens, p 22.
Persian Peregrination

may be ventilated by pairs of shafts, with a lamp at the bottom causing the air to rise in one, and creating a downdraft in the other. ¹ But while this might well be required during the excavation of the tunnel, it is difficult to believe that a lamp would be maintained on a continued basis. The geographer Henri Goblot estimated that by 1950 there were 40,000 qanats on the whole plateau, producing 600,000 litres per second. And with a total length of 400,000 kilometres, one and a half times the distance from the earth to the moon. ²


Cisterns are used in towns to store rain water or water supplied by qanats, and they are typically round, five to six metres deep, with domed tops.\(^1\) Middle class residences often have a partially buried room which opens onto a courtyard up a flight of steps. This cellar, called a *sardab* (literally ‘cold water’) has its own basin, and receives air from *bad-girs*. As it flows over the chilled water the air is cooled, exiting through interior conduits up to the rooms above.\(^2\)

\(^{1}\) Beazley & Harverson, *Living with the Desert*, p 39.


Section showing the performance of a wind catcher in a Yazdi house. Beazley & Harverson, *Living with the Desert*, p 68.
The badgirs or wind towers catch the slightest breeze and direct it into the rooms below. They range from two to six shafts. The trunk contains these vertical shafts, with air shelves to impede hot air from descending. The currents are often directed across a pool of water, which humidifies but also cools it. The warm air rises through a different shaft.¹

**gardens**

Sanguine gardenologists have created a scenario in which the Achaemenids developed a new culture of gardening; this culture has been passed on in Iran to the present day; and in the meantime it has influenced the culture of gardens in the Islamic world generally. None of those things can be proved to be false, but nor is there any particular reason to believe them to be true.

Hobhouses’s popular Gardens of Persia, is a comprehensive descriptive account with superb photographs, but tends to make everything a bit earlier than it ought to be, a bit more Persian than it ought to be, and a bit more intact than it actually is. When she refers to Pasargadae as the ‘earliest garden of which we have a record’² she must mean the earliest in Iran, for she herself knows that the Iranian gardens derive from those of Mesopotamia. But the Rocky Garden at Phaestos, Crete, is a much older garden and one of which substantial fabric remains.

¹ Burke & Elliott, *Iran*, p 257.
² Hobhouse, Gardens of Persia, p 7.
Pope claims that at Hasanlu by the ninth century BC, gardens, groves and vineyards were abundant, but the evidence for this is unclear. Our first unequivocal information on garden design comes from the Achaemenid period, and the Achaemenid gardens must certainly have derived from those of Mesopotamia. Pope has cited Gudea's Palace, temple and garden complex, of about 2100 BC, as the ultimate antecedents for Susa, and there are cuneiform records of palace gardens in Babylonia of about 1200 BC. In the first half of the first millennium, Assurnasirpal II, Sargon II and Sennacherib all created gardens, and many others followed, including the famous Hanging Gardens of Babylon. The technical details of these gardens tend to be vague, but Reade has identified a relief of the mid-seventh century BC which shows irrigated gardens. Wilber's assertion that the qanat 'appears' to date back to the Achaemenian period is quite unsubstantiated. In fact whether the Achaemenids incorporated any novel or distinctive elements of their own it is impossible to say, but the architectural eclecticism displayed at Pasargadae and Persepolis indicates that they borrowed wherever they could.

The Achaemenid love of gardens is attributed to Cyrus and Darius. Cyrus created a garden at Pasargadae and it is claimed (upon what basis I am not sure) that Darius actively promoted horticulture and agriculture, and a satrap

3 Beazley & Harverson, *Living with the Desert*, p 38.
4 Beazley & Harverson, *Living with the Desert*, p 38.
5 Stronach, 'Parterres and Stone Watercourses', p 3.
could acquire great favour by afforesting or cultivating his domain. The Persians called their parks paraidaida, the word transcribed by the Greeks as paradeisos, or paradise. This is the term used by Strabo, who describes Alexander the Great as coming upon ‘the tomb of Cyrus in a paradise’. This garden at Pasargadae has been described by David Stronach, and his plan is reproduced above. Somewhat suspiciously, since the publication of his excavation report he has added a transverse water axis to the plan, and on this basis argues that it can be seen as the forerunner of the fourfold scheme called a chahar bagh (‘four ‘garden’) which was fundamental to later Persian garden design. Thus it contributes to what is essentially a myth about the continuous evolution of the Persian garden. To divide a rectangular garden into four quarters is not a very distinctive device, and there are many European examples. If the rectangular garden at Pasargadae had also been walled, and had a pavilion at the centre it might have been more persuasive as evidence. But even if there is some basis for a connection, who knows what Hobhouse means by dating this form to ‘after the first millennium [BC]’: there is not the slightest evidence of its existence before Pasargadae. It is true enough that Pasargadae dates from after 1000 BC – but rather long after.

Apart from the plan we know almost nothing of the Achaemenid gardens, though there are some clues in Xenophon about Anatolian, Syrian and Mesopotamian gardens during the period of Achaemenid rule. In the Anabasis Xenophon refers to the palaces of the Great King, Artaxerxes, and his younger brother Cyrus, at Celenae in Asia Minor. Cyrus had a hunting park full of wild animals, through the middle of which flowed the river Maeander – but nothing is reported of any cultivation. More specifically, Belesys, Governor of Syria, had ‘a very large and beautiful park which had in it all the plants that can possibly be grown’ (which Cyrus duly ravaged and burned).

But Hobhouse claims that Xenophon refers to Artaxerxes as having gardens watered by an aqueduct, which, she asserts, is the earliest known record of gravity-fed water rills and basins arranged in a geometric system. This reference eludes me. The nearest to it that I can find refers to the army under Clearchus having crossed two canals:

The canal water was supplied from the river Tigris, and from the canals ditches were cut to extend over the country, big ones at first and then smaller ones, until in the end they were just little channels like those we have in Greece for the millet fields.

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1 Holland, Persian Fire, p 212.
2 Holland, Persian Fire, p 213.
5 Hobhouse, Gardens of Persia, p 8.
6 Xenophon, The Persian Expedition, p 21.
7 Xenophon, The Persian Expedition, p 33.
8 Hobhouse, Gardens of Persia, p 8.
Having described this typical example of Mesopotamian agricultural irrigation, Xenophon tells how the troops soon came to the Tigris and encamped outside Sittace ‘near a beautiful large park thickly planted with all sorts of trees’.¹ He does not say that this park is a cultivated garden, or that it is irrigated, and still less does he speak of gravity-fed rills or basins, but these things are possible. We already know of the irrigated gardens of Mesopotamia, and indeed of aqueducts supplying Nineveh, and the existence of Mesopotamian irrigated gardens is not in doubt. It is their adoption by Achaemenids within Iran which is at issue.

¹ Xenophon, *The Persian Expedition*, p79.
'gardens underneath which rivers flow'. Hobhouse thinks this refers to qanats,¹ which is unlikely to be the case, for the qanat is not of Arabian origin, and there were plenty of other types of aqueduct and tunnel in the Near East.

Mavash Alemi, who treats Stronach’s claims for Pasargadae with some suspicion, nevertheless says:

> The walled orchard, water channels and open pavilions can be considered the essential features of the archetypal royal garden. The recurrence in the description of later baghs of such elements as water channels, basins, fruit and shade trees, pavilions, baths and towers certainly leads us to conclude that there was some continuity in the idea of a garden through the centuries.²

And this is reasonable, in the sense that there is a significant degree of continuity between Mesopotamian gardens, of which early Iranian gardens were a subset, to Islamic gardens, of which Persian gardens are a subset.

M E Subtelny discusses medieval agricultural manuals and works on agronomy, most of which reproduce material from earlier Arabic manuals or from ancient Greek, Syriac and Pahlavi translations, though a few were clearly based on firsthand agricultural experience and observation. Even these, except for the the Iršād al-zirācā, contain nothing substantial on gardens.³

Early references to Persian gardens tell us little more than the fact that some sort of cultivated area surrounded whatever important building is the real subject of discussion. Wilber claims that the chahar bagh plan form ‘crystallised’ at least as early as the Sassanian period in the hunting park with a palace or pavilion at the intersection of the two axes. From the time of the Arab conquest, he asserts, gardens represented images of Paradise, and the cross plan with the axis longer became the standard chahar bagh. But he cites no evidence for this.⁴

One does, however, get an idea of a real philosophy of garden design when Rashid al-Din describes the bagh built for Ghazan Khan at Ujan in the Tabriz district, in about 1299-1302:

> The Padishah-I Islam previously had ordered excellent masters and expert engineers to build a golden tent and golden throne with appropriate appurtenances. … there was a most pleasant and delightful meadow enclosed by a wall [for him] to settle in. Within, there were flowing rivers and springs; they built mighty reservoirs and pools, and [all] sorts of birds found refuge there.

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¹ Hobhouse, Gardens of Persia, p 68.
² Alemi, ‘Royal Gardens of the Safavid Period’, p 72.
³ Subtelny, ‘Agriculture and the Timurid Chahārbāgh’, p 127.
⁴ Wilber, Persian Gardens, p 3.
That square, equilateral on its sides, was divided into equal-sized sections. On two sides of its marzha [raised borders between fields] willows and white poplars were planted, so that people would pass on those marzha, and no-one would pass through the middle of the meadow. There was a path for each appointed group that came there from, somewhere and left for somewhere.

And in the middle of it he ordered to be built pavilions and towers and a bath and a high building in such a manner that they might pitch the golden tent in the middle of that bagh, with the bargah [audience hall] and parasols that are appropriate to it.¹

There is no more specific evidence before the Timurid period. In the later thirteenth century Marco Polo refers to groves of date palms, though his silence on the subject of gardens speaks for itself. In Yazd a number of gardens were established in the Muzaffarid period (just before Timur) but we have only the later descriptions of them in the Tarikh-I Jadid-i Yazd, by which time many were in ruins. All incorporated a source of water, in many cases a tree-lined channel, and most had a pool or cistern. The commonest architectural feature was an elevated arcade or row of arched recesses (sabat), usually near the entrance.²

Wilber’s reconstructed plan of a garden at Samarqand, probably that known as the Rose Garden, and a more convincing alternative. Wilber, Persian Gardens, pl 15, and Miles Lewis adaptation.

Most of what we know of Timurid gardens comes from literary sources, as remains are fragmentary and illustrations in miniatures, dating from the fifteenth century onwards,³ show only that much activity took place in

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¹ Golombek & Wilber, Timurid Architecture, pp 181-2.
² Golombek & Wilber, Timurid Architecture, p 174.
³ Wilber, Persian Gardens, p xii.
But the patronage of Timur himself was a critical factor. In the later fourteenth century he established a number of gardens in his capital of Samarqand, and in 1399 he is said to have ‘moved from garden to garden’ in the city. In 1404, in his old age, Timur directed ‘architects’ from, Syria to build a palace in a garden south of one of his estates at Samarkand, the Bagh-i Shimal. In the same year, 1404, Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo, ambassador of Castile and Leon, visited Timur’s palace at Shahrisabz (probably Aq Saray), and recorded an orchard with ‘many tanks of water and of stone laid out by hand.

Clavijo visited another garden, probably the Gul Bagh, or Rose Garden, and reported:

We found it to be enclosed by a high wall which in its circuit may measure a full league around, and within it is full of fruit trees of all kinds save only limes and citron – trees which we noted to be lacking. Further, there are here six great tanks, for throughout the orchard is conducted a great system of water, passing from end to end: while leading from one tank to the next they have planted five avenues of trees, very lofty and shady, which appear as streets, for they are paved to be like platforms. These quarter the orchard in every direction, and off the five main avenues other smaller roads are led to variegate the plan.

However Wilber’s reconstruction does not seem to accord well with this description.

About ninety years later another visitor to Samarqand, Babur, listed a whole series of gardens, most of which had been first established under Timur. At Babur’s own garden on the Kabul River, south of Kabul, founded in 1508, was ‘a small hillock, from which a stream of water, sufficient to drive a mill, incessantly flows into the garden below. The four-fold plot of the garden is situated on this entrance.’ What is here rendered as ‘four-fold plot’ is apparently chahar bagh in the original, and this would seem to be one of the earliest uses of the term.

The Irshād al-zirācā, by Qasim b Yusuf Abu Basri, 1515, relates to the Herat region, and the eighth chapter is ‘On the planting of saplings, flowers, and aromatic plants in relation to each other in a chahārbāgh according to a symmetrical landscape plan.’ Subtelny has attempted a reconstruction based

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1 Golombek & Wilber, Timurid Architecture, p 174.
2 Golombek & Wilber, Timurid Architecture, p 7.
3 Golombek & Wilber, Timurid Architecture, p 8.
5 Wilber, Persian Gardens, p 28.
7 Wilber, Persian Gardens, p 34.
8 Subtelny, ‘Agriculture and the Timurid Chahārbāgh’, p 127.
in this description, and it is certainly not a *chahar bagh* in the current restricted sense.\textsuperscript{1}


But neither Samarqand nor Kabul is in modern Iran, and we cannot assume that the art of gardening was as advanced in other parts of Timur’s realm. The Hasht Behisht, or ‘eight paradises’ palace and garden at Tabriz was visited by a Venetian merchant in the 1460s. His description was more about the octagonal palace at the centre than about the garden itself, though Wilber

\textsuperscript{1} Subtelny, ‘Agriculture and the Timurid *Chahārbāgh*’, p 110.
asserts that it was on a cross plan. Garden carpets, which are sometimes cited as evidence, became significant only in the seventeenth century, and it is not until then that Persian miniatures begin to depict gardens in any detail. But by then of course gardens were common in the Islamic world generally. In fact the evidence suggests that Iran was influenced by the general garden culture of Islam rather than the reverse.

In the seventeenth century Sir John Chardin wrote, in his *Voyages en Perse*:

The gardens of the Persians commonly consist of one great Walk, which parts the Garden, and runs on in a straight line, border'd on each side by a row of Plantanes, with a Bason of water in the middle of it, made proportional in Bigness to the Garden, and likewise of two other little Side-Walks, the space between them is confusedly set with Flowers, and planted with Fruit-Trees, and Rose Bushes: and these are all the decorations they have...

The earliest detailed plans are even later, notably those of royal gardens drawn by Engelbert Kaempfer (1651-1716), a doctor and secretary in the embassy of King Charles XI of Sweden to the Persian court of Shah Sulaymen. Some of these were engraved and published in his book *Amoenitatum Exoticarum Politico-Physico-Medicarum Fasciculi v Quibus Continentur Varia Relationes*, &c (Lemgo 1712). But there more of his unpublished drawings in the British Library, as the originals of the published ones in their original form, without the engraver’s modifications. Alemi discusses them, but even at this late date none of those he illustrates is of the supposedly standard type. The nearest is a 2 x 8 grid like a double chahar bagh, but others include include a 5 x 6 grid, a T pattern with a pool at the junction, a double ring octagon, a 13 x 15 grid; and a rectangle containing an elongated octagon, linked to a 3 x 3 square.

At the beginning of the twentieth century it was much the same, though Napier Malcolm wrote more of middle class than aristocratic examples:

A bāgh is an enclosure, generally oblong, consisting of mud walls twelve feet high, surrounding a planted area. Very often a bagh contains nothing but fields of farm crops. He better class baghs belonging to the richer Persians, have in the centre a kind of summer dwelling-house, with plenty of porticos, built on a very open-air pattern. Such baghs are well stocked with fruit trees and rose bushes; there may also be few small elms, or short poplars, or perhaps some cypresses. There are not many flowers. Here, too, most of the area is given up to farm crops. Everything is laid out after the plan of a Dutch garden, but without the turf and thick foliage, and also without the

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4 Alemi, ‘Royal Gardens of the Safavid Period’, p 72.
5 Alemi, ‘Royal Gardens of the Safavid Period’, pp 82-96.
extreme trimness that we connect with such places. In the better gardens there is always a small gutter of running water, and generally an artificial tank with a stone border. This is the part of the bagh most highly prized by the natives. In Persia a small artificial channel with a stream of water about two feet across seems to give that air of distinction to a house that we expect from a well-kept lawn with goods flower-beds.¹

The fact that their antecedents are unclear does not detract from the quality of the gardens which survive. But the somewhat published exaggerated accounts of them can lead to a sense of disappointment when they are finally attained, as E G Brown found in the 1890s:

The Persians take the greatest delight in their gardens, and show more pride in exhibiting them to the stranger than in pointing out to him their finest buildings. Yet to one accustomed to the gardens of the west they appear, as a rule, nothing very wonderful. They generally consist of a square enclosure surrounded by a mud wall, planted with rows of poplar trees in long straight avenues, and intersected with little streams of water. The total absence of grass seems their greatest defect in the eyes of a European, but apart from this they do not, as a rule, contain a great variety of flowers, and, except in the spring, present a very bare appearance. But in the eyes of a Persian, accustomed to the naked stony plains which constitute so large a portion of his country, they appear as veritable gardens of Eden …²

They tend of course to be of the chahar bagh form, squarish, divided into four by watercourses on intersecting axes at right angles, often with a pavilion at the centre. There is usually a substantial wall around the outside (especially in the desert areas). Fountains are common where there is enough incline in surrounding terrain to build up a head of pressure. The water then courses through the gardens, spilling out into pipes and down little cascades, and in some places syphon systems (shotor-gelu, literally ‘camel’s neck’) cause the water suddenly to burst forth to a surprising effect, bubbling up or spouting out in jets.³ In the eleventh century the poet Azraqi described a fountain in a garden:

From a marvellous gold tap a wave flows forth,
as spotless as the soul:  
turquoise and spun silver threads swirl about
in the pool pouring from this gilded tap;
it is if some dragon, whose body is of silver and whose bones
are of turquoise,
scatters the silver he extracts from purest gold

²  Browne, *A Year Amongst the Persians*, p 95.
A garden laid out like this has more charms than Paradise itself; a pool like this is fairer than Kauthar.¹

**conservation**

Historically, the heritage of Iran has been recognised and studied more by foreigners, especially the French, than by the Iranians themselves. The first phase was, more or less inevitably, the archaeological investigation and recording of major monuments and the collection of artefacts for the Louvre and other museums. The Imamzada Yahya at Varamin, for example, had splendid tiles on the mihrab, dado, as late as the nineteenth century, but they are now dispersed in some two dozen collections.²

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This might be a case of unscrupulous looting, but in most cases this overseas collecting was the sole means by which important material would be preserved. Had it not been collected for museums it would have been sold on the private market or destroyed by war or vandalism. National claims to retain such material came later, as did the study and conservation of the more vernacular structures. Individual treasure hunting was a more damaging activity, and it seems to have been extensive. In about 1888, when EG Browne sought directions to the inscriptions at Háji-ábád, near Shiraz, a tribesman who thought he was concealing his real intention responded ‘you hope to find treasures there; many Firangis come here seeking for treasures’.

Several well-funded French expeditions to Iran during the nineteenth century resulted in sumptuous and finely illustrated volumes. Charles Texier, architect and archaeologist, went to Persia in 1839 and on his return published his Description de l’Arménie, de la Perse, &c (1842-5). Xavier-Pascal Coste accompanied a French embassy to Persia in 1840, and he was later associated with Eugène Flandin, artist and archaeologist: the two men, working sometimes together and sometimes separately, produced a number of books. Marcel Dieulafoy and his intrepid wife, Jane, excavated at Susa between 1881 and 1886 and sent back superb antiquities to the Louvre. Mme Dieulafoy’s La Perse (1886) describes their travels and adventures.

It is also ironic that while Iran seems rich in architectural treasures from its past, conservation is a concept alien to most Iranis. Mosques and other sacred buildings have been cared for out of respect for their religious significance rather than for conservation reasons, and not always in the way that a conservationist would wish. Vernacular buildings, on the other hand, survive almost fortuitously, because no-one has yet got around to demolishing them. The history of destructive raids and natural disasters has led Iranians to see their buildings as more or less ephemeral and has produced a tradition in which the idea of preserving a building, unless it is sacred, is seldom considered. Malcolm noted that ‘to the Yazdi an old house means a bad house’, and pointed out that a new house was not intended to outlive its cesspit, forty or fifty years. He expressed the opinion that two thirds of any Persian town or village was ruinous.

The processes of conservation are not so easily assessed as those of destruction. Islamic rules traditionally applied to community properties and sacred places, including the law of Vaqf, by which properties are removed from private ownership and their revenues dedicated to some public purpose, such as supporting a mosque. In the early twentieth century Islamic laws and traditions were abolished, and it is claimed that under the Pahlavis (1925-79) historical structures of particular eras, or with links to particular rulers, were deliberately eliminated. This apparently refers to Qajar relics in particular.

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1 Browne, A Year Amongst the Persians, pp 203-8.
2 Blunt, Isfahan, p 181.
Between 1930 and 1941 many historic structures were demolished, including two thirds of the Qajar structures in Tehran.\(^1\)

At the end of 1932 the first official list of heritage sites and structures contained 287 items, 82 of them pre-Islamic.\(^2\) The number of conservation projects increased from the mid-1960s into the seventies, and a new national agency was established to care for heritage. Rehabilitation plans were prepared for Tehran, Isfahan and Shiraz, and proposals were made for conserving major sites, in association with UNESCO. However the majority of conservation plans did not come to fruition, and UNESCO’s recommendations were ignored. Conservation work was concentrated on the major monuments, and in some cases historic fabric was demolished to create open spaces around them.\(^3\) But much of the conservation work that was done seems to have been exemplary, respecting the authentic fabric and intervening only the extent necessary to stabilize the fabric. At Sarvestan, for example, restoration in the 1960s by the National Organisation for the Protection of Historic Monuments of Iran consisted mainly refacing the bases of walls, filling a gap which threatened the stability of the large dome, and propping leaning walls with timber.\(^4\) This contrasts favourably with the total rebuilding of bomb damaged fabric in Europe, the arbitrary relocation of buildings to folk museums, and the quirky redecoration of buildings like Claydon Manor by the British National Trust.

Modern writers have blamed Reza Shah (1925-1941) for disrupting the traditional character of Iranian cities by his ‘authoritarian modernisation’, including the cutting of new roads through the old fabric.\(^5\) But this is somewhat disingenuous. It is difficult to name a country which has not either undergone a process of modernisation or aspired to do so. All such processes have been destructive, and many of them more so than that of Iran. And most of them, from Haussmann in Paris to Mao in Beijing, have involved driving roads through old urban areas. In Iran itself, as the same writers acknowledge, the process has continued even into the post-revolutionary period.\(^6\)

The Islamic revolution was at first attended by anti-conservation sentiments. Nationalistic evocation of the glories of Persepolis was too much associated with Pahlavis, and many felt that their own loyalty should not be to Iranian Islam, and indeed not so much the Iranian past itself as to Islamic culture at large. The war with Iraq, and the support which Iraq received from Arab nations, tended to undermine that view.

In January 1986 the Iranian Cultural Heritage Organisation (ICHO) was established, and while it has undergone a series of administrative restructurings it has developed a major thrust towards the conservation of

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1. Izadi & Sehizadeh, ‘Modernism and Conservation’, p 263.
areas rather than isolated monuments. In 1997 the Urban Development and Revitalisation Company (UDRC) was set up under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development to coordinate plans for regeneration and redevelopment. Its dominant approach has been property-led regeneration, and it has tried to attract private sector investment by promoting specific opportunities and by offering taxation incentives. In 2004 its role was changed from that of a provider to that of a regulator, and more responsibilities were devolved to local authorities.

In December 1999 the Supreme Council of Architecture and Urban Planning (SCAUP) responded to the problem of urban sprawl by issuing a new policy to

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1 Izadi & Sehizadeh, 'Modernism and Conservation', p 264.
prevent expansion and promote increased urban density. Meanwhile detailed plans prepared by UDRC in association with local authorities provided some response to local concerns and issues, such as planning blight in urban centres. While these might be potentially a threat more than an aid to conservation, they do at least require property owners to obtain a building permit before constructing, altering, repairing or demolishing a structure. Between 1998 and 2003 major municipalities redrew the boundaries of their historic cores, which might previously have been fragmented between different districts, and applied consistent controls to them. In 1999 elected city councils were established, and though their powers were limited this was a step towards a participatory system of urban administration.

18 September
Tehran

Tehran
Tehran [Map E3] originates in the village of Rey, where in the 13th century rebellious inhabitants reportedly lived in underground dwellings. Rey was sacked by the Mongols in 1220, and most of the survivors congregated in Tehran, transforming it into a moderately prosperous trading centre. In the mid-16th century its natural setting and other advantages attracted the attention of the Safavid king Tahmasb I, who laid out gardens, built houses and Caravanserais, and surrounded it with a substantial wall and towers. The earliest surviving architecture is of this period. Tehran became the capital of Iran in 1795.

The part of the city south of Jomhuuri-ye Eslami Ave, which was once the centre, is now the poorest part, but contains the National Museum, the Golestan Palace Complex, and the Tehran Bazaar.

- Tehran Bazaar
  The Bazaar (main entrance, 15 Khordad Ave) has many entrances and more than 10 km of covered stores. The present fabric dates up to two hundred years old, but the history of the market goes back almost a thousand years.

- Golestan Palace
  The Golestan Palace complex (south from Imam Khomeini Square) was built on the site of a Safavid citadel early in the nineteenth century under Fath Ali Shah (1797-1834), the second Qajar monarch. It appears to have been completed by 1806, when the ruler received the Frenchman P A

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3 Burke & Elliott, Iran, p 93.
4 Burke & Elliott, Iran, p 100.
5 Burke & Elliott, Iran, p 100.
6 Lockhart, Persia, p 30.
Jaubert, who described it. But the present structures are those of the Qajar ruler Nasser al-Din Shah (r 1848-96). It is now a museum.

- National Museum of Iran (Iran Bastan Museum, Muzeh Iran Bostan)
The National Museum is a twentieth century building designed by André Godard in a Sassanian style, and containing material from excavations at Choqā Zanbīl [Choga Zanbil], Persepolis, Ismail Abad (near Qazvin), Shush, Rey and Turang Tappeh [Tureng Tepe], as well as an important collection of Lorestan [Luristan] bronzes.

- Islamic Museum
The adjoining Museum of the Islamic Period covers Islamic calligraphy, carpets, ceramics, wood and stone carving, miniatures, brickwork, silks, textiles, and Sassanian coins. There are also 14th century wooden doors and windows.

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1 Wilber, _Persian Gardens_, p 66.
2 Burke & Elliott, _Iran_, p 101.
3 Matheson, _Persia_, p 37.
4 Burke & Elliott, _Iran_, pp 104-5.
5 Burke & Elliott, _Iran_, p 105.
19 September
Choqā Zanbīl

Shush, Haft Tappeh, Choqā Zanbīl
Fly to Ahvaz; visit Shush, Haft Tappeh and Choqā Zanbīl outside Ahvaz; drive back to Ahvaz and fly to Tehran.

Ahvāz
Ahvāz [Map D5] is a totally unattractive city with a major airport.¹

Shush [Susa]

Plan of Susa [Shush], after A Labrousse. Matheson, Persia, p 147.

Susa, now Shush [Map D4], was an important Elamite city from the middle of the third millennium, BC, but was burnt by the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal in about 640 BC, and razed by Darius after his defeat of the Elamites. He rebuilt it as his winter capital from 521 BC, and it is from this period that its importance derives. Darius’s account of its construction is quoted above.² Its main feature was a large columnar, reception hall measuring 116 by 54 metres with columns 18.5 metres feet high set eight metres feet apart, which was the prototype for the apadana at Persepolis.³ Susa remained important in the time of Alexander the Great, who married one of Darius III’s daughters

¹ Burke & Elliott, Iran, pp 219-20.
² Matheson, Persia, pp 147-152; Loveday, Iran, pp 286-9; Burke & Elliott, Iran, p 214.
here, prospered through the Seleucid and Parthian eras, and became a Sassanian capital and a centre of Nestorian Christianity. But it disappeared during the Mongol raids and was not rediscovered until the nineteenth century.

Many artefacts have been removed to museums, including one at the site itself, and there is not much to see on the ground. In 1937 the Shah visited Susa and was shown the remains of an Achaemenid audience hall and told that a piece of cement from the floor was in the Museum at Tehran. But he then learnt that columns and statuettes had been taken to the Louvre. He was furious and said ‘Those thieves took all those objects to the Louvre and left the cement for Iran.’ There is certainly some splendid material in the Louvre today. As we will probably not find the time to visit the site it will be better discuss its architecture, so far as necessary, in the context of other Achaemenian work below.

Haft Tappeh [Haft Tepe]

Haft Tappeh, site plan in 1973 after W Kleiss. Matheson, Persia, p 142

1 Matheson, Persia, pp 147-152; Loveday, Iran, pp 286-9; Burke & Elliott, Iran, p 214.
2 Wilber, Riza Shah Pahlavi, Iran, p 197.
Haft Tappeh [Map D4, 3 km off the Ahvaz-Andimeshk Highway, west of Shūshtar] is an excavated Elamite site with a UNESCO sponsored museum.₁ Excavations were begun in 1965 by Prof E Negahban of the University of Tehran, and the museum was opened in 1973. The name Haft Tappeh means ‘seven mounds’, though there were in fact more than a dozen of them, which included the remains of ziggurats about 25 metres high, royal graves, temples and palaces. Pottery as early as the sixth millennium BC has been found here, but the critical period of this site is about 1500-1300 BC, just before the peak of the Elamite Empire and the construction of Choqā Zanbīl, and it was probably the city of Tikni. Elamite architecture was generally built of unfired brick, with red bricks used for revetment, and by the twelfth century BC glazed bricks were used for decoration, blue and green at Choga Zambil and blue and yellow at Susa.²

Here there are two tombs with vaulted roofs, one of which contained twenty-one skeletons; behind is a large temple, with which were bodies in urns, or simply interred, and a sarcophagus of baked clay, bound with tarred rope. A series of great courtyards contain (or did) columns of earth left to support Sassanian skeletons of a much later date which were found in the upper levels of the site. At the Elamite level are palace buildings with walls finished in yellow, red, black and white plaster, outside of which are kitchens and wells. ³

Choqā Zanbīl [Choga Zambil]


Choqā Zanbīl [Map D4, between Haft Tappeh and Shūshtar] is a magnificent brick ziggurat, the best-preserved of the Elamite sites, and on the World Heritage list. The Elamite culture, as discussed above, was essentially

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Mesopotamian in character, and the ziggurat is a Mesopotamian form, examples of which are known at Sumer from 2200 BC.¹

Choqā is a local word for hill, and zanbīl is a basket, referring to the shape of the ziggurat mound before excavation. The ziggurat was built in about 1250 BC by Untash Gal, king of Elam, and dedicated to Inshushinak, chief god of the Elamite pantheon and patron of nearby Shush [Susa] (who is symbolised by a bull). It is 105 metres square and was built as five concentric towers, rather than in layers (as was – or so it incorrectly reported - the practice in Mesopotamia), the central tower being 28 metres square at the base and nearly 50 m high. It was entered by four monumental vaulted brick doorways, each over seven metres high, and contained a complex of tombs, tunnels and chambers. On the flat top there was originally a temple, by way of which the god would ascend to the heavens.

It is said to be built of sun-dried bricks bonded with ‘cement’ and bitumen, and faced with glazed baked bricks in blue and green. According to another account, more consistent with illustrations, it is built of remarkably well-preserved red bricks, including one course with a cuneiform inscription. It is the largest man-made structure in Iran, and better preserved any comparable structure in Iran. Around it were other structures, including three temples, within a sacred enclosure about 400 metres square. Outside this again was a larger enclosing wall, about 1200 x 800 metres. The site was sacked and pillaged by the Assyrian Ashurbanipal, when he overthrew the Neo-Elamite empire in about 640 BC. At later dates, as the area became drier, the site was supplied with water by qanats extending 45 km, of which vestiges are visible.²

¹ Pope, Persian Architecture, p 16.
² Matheson, Persia, pp 144-. See also Burke & Elliott, Iran, pp 215-16; Loveday, Iran, pp 289-90.
20 September
Mahan

Mahan, Rayen, Kerman
Fly to Kerman; drive to Mahan and Rayen; drive back to Kerman.
Overnight: Akhavan Hotel, Kerman.

Māhān

Māhān [Map H5, 35 km se of Kerman] has the Aramgah-e Shah Ne'matollah Vali, the mausoleum of a well-known Sufi poet and divine [also Nur al-Din Nimatullah], founder of the dervish order. The mystic, who came to be regarded as a saint, lived in the fifteenth century at Samarqand, then Herat, then Yazd, and spent his last twenty-five years at Mahan.¹ He died in 1431, and some of the buildings on this site were already in existence by that time, having been built by an Indian king who followed his teachings, while other buildings in the complex were built by Shah Abbas I and embellished during the 18th and 19th centuries.²

The shrine contains a series of enclosures with pools and shaded by cypresses.³ Much of the complex is Safavid, and some Qajar, but the earliest work is the dome chamber housing the sunduq of the saint, erected in 1436. The square dome chamber is crowned by an inner dome. On the exterior an octagon appears at the level of the zone of transition.⁴ Internally the exquisite prismatic plaster designs of some of the vaults⁵ put one in mind of the late Gothic cellular vaults of eastern Europe, or the geometrical decoration of Walter Griffin in Australia.

The Shrine of Niamatullah brings a sudden reprieve, a blessing of water and rustle of leaves. The purple cushions on the judas trees and a confetti of early fruit-blossom are reflected in a long pool. In the next court is another pool, shaped like a cross and surrounded by formal beds newly planted with irises. It is cooler here. Straight black cypresses, overtopped by the waving umbrellas of quicker-growing pines, throw a deep, woody shade. Between them shines a blue dome crossed with black and white spiders' webs, and a couple of blue minarets. A dervish totters out, wearing a conical hat and an embroidered yellow sheepskin. He leads the way past the tomb of the saint below the dome, through a spacious white-washed hall, to a third and larger court, which has a second and larger pair of minarets at the far end. A last formal pool, and a mighty plane tree gleaming with new sap, stand outside the last gate. The country round is covered with vineyards, fields of ninepins full

¹ Golombek & Wilber, Timurid Architecture, pp 394-5.
² Matheson, Persia, pp 270-1; Burke & Elliott, Iran, pp 319-20; Loveday, Iran, p 390 and illustration, p 7.
³ Hobhouse, Gardens of Persia, p 78.
⁴ Golombek & Wilber, Timurid Architecture, pp 394-5.
⁵ Illustrated in Ardalan, Sense of Unity, p 38.
of clay cones to support the vines, as mulberries support them on the Lombardy Plain. A high range of mountains, in a dress of snow and violet mist bounds the horizon.

While the cadent sun throws lurid copper streaks across the sand-blown sky, all the birds of Persia have gathered for a last chorus. Slowly, the darkness brings silence, and they settle themselves to sleep with diminishing flutterings, as of a child arranging its bedclothes. And then another note begins, a hot metallic blue note, timidly at first, gaining courage, throbbing without cease, until, as if the second violins had crept into action, it becomes two notes, now this, now that, and is answered from the other side of the pool by a third.

Mahun is famous for its nightingales. But for my part I celebrate the frogs. I am out in the court by now, in the blackness beneath the trees. Suddenly the sky clears, and the moon is reflected three times, once on the dome and twice on the minarets. In sympathy, a circle of amber light breaks from the balcony over the entrance, and a pilgrim begins to chant. The noise of water trickling into the new-dug flower-beds succeeds him.¹

¹ Byron, Road to Oxiana, pp 182-3.
Rayen

Since the destruction of Bam the adobe citadel of Rayen, the Arg-e Rayen, has taken its place as the prime goal of adobe aficionados. It is thought to have begun no later than AD 1000 and grown by accretion until it was abandoned in the mid-nineteenth century. The walls are 3 metres thick at the base, tapering to one metre at the top, and there are fifteen defensive towers.1

21 September
Kerman

Kermān [Kirman]

Kermān [Map H5] is one of Iran's oldest cities, and a staging post on the route to the Indian subcontinent.2 It is said to have been founded by the first Sassanian king, Ardashir I, and called Beh-e Ardashir, later corrupted to Berdeshir. It was captured by the Arabs in 642, and fortified by the Buyids. They were driven out by the Saljuqs in 1041. In 1187 Turkoman Ghuzz raiders sacked the province and transferred the capital from Kirman to Zarand. A local dynasty ruled it under the Mongols and it subsequently passed through a number of hands, being named Kirman by the Safavids.3

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1  Burke & Elliott, Iran, p 321.
2  Burke & Elliott, Iran, p 312-19. See also Loveday, Iran, pp 387 / 390; Byron, Road to Oxiana, pp 181-2. See Hutt & Harrow, Iran I, pp 126-7, for illustrations of the Khwaja Atabeg Mausoleum, not mentioned in Burke & Elliott.
3  Matheson, Persia, p 264.
• Bazar-e Sartasari [End-to-End Bazaar]
The Grand Bazaar [Tohid Square to Shobada Square] is one of Iran's oldest trading centres. The first section off Tohid Square is the 17th century Bazar-e Ganj Ali Khan. This is followed by a Safavid period courtyard, the Ganj Ali Khan Square, off which is the Hamam-e Ganj Ali Khan, now a bathhouse museum. The Bazar-e Ekhtiari leads east and becomes the Bazar-Vakil (both 150 years old), leading to the 700 year-old Bazar-e Mosaffari, showing nothing of its age. ¹

• The Bazaar-e Vakil and the Bazaar-e Ekhtiari
The open air Bazaar-e Mosafari is seven hundred years old, though little evidence of it remains, and it continues as the Bazaar-e Vakil and the Bazaar-e Ekhtiari, both of the mid-nineteenth century. The Hamam-e Vakil Chaykhaneh is a bath built in 1820, now a teahouse, and an atmospheric spot for lunch. ²

• Jamae Mosque
The Jamae Mosque [off Shohada square and the Bazaar] has four large iwans and shimmering blue tiles, and dates from 1348-9, though extensively modernised in the Safavid period and later. The entrance pishta and steeply proportioned aiwan are decorated with blue and white floral motifs, and the columns of the arch in polychrome geometric designs. ³

¹ Burke & Elliott, Iran, pp 315-16.
² Burke & Elliott, Iran, pp 315-6, 318.
³ Burke & Elliott, Iran, p 316; Loveday, Iran, p 390.
The Imam Mosque [Imam Khomeini St] is among the earlier monuments of Kermān, with a domed square mihrab room thought to date from the 11th century. The rest of the mosque, apart from some fragments, is 12th century or later. There are [or were] three fine stucco mihrabs of the

Jamae Mosque, Kerman, 1348-9: portal with tile mosaics of 1350.
Blair & Bloom, Art and Architecture of Islam, p 17
twelfth century standing under cover on the roof [permission and key required]. The mosque has suffered considerable damage over the time, including the destruction of the minaret by earthquake in the 1970s. The process of restoration and the uncovering of early inscriptions makes it interesting from a conservation point of view.

Moayedi Ice House
The Safavid period Moayedi Ice Store is a well preserved conical adobe structure, within the grounds of which are shallow channels protected by walls from the sun’s rays, in which the ice would freeze and then be moved into the store.

Gonbad-e Jabaliye [Stone Dome]
The Gonbad-e Jabaliye is a mysterious structure dated by some to the 2nd century AD, but probably of the late 12th century. It was possibly a tomb or an observatory. It is unusual in being built of stone, though the brick dome was added in the 19th century.

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1 Mathesont, Persia, pp 264-5.
2 Burke & Elliott, Iran, p 316; minaret illustrated in Hutt & Harrow, Iran 1, p 85. See also Loveday, Iran, p 390.
3 See also Porter, Palaces and Gardens, p 33; Hobhouse, Persian Gardens, p 21.
4 Burke & Elliott, Iran, p 316. Ice house illustrated in Michell, Islamic World, p 189.
5 Hutt & Harrow, Iran 1, p 43 [illustrated]; Burke & Elliott, Iran, p 317. Rahman Mehrabi tells me that ‘stone dome’, not ‘mountain of stone’, is the correct translation.
Yazd & Meybod
Drive to Meybod, then Yazd.

Meybod [Meibod; Maybod; Maybud]

Meybod [Map G4, 50 km nw of Yazd] is a mud brick town claimed to date from at least the 3rd century AD. Its sights include a caravanserai with a covered qanat, a giant Safavid period icehouse, and a circular pigeon tower which once housed four thousand pigeons,¹ and a remarkable mud brick fortress.² Amir Mozafar, whose son was to found the Mozafarid dynasty in Yazd, was buried in Meybod in 1315.³ And in 1338 its moat was expanded by Amir Mohammad.⁴

- Masjed-e Jameh [Jameh Mosque]
The masjid is some distance from the fortress and consists of a court, qiblah ivan and dome chamber, and a garm kaneh for winter use. The chronology is unclear. There is a small mud brick dome chamber of about 1320 in the corner of the court. Stylistic evidence suggests that the dome chamber, ivan and garm kaneh were built around 1405, but that their qiblah walls were modified around 1462 to accommodate semi-octagonal niches.⁵

- Shah-‘Abbasi Caravansary
The Shah-‘Abbasi Caravansary, twelve kilometres along the Ardekan-Yazd Road, is taken to date from 1654, as this date appears on the apparently contemporary Kolar cistern, opposite the entrance.

¹ Burke & Elliott, Iran, pp 266-7.
² Golombek & Wilber, Timurid Architecture, p 397.
³ Modarres, Modernizing Yazd, p 26.
⁴ Modarres, Modernizing Yazd, p 28.
⁵ Golombek & Wilber, Timurid Architecture, p 397.
Yazd


Yezd [sic] is unlike any other Persian towns. No belt of gardens, no cool blue domes, defend it from the forbidding wastes outside. Town and desert are of one colour, one substance; the first grows out of the second, and the tall wind-towers, a witness of the heat, are such a forest as a desert might grow naturally.¹

Yazd [Map G5, on the main road between Kerman and Tehran] is built on a site inhabited for seven thousand years, and is claimed to be the oldest living city on earth. It stands at the junction of the most important caravan routes from central Asia and India to the south and west. It has been known for its silks and fabrics since before the time of Marco Polo, who called it ‘the good and noble city of Yazd’, and is home to the largest Zoroastrian community in Iran. Some remains of the city walls, probably begun in 1119 and reconstructed in the fourteenth century now surround a prison.² These fortifications, as completed by the Mosafarids in the fourteenth century, enabled the city to withstand a siege of fourteen months before submitting to the Timurids [Amir Timur].³ A flood was reported to have destroyed the city in 1456, but it seems to have recovered quickly.⁴

¹ Byron, Road to Oxiana, p 180.
² Matheson, Persia, p 177; Burke & Elliott, Iran, pp 255-60.
³ Modarres, Modernizing Yazd, p 29.
⁴ Modarres, Modernizing Yazd, p 34.
Yazd is surrounded by desert, but the lofty Shir Kuh range to the south provides water through qanats up to fifty kilometres long. The mud brick old town, as it survives today, has an intricate street pattern and a forest of badgirs. Older houses in Yazd have khasinair baths, with fire chambers heating the water from beneath. The badgirs or wind towers catch the slightest breeze and direct it into the rooms below. They range from two to six shafts. The trunk contains these vertical shafts, with air shelves to impede hot air from descending. The currents are often directed across a pool of water, which humidifies but also cools it. The warm air rises through a different shaft.

Twenty-one Timurid monuments have survived, and their decoration is rather standardised. Almost without exception they have dados of hexagonal glazed tiles, usually light blue, trimmed with borders of mosaic faience. In some cases medallions of mosaic faience float against the solid blue ground. During the second half of the fifteenth century the dado became the background of the mihrab, outlined in black or executed in full mosaic faience. Minbars of tile and mosaic faience became popular, sometimes integrated with the tilework of the dado. For the mihrab itself a common practice was to use a carved stone slab, often taken from an earlier building or one that had originally been

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4 Burke & Elliott, *Iran*, p 257.
made as a grave cover. Decoration was limited to the dado level, above which the walls were simply whitewashed.1

A number of large houses of the Qajar period remain. They have no external architectural embellishment, but look inwards to a courtyard. They deal with the climate by means of tall bad-girs, successive sunbreakers, thick vaults and walls, pergolas, pools of water, cots over pools, and extensive rooftop and basement areas. They are planned according to strict geometry down to the details² and are built up from standard elements, the eivan, eivancheh [small eivan], talar [columnar porch or balcony], seh-dari [three windowed room], panj-dari [five windowed room], antechamber and hashti [square room with chamfered corners, or quasi-octagon].³

The population of Yazd grew from 63,000 in 1956 to 366,000 in 1999. According to Modarres, Yazis in the new neighbourhoods hardly visit the older ones, and if they did they would care little about their destruction.⁴

Wind towers or badgirs, of an underground cistern at Yazd. Michell, Islamic World, p 189.

- Masjed-e Jameh [Jameh Mosque]
The Masjed-e Jameh [Masjed-e Jameh St] is on the site of a fire temple, demolished for a mosque built in 1119, which was itself destroyed. The entrance portal is one of the tallest in Iran, and flanked by two 48 m minarets. The earliest parts of the present building date from 1135,⁵ and the mosque has been in continuous use since the twelfth century, and the original mosque lay north-east of the present court. But the standing remains are mostly those of the masjid as refounded in the fourteenth

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1 Golombek & Wilber, Timurid Architecture, p 195.
2 Haji-Qassemi, Yazd Houses, p 7.
3 Haji-Qassemi, Yazd Houses, pp 8, 11.
4 Modarres, Modernizing Yazd, p 6.
5 Matheson, Persia, p 178; Burke & Elliott, Iran, p 257: they say that it was was built for Sayyed Roknaddin in the 15th century, and has an inscription of that date. Wilber, Il Khanid Period, p 159, dates it to 1324 and later, then 1365. Illustrated in Byron, Road to Oxiana, facing p 184.
century. Between 1325 and 1334 a local notable, Shams al-Din Nizami, ordered a new courtyard mosque in which the dome chamber and iwan were flanked by halls. A much restored monumental portal provided a link between the old mosque and the new.¹


This is thus the earliest datable example of the arrangement with a dome chamber and iwan flanked by hall, which during the fourteenth century became the characteristic masjid design of the entire Yazd region, with a domed summer sanctuary and one or more long rectangular prayer halls referred to as winter masjids. There is extensive use of transverse vaulting in the prayer halls, and there is remarkable glazed tile decoration. But it is difficult to distinguish original work from the restoration.

Period 1: First phase, 1324-8, includes the dome, the entrance portal and the foundations of the iwan-i maqsurah. Second phase. After 1334, completion of the iwan and some revetment.

Period 2, 1364 & 1375-6: south prayer hall, vestibule, galleries adjoining the dome chamber, filling-in the alcoves of the dome chamber; the mosaic faience mihrab; reconstruction of the entrance portal and revetment (now mostly lost).

Period 3, 1406-17: north prayer hall and its vestibule and communicating galleries, Quranic inscriptions in the iwan and court, marble minbar.¹

- Ab-anbar

The reservoir with four *bad-girs*, illustrated by Porter, is possibly that referred to by Burke & Elliot as being in a lane off Fazel St.²

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² Burke & Elliott, *Iran*, p 262.
Bogheh-ye Sayyed Roknaddin [Mausoleum of Sayyed Roknaddin, Rukn ad-din] 
Near the Masjid-i-Jami[off Masjed-e Jameh St] is the tomb of Sayyed Roknaddin, dating from 1325.¹ It houses the remains of a local Islamic notable, Bogheh-ye Sayyed Roknaddin Qazi, and has a beautiful blue-tiled dome, though the interior stucco is deteriorating.²

• Yazd Water Museum
The Yazd Water Museum [Amir Chakmaq Square] is in a restored mansion with qanats beneath it, and has clear displays explaining the qanat.\textsuperscript{1}

\textbf{Lari-ha house, isometric diagram. Haji-Qassemi, \textit{Yazd Houses}, p 60.}

\textbf{Lari-ha house, section. Haji-Qassemi, \textit{Yazd Houses}, p 55.}

\textsuperscript{1} Burke & Elliott, \textit{Iran}, p 260.
Lari-ha house, views of the panj-dari off the main courtyard. Haji-Qassemi, *Yazd Houses*, p 56.

- **Lari-ha house [Khan-e Lari]**
  The Lari-ha house, Yoozdaran Alley, Fahadan District, was built in about 1875 by Haj-Gholam-Hossein Molla-Zainal, patriarch of the Lari-ha family, and in modern times acquired by the Iranian Cultural Heritage Organisation and converted to be its Yazd office. There are a large and a small courtyard, with the main entrance giving access to both of them, and there are a number of basement areas separate from each other and reached by individual stairs. There are also *badgirs*, traditional doors, stained glass windows, arches and alcoves.\(^1\)

- **Zendan-e Iskander [Alexander's Prison]**
  The spuriously named Alexander's Prison is a 15\(^{th}\) century domed school building with a deep well in the courtyard (claimed in a Hafez poem to have been built by Alexander as a dungeon), and contains a display on the city of Yazd.\(^2\)

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1. Haji-Qassemi, *Yazd Houses*, pp 52 ff; see also Burke & Elliott, *Iran*, p 260, where it is dated to about 1860.
• Duvazdah [Davazde] Imam Tomb [Tomb of the Twelve Imams]
The Tomb of the Twelve Imams [almost next door to Alexander's Prison, ask a local for a key] dates from the 1036-7 and is inscribed with the names of the Shi'ite imams, but is now seriously deteriorated. There are early and striking squinches made up of three arched panels, blending upwards to carry the ring of the dome; a quilted style stucco panel above the mihrab; and the remains of a fine painted ceiling.¹

Here, according to Pope, the ancient problem of setting the dome on a square is all but perfectly solved. In earlier solutions the zone of transition was narrow and compressed, obviously only a mechanical adjunct without beauty or character in its own right. But here this zone is fully developed, equal in height and in aesthetic function to the dome above and the chamber below, and in visual terms is actually the dominant member of the ensemble.²


Chaqmaq Mosque: view and The the *tekiye*, nd Yazd, Lockhart, *Persia*, pl 90.

• Amir Chakhmaq complex
Within the Amir Chakhmaq complex [Amir Chakhmaq Square] the *tekiye* (a building used in rituals commemorating the death of Imam Hossein) is one of the largest hosseiniehs in Iran, with rows of perfectly proportioned sunken alcoves.³

¹ Matheson, *Persia*, p 179. See also Burke & Elliott, *Iran*, p 260.
- **Saheb A Zaman Club Zurkhaneh**
  The Saheb A Zaman Club Zurkhaneh [just off the north of Amir Chakhmaq Square] is a body-building club housed within a cavernous *ab anbar* or water reservoir built in about 1580 and crowned with five *badgirs*.\(^1\)

- **Masjid Abu'l-Ma'ali, Yazd, 787/1385-6.**
  The Masjid Abu'l-Ma'ali, of 1385-6, is not important, but is the earliest dated example of the dado with mosaic tile insets, which became very common in the fifteenth century. In this case blue hexagonal tiles outlined in black faience, upon which are squares of mosaic faience set on their corners, containing simple geometric designs based on the eight-pointed star.\(^2\)

- **Bagh-e Dolat Abad [Baghe-Doelat-abad, Bagh-e Doulatabad]**
  The Bagh-e Dolat Abad [entered from the western end of Shahid Raja'i Street] was built in about 1750 by the local feudal ruler known as the ‘Great Khan’ [Mohammad Taghu Khan] for the visit of the great Zandieh ruler, Karim Khan.\(^3\) Five qanats were dug to bring water from Mehriz, 35 km to the south in the foothills of the Shirkuh Mountains. A quarter of the water was used for the garden, which had only one octagonal pool, because of evaporation, and the rest for the town. The walled garden was divided into a ceremonial reception area and a private space. A winter pavilion faced south down a long avenue flanked by pines and cypresses, and a shaded summerhouse topped by a tall badgir faced north.\(^4\) The pavilion is small, with intricate latticework and exquisite stained glass windows, and the summerhouse has Iran's tallest *badgir*, 33 metres high, rebuilt after it collapsed in the 1960s.\(^5\)

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\(^1\) Burke & Elliott, *Iran*, p 261.
\(^3\) Modarres, *Modernizing Yazd*, p 40.
• Zangiyán
The ruins of a large complex just north of the old city walls known as ‘Zangiyán (or shrine)’, have been identified as a mazar and madrasah built by Khvájeh Mu’ín al-Dín ‘Ali Maybudi, vizier of Jahanshah Qara Qoyunlu in about 1456. The mud brick walls have lost most of their plaster.¹

The Dakmeh-ye Zartoshtiyun [on two barren hilltops on the southern outskirts of Yazd] are uncovered stone towers upon which the dead were placed for the vultures to pick the bones clean as required by the tenets of Zoroastrianism, though they have not been used since the 1960s. At the foot of the hills are disused Zoroastrian buildings including a well, cistern and two small badgirs.¹ After the rise of Shi’ism the Safavids appointed officials to supervise the Zoroastrians, and though segregated they were tolerated and even protected.²

### 23 September
**Shiraz**

**Abarkouh, Pasargadae, Shiraz**

Drive to Shiraz via Abarkouh & Pasargadae.

**Abarkūh [Abarqu, Abarquh, Abarkouh]**

Abarkūh [Map F5, sw of Yazd towards the Shiraz-Esfahan road] was already a prosperous city on an important caravan route when it was seen by the geographer Istakhri in AD 950.³ Butt by the twentieth century it was merely a desolate and sparsely populated village on a crossroad connecting the Yazd-Kirman road with the Esfahan-Shiraz road.⁴ The Mausoleum of Pir Mamza Dabz Push has a lovely stucco mihrab of the twelfth century. Other sights are the Khan-e Aghazadeh, a restored Qajar mansion; and a huge ice house.⁵ The Gunbad-i-Sayyidun and Gunbad-i-Sayyidun Gul-i-Surkhi, both of about 1330 were reported in 1955 to be almost entirely destroyed.⁶

- **Masjid-e Jameh**

The Masjid-e Jameh is a four iwan mosque said to be of the Saljuq period and later,⁷ though Wilber dates it to 1337-88.⁸

- **Gonbad Ali [Gunbad-e Ali]**

The Gonbad Ali is dated 1056-7 by Kufic inscriptions under the cornice and above the entrance. It is the earliest octagonal tomb tower in southern Iran, built of heavy rubble and roofed with a low dome, in appearance resembling the Yazid tower at Ray.⁹

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⁵ Burke & Elliott, *Iran*, p 267.
Masjid-i-Nizamiya
The portal of the Masjid-i-Nizamiya dates from about 1325.¹


Pasargad [Pasargadae]


Pasargardae [Map F5] is the palace in the Murghab Plain built by Cyrus the Great (r 550-529 BC) from about 546, supposedly on the site where he defeated the Medes in 550 BC. The Greek name Pasargadae is thought to derive from the original name, Pasragada, which may have been that of the main Persian tribe. Whether its main function was administrative or religious is unclear. The plain had been populated with prehistoric communities by the fourth millennium BC, and intensive farming continued into the third, but after that there seems to have been little permanent settlement until the Achaemenian occupation.² Even the permanent residence which Cyrus built retained the character of a settlement of a nomad chief, with separate pavilions standing in a vast park surrounded by a wall four metres thick.³

The watercourses have metre square basins at about fifteen metre intervals.⁴

• Tomb of Cyrus

The Tomb of Cyrus is a simple rectangular burial chamber of white limestone on six stone tiers, and was originally surrounded by gardens. Alexander the Great was distressed, on seeing it in 324 BC, to find that his armies had looted it.¹ Matheson has likened the steps to a Mesopotamian ziggurat and the gabled roof, more tentatively, to Phrygian and Lycian funerary monuments,² but only the Phrygian suggestion is at all convincing. Ordinary steps, which is what these are, are common to most cultures, and the curved Lycian roof form, which apparently derived from thatch, is not nearly as close as the roofs of Phrygian and Urartian structures, and some early Greek temples. Curtis and Razmjou are quite incorrect in stating that examples in Asia Minor do not predate the Tomb of Cyrus.³

One cannot enter the tomb chamber itself, but the doorway retains the traces of double doors pivoting in sockets, as in almost all preceding Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Hiittite and other doors before the invention of the hinge. In the topmost stone of the gable over the door Stronach discovered the much eroded lower half of a rayed disc, which is a clue to Cyrus’s religious beliefs. The original inscription, according to Strabo, read ‘O man, I am Cyrus who founded the Empire of Persia and was King of Asia. Grudge me not therefore this monument’.⁴ (Ozymandias meets rap)

¹ Loveday, Iran, p 370; Burke & Elliott, Iran, p 284.
² Matheson, Persia, p 216.
⁴ Stronach, Pasargadae, p 27, quoting Arrian [Anabasis, VI, 29] following Aristobulus.
The demon on the door jamb at Pasargadae is the earliest Achaemenian relief and Frankfort categorises it as purely oriental in both design and style.\textsuperscript{1}


- The Palaces
The palaces [about a kilometre to the north] are Cyrus's Private Palace, on an unusual H-shaped plan, with a hall of thirty columns; and the Audience

\textsuperscript{1} Frankfort, \textit{Ancient Orient}, p 364.
Palace [or palace ‘S’], an 18 metre high hypostyle hall surrounded by balconies, from which one of the eight limestone columns survives on its unusual black limestone plinth. On this latter are bas-reliefs of partly Assyrian inspiration, and at the south-east corner a stone shaft with cuneiform inscription in Old Persian, Elamite and Babylonian, reading ‘I, Cyrus the King, the Achaemenian [built this].’¹ The central room of the audience hall or temple covered an area 69 by 39 metres.²

¹ Matheson, Persia, p 217; Frankfort, Ancient Orient, pp 351/353; Burke & Elliott, Iran, p 284; Loveday, Iran, p 371.
² Pope, Introducing Persian Architecture, p 22.
Persian Peregrination

- Prison of Solomon [Zendan-e Soleiman] & Throne of the Mother of Solomon [Takht-e Madar-e Soleiman]

To the north is the so-called Prison of Solomon, and the so-called Throne of the Mother of Solomon, which. The latter was actually a six thousand square metre citadel which continued in use into late Sassanian times. The former, which is like a squarish three storey house on a three-stepped plinth, may have been a fire temple, a tomb, a sundial or a store, but Stronach suggested that it related to temples in Urartu (and therefore had a religious rather than a funerary function). It is believed that the inhabitants made the references to Solomon at the time of the Arab conquest, to prevent their destruction.

Shīrāz

[To be seen on this and subsequent days]

We were now at that point, known to all students of Háfiz, called Tang-i-Alláhu Akbar, because whoever first beholds Shīrāz hence is constrained by the exceeding beauty of the sight to cry out in admiration “Alláhu Akbar”—“God is most great!” At our very feet. In a grassy, fertile plain girt with purple hills (on the loftier summits of which snow still lingered), and half concealed amidst gardens of dark stately cypresses, wherein the rose and the judas-tree in luxuriant abundance struggled with a host of other flowers for the mastery of colour, sweet and beautiful in the garb of spring verdure which clothed the very roofs of the bazaars, studded with many a slender minaret, and many a turquoise-hued dome, lay the home of Persian culture, the mother of Persian genius, the sanctuary of poetry and philosophy, Shīráz.

Shīrāz [Map F6] is traditionally the most sophisticated and cultured Persian city. It is the capital of the province of Fars (ancient Parsa), the homeland of the Persians. Jean Chardin, who visited Shiraz in 1674, found it full of gardens. Approaching from the Allahu Akbar Pass on the north he descended along a most beautiful wide avenue lined on both sides with symmetrically opposed gardens, each marked by a portal crowned by a semi-dome, with a pavilion above. ‘The most beautiful things at Shiraz are the public gardens, twenty in number, which contain the largest trees of their kind in the world … cypresses, plane trees … and pines.’

- Arg-e Karim Khan or Citadel of Karim Khan

1 See, generally, Stronach, 
2 Burke & Elliott, Iran, p 284.
3 Browne, A Year Amongst the Persians, pp 283-4.
4 Burke & Elliott, Iran, pp 267-9.
5 Matheson, Persia, p 208. See also Byron, Road to Oxiana, pp 140 ff.
6 Wilber, Persian Gardens, p 77.
The Arg-e Karim Khan [Shohada Square] was built in the early Zand [1750-79] period, and dominates the central city.  

- Pars Museum  
The Pars museum [in the Bagh-e Nazar or Eye-Catching Garden, Zand Boulevard] is a Zand period octagonal pavilion in which Karim received foreign dignitaries, with a stunning stalactite ceiling and exterior walls in *haft rangi* decoration, with floral motifs and hunting scenes in blue, beige, green and pink.  


- Masjed-e Vakil [Vakil Mosque, Regent's Mosque]  
The Masjed-e Vakil was begun by Karim, and is the only major mosque surviving from the late Zand period, with two vast iwans to the north and south, an inner courtyard with beautifully tiled alcoves and porches, and a 36 x 76 metre vaulted prayer hall, containing a marble minbar carved out of a monolith from Azerbaijan and forty-eight spirally fluted columns. The *haft rangi* decoration is in the same style as that of the Pars Museum. Much of the tiling was added in the early Qajar period.  

- Masjed-e Jame-ye Atigh [Masjed-e Atiq, Jameh-ye Atigh Mosque]  
The Masjed-e Jame-ye Atigh [behind the Aramgah-e Sha-e Cheragh] dates from 894, and is Shiraz's oldest Islamic structure, though what can now be seen is mostly late Safavid onwards. The turreted Khodakhaneh [House of God] was built in the mid-14th century to house valuable Qurans, and the tilework of the western walls is 16th century. In the court is an unusual structure with rubble walls lined with cut stone, built in 1351. It was badly damaged but was largely rebuilt during the repair and reconstruction of the mosque in 1944-8.  

- Madraseh-ye Khan  
The Madraseh-ye Khan [Dastqueib St, lane off Lotfali Khan St] is a theological college founded in 1615 by Imam Gholi [Qoli] Khan, governor of Fars. It has been severely damaged by earthquakes, but the portal and octagonal hall visible from the entrance survives. The entrance has unusual stalactite moulding within the outer arch, and with intricate mosaic tiling, with much use of red, unlike the tiles of Yazd and Esfahan.  

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1 Burke & Elliott, *Iran*, p 35.  
7 Burke & Elliott, *Iran*, p 273; Loveday, *Iran*, p 78. According to Loveday only the octagonal hall survives, but according to Burke & Elliott only the portal.
The Bazar-e Vakil was built by Karim Khan and has magnificent wide vaulted brick avenues.¹

¹ Burke & Elliott, *Iran*, p 272.
• Aramgah-e Shah-e Cheragh [Imāmzāda Shāh Chirāgh]
This tomb houses the remains of Sayyed Mir Ahmad, one of Imam Reza’s seventeen brothers, who was hunted down and killed by the caliphate on this site in AD 835. The present building is claimed to date from 1230-59. But Wilber finds no traces of C13th construction, and dates the bulbous dome as certainly after 1500. Most of what can be seen dates from the Qajar period, or indeed that of the Islamic Republic, for expansion continues.

Hafez’s tomb garden & kiosk, Shiraz. Hobhouse, Persian Gardens, pp 13, 89.

• Aramgah-e Hafez
The Aramgah-e Hafez [a 2 km walk or taxi ride from the centre] is the tomb of the Háfiz (Shams ad-din Muhammad Háfiz), one of the greatest poets of Iran, and author of about six hundred ghazals or romantic odes. He was born at Shiraz, exactly when is not known, and died there in 1389. He was buried at the Musalla, in the northern part of the town, a pleasure ground watered by the Roknabad, of which he was particularly fond. He wrote of it:

Bring, Cup-bearer, all that is left of thy wine!
In the Garden of Paradise vainly thou’l’t seek
The lip of the fountain of Ruknabad
And the bowers of Musalla where roses twine

OK, perhaps something is lost in Gertrude Bell’s translation.

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1 Burke & Elliott, Iran, p 272; Loveday, Iran, pp 338 / 340.
2 Wilber, The Il Khanid Period, p 105.
3 Burke & Elliott, Iran, p 272.
4 Wilber, Persian Gardens, p 79.
The tombstone was described as a ‘simple oblong block of stone’ engraved with quotations from the poet’s verses, but at the top:

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\text{Huwa’l-báki wa kull;u shey’în hálîk’}
\]
[He (God) is the enduring, and the rest passes away]\(^1\)

This tombstone was set in a small shrine by Kharim Khan in 1773, and in 1935 an octagonal pavilion was constructed over it.\(^2\)

### 24 September

**Bishapur**

**Firūzābād, Bishapur, Sarvestan, Shiraz**

Drive to Firūzābād, Bishapur, Sarvestan, and back to Shiraz.

**Sights:**

Firūzābād: Qal'eh-e Doktar [Maiden's Palace]; Ardashir's palace; city of Gur

Bishapur: excavations of Shapur's palace and Anahita's temple; **reliefs in the Chogan Gorge**; Tang-e Chogan [Shapur Cave].

? Sarvestān: Imamzada of Shaiykh Yusuf

**Firūzābād [Firuz Abad]**

Firūzābād [Map F6, south of Shīrāz], today a Qashaqai'i farming town, was an important centre on the road from Shīrāz to the port of Shiraf, built in the 3rd century AD [not BC as in Burke & Elliott] by Ardashir Babakan, founder of the Sassanian empire.\(^3\)

- **Qal'eh-e Doktar [Qaleh-i Dukhtar, Maiden's Palace]**
  
The Qal'eh-e Doktar, a three level building of rock and gypsum was was probably built by Ardashir I before his victory over the Parthian ruler Artabanus V.\(^4\) Ghirshman implies that it was in fact built as part of the strategic planning for his revolt.\(^5\)

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\(^1\) Browne, *A Year Amongst the Persians*, p 52.

\(^2\) Burke & Elliott, *Iran*, p 274.

\(^3\) Burke & Elliott, *Iran*, pp 285-6. See also Byron, *Road to Oxiana*, pp 144 ff.


\(^5\) Ghirshman, *Parthians and Sassanians*, p 123.
• Ardashir's palace
Ardashir's palace [about 2 km towards Firūzābād] has impressive iwans and domes on squinches.\(^1\) Again, according to Pope, Ardashir constructed the palace while he was still in effect a vassal of the Parthians, as a politically motivated act of defiance against the last Parthian ruler,

\(^1\) Burke & Elliott, *Iran*, p 286. See also Byron, *Road to Oxiana*, p 150.
Artabanus V. The walls are unattractively built of slabs of unworked stone laid flat in discontinuous courses with little mortar. Robert Byron commented that ‘only archaeologists see beauty in Sasanian architecture’.

*Gur [Ardashir Khurrah]*
To the south of the palace Ardashir’s city of Gur has a circular plan divided into sectors by high walls, but the only existing building is the 30 metre ‘minaret’ marking the centre.

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Bishapur

Bishapur, or Shapur's city [presumably E6, not on the map: said to be 25 km to the west of Kāzerūn, but eastwards on the LP map\(^1\)], was built in AD 266 as the capital of Shapur I, the greatest Sassanian king. It lost its importance after it was captured by the Arabs in about 637, and by the tenth century it was falling into ruins and most of the inhabitants moved to Kazerun.\(^2\) He defeated the Romans three times, and the emperor Valerian lived his last years in captivity here. Much of the city was built by Roman captives. Excavations have revealed Shapur's enormous palace, and the nearby Anahita's temple. The semicircular towers of the city wall have been restored, with protective material on top of the original Sassanian fabric, and were originally about 10 metres high, and coated with what is described as white plaster on fine, fluted stucco, with red and blue plaster in the V-shaped spaces between buttresses.\(^3\)

- Shapur's Palace and Audience Hall

Precisely what is thought to comprise the palace is not clear, but the audience hall is a cruciform space with a central square of over 21 metres and four arms, which are described a triple vaulted. Godard believed the central area to have been unroofed, in which case the arms can be seen as iwans, whereas Ghirshman, the excavator, believed it to have been domed\(^4\) (the height would be about 24 metres). The latter seems much more persuasive. A cruciform unroofed space was a rarity in antiquity, and even in later mosques the iwans are usually much smaller in

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\(^1\) Burke & Elliott, Iran, p 222.
\(^2\) Matheson, Persia, p 238.
\(^3\) Matheson, Persia, p 240.
\(^4\) Matheson, Persia, pp 238-9.
proportion to the courtyard. But the really telling evidence is the thickness of the masonry, which seems inexplicable unless it was designed (rather cautiously) to carry the weight and thrust of a dome. It is built of stone and brick rubble set in mortar.


The extensive stucco decoration provides the best extant examples of Sassanian palace decoration.\(^1\) Sixty-four elaborate niches around the walls – motifs from Greco-Roman prototypes - reflect the fact that Shapur took thousands of Roman prisoners, who did the work. They are decorated with Greek key patterns and leaf scrolls in stucco and painted in red, yellow and black.

A courtyard to the north-east was paved in stone, bordered by colourful mosaics, some of which are now in the Tehran Museum and the Louvre, Paris.\(^2\) To the north-east again of this courtyard is a structure which has been referred to (somewhat meaninglessly) as a second palace, which has niches with detailing reminiscent of Persepolis. To the south-west of the audience hall is a large rectangular hall with remains of mosaic flooring.\(^3\)
• Anahita Temple
North-west of the audience hall is a square structure, the walls of which stand to a height of 15 metres. It was once thought to have been a fire temple of the later 3rd century AD, but is now known to have been a temple to Anahita. It contained a central pool with a deep well below.\(^1\) A relieving arch over the door\(^2\) shows the influence of Romano-Syrian stonemasonry, notwithstanding the enmity between the two powers.

• Islamic building
Some way further west is an excavated Islamic building thought to have been a very early mosque-madrassah, with round columns and with a square minaret built into one wall. The elements of a stone fire altar were embedded in the structure, and Parthian material was found below the foundations\(^3\)

• Chogan Gorge
In the nearby Chogan Gorge are six large bas-reliefs commemorating Shapur's investiture and victories. About 4 km along the gorge is the Tange Chogan [Shapur Cave] with a 7 m high statue of Shapur.\(^4\)

Sarvestān [Sarvistan, ancient Khavristan]

• Imamzada of Shaiykh Yusuf [Imāmzāda Shaykh Yusūf Sarvistānī; Imamzadeh Pol]
At Sarvestān [Map F6] is an elegant tomb, the Imamzada of Shaiykh Yusuf,\(^5\) which is remarkably similar in form to a Sassanian chahar taq,\(^6\) and which Wilber dates to 1281-1349.\(^7\)

• Sarvestān 'Palace’
Six kilometres east of the town is a complex of buildings commonly taken to be of the 5th century AD and including some sort of palace, which in plan resembles the palace at Firuzabad. Pope refers to it as fifth century palace built by Bahram V.\(^8\) The main dome is of baked brick carried on corbelling, and it has been regarded as an excellent example of sophisticated Sassanian construction.\(^9\)

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\(^1\) Matheson, Persia, p 240.
\(^2\) Illustrated in Lockart, Persia, pl 45.
\(^3\) Matheson, Persia, p 240.
\(^4\) Matheson, Persia, pp 241-2; Burke & Elliott, Iran, p 286. See also Loveday, Iran, pp 371-2.
\(^5\) Hutt & Harrow, Iran 1, pp 48, 147 [illustrated].
\(^6\) Matheson, Persia, p 258.
\(^7\) Wilber, The Il Khanid Period, p 117.
\(^8\) Pope, Persian Architecture, p 259: Pope refers to Oscar Reuther as his authority.
\(^9\) Matheson, Persia, p 259.
However a study by Robert Bier has concluded that it is a fire temple rather than a palace, and is not Sassanian at all, but early Islamic.\textsuperscript{1} These changes matter less than might be supposed, for the reasons discussed below, and the details of the building still deserve attention. The walls are of mortared rubble, faced with large roughly shaped stones in regular courses. Doors are capped with arches varying from semicircular to gently parabolic, and set slightly forward on their imposts.\textsuperscript{2} There are two well-preserved domes of baked bricks, measuring 275 x 275 x 750 mm and set in a hard light grey lime mortar.\textsuperscript{3} The squinches are of a distinctive type in which two cylindrical surfaces intersect, in the manner of a cloister vault.

In construction and appearance these brick domes of Sarvistan remain as isolated examples in an area where the history of the dome in general is obscure. Architects of the Parthian period apparently preferred to roof their buildings with only simple tunnel vaults. Otherwise there are domes at Firuzabad, but nothing remains of the domes believed to have covered the great hall at Bishapur\textsuperscript{4} At Sarvistan a mound 220 metres to the north has been investigated and has revealed a thirty metre square building with a central square room or court.\textsuperscript{5}

\textsuperscript{1} Bier, \textit{Sarvistan}, especially pp 23 ff, 55 ff. \\
\textsuperscript{2} Bier, \textit{Sarvistan}, p 4. \\
\textsuperscript{3} Bier, \textit{Sarvistan}, p 5. \\
\textsuperscript{4} Bier, \textit{Sarvistan}, p 40. \\
\textsuperscript{5} Bier, \textit{Sarvistan}, p 6.
25 September
Persepolis

Persepolis, Naqsh-e Rostam, Naqsh-e Rajab, Shiraz
Drive to Persepolis, Naqsh-e Rostam, Naqsh-e Rajab, and back to Shiraz for more sightseeing. Fly to Esfehan.

Takht-e Jamshid [Persepolis]

Parsa, known in the west by its Greek name, Persepolis [Map F 6], was founded by Darius I in about 518 BC, as soon as Susa was completed, in the plain of Marv-e Dasht, near Cyrus the Great's capital of Pasargadae. It was
mostly carried on by Xerxes I (486-465) and completed by Artaxerxes I (c. 460). It was perhaps a sort of large scale summer palace, but it was deliberately remote and difficult of access, seemingly as a means of impressing especially foreign envoys. In fact A U Pope has claimed that it was a ritual city, the existence of which was kept secret from the outside world, but in fact it seems to have been purely fortuitous that no contemporary external reference to it has been found.\textsuperscript{1}

It is built on a large level platform, partly built up and partly excavated, and the base walls are of stone rather than of brick, in contrast to earlier Mesopotamian work, while the walls above were of mud brick.\textsuperscript{2} While the columns of the major spaces were of stone, use was also made of tree trunks set on stone bases and covered in painted plaster or gold leaf – these of course do not survive.\textsuperscript{3} The existence of a complex system of drainage and water channels, cut into the foundation, indicates that it was pre-planned, rather than developing by accretion.\textsuperscript{4} It measures about 450 by 270 metres. The largest structure is the Hall of the Hundred Columns, built by Xerxes, which is a throne hall 68 metres square with stone columns eleven metres high carrying, originally, a flat cedar roof. The original finishes can only be imagined today. The great wooden doors were covered in delicately patterned gold plates, there were heavy curtains of gold lace to keep out the draughts; the upper walls were decorated with glazed tiles in blue, yellow and pink, depicting lions, bulls and plants, together with some paintings on stucco; and some or all of the column bases, stone walls, bas-reliefs and column capitals were painted in bright colours.\textsuperscript{5}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{persepolis_reconstruction.jpg}
\caption{Persepolis. Reconstruction of the west façade, by F Krefter. Matheson, \textit{Persia}, p 45.}
\end{figure}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1} Matheson, \textit{Persia}, p 226. See also Frankort, \textit{Ancient Orient}, pp 353-63.
\item \textsuperscript{2} Finnegan, \textit{Middle East}, p 152.
\item \textsuperscript{3} Matheson, \textit{Persia}, p 232.
\item \textsuperscript{4} Matheson, \textit{Persia}, p 228.
\item \textsuperscript{5} Matheson, \textit{Persia}, p 229.
\end{itemize}
The terrace, āpādāna, monumental staircases and Darius's palace, or tachara, were built during Darius's reign (522-486 BC). Xerxes I (r 486-465 BC) added the Gate of All Nations and his own palace, or hadish, and began work on the Hall of a Hundred Columns which was finished in the reign of Artaxerxes I (465-423 BC). The complex was never really finished, and the so-called Palace of Artaxerxes II (r 359-338 BC) was left incomplete. Alexander the Great entered Persepolis in January 330, sacked the town and removed the treasure, but did not initially destroy the buildings. However, according to report, Alexander held a great feast and got very drunk. Ptolemy's mistress, Thaïs, speaking as an Athenian, said how marvellous it would be to burn down Xerxes's palace. Torches were called for and a garlanded procession set off accompanied by flute and pipe music. It hesitated at the palace doors, but a flatterer called out that this was a deed worthy of Alexander alone, and he cast the first torch. The rich tapestry and dry cedar beams quickly ignited, and soon the whole terrace was a raging
How the rest of Persepolis was subsequently destroyed is not known. It was only in the 17th century that travellers' reports told Europe of the existence of the site, and in the early 19th century that excavations began.2

- **Terrace**  
The terrace is built up at the south-west to about 20 metres height, of enormous stone blocks, meticulously fitted together. On top there was an enclosing wall of mud brick, 13.5 – 18 metres high, at least partly faced in polychrome glazed tiles.3

- **Grand stairway**  
The stairway at the north-west corner is the main entrance to the complex, with shallow steps to allow draped dignitaries to ascend with dignity. Fragments of a bronze trumpet, thought to have been used to herald these arrivals, are in the museum.4

View from the top of the great stair. Ferguson, *Nineveh and Persepolis*, facing p 103.

- **Gate of all Nations [Gate of Xerxes].**  
The gateway, built under Xerxes I, is guarded by winged bull-humans of Assyrian style (except that in Assyria they would have five legs, and here here here are four).5 It is inscribed in cuneiform script in the Old Persian, Neo-Babylonian, and Elamite languages:

  King Xerxes says – By the favour of Ahuramazda this Gate of All Nations I built. Much else that is beautiful was built in this Parsa, which I built and my father built.6

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1 Green, *Alexander the Great*, p 176.  
• Apadana Palace and staircase.\(^1\)
  The main feature is the staircase with its reliefs, showing at the north end
  the reception of Persians, in long robes, and Medes, in shorter ones. In
  the central panel are symbols of Ahura Mazda, and at the southern end
  twenty-three delegations bring tributes.\(^2\) The staircase has stepped
  merlons in the Assyrian-Babylonian tradition.

Reconstruction of the Apadana façade. Jamzadeh, 'The Apadana Stairway Reliefs', p 125,
from M C Root, 'The King and Kingship in Achaemenid Art', *Acta Iranica* 19, 1979, fig 11.

Persepolis. Reconstruction of the central part of the eastern Apadana stairway façade, with
the original relief panel with an audience scene of King Darius, from A B Tilia, 'Studies and
Restorations of Persepolis and other sites in Fars'. Matheson, *Persia*, p 43.

Persepolis [staircase of the Apadana]. Procession of Persian officials. Procession of

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\(^2\) Loveday, *Iran*, pp 352 / 356-7; Burke & Elliott, *Iran*, pp 281-2. A full key to the reliefs of
the south section, by Schmidt, is reproduced in Matheson, *Persia*, p 230.
Detail from ? the Great Stair. Hobhouse, Gardens of Persia, p 44.

Persepolis: lion and bull, staircase of the Apadana. Loveday, Iran, p 357.
The fluted and tapered columns of the hall are nearly twenty metres tall, but only thirteen of the original thirty-six survive, and most have lost their double bull protomes. Another thirty-six columns supported the porticoes on three sides, and the cedar ceiling beams were of cedar, ebony and teak, gold plated and inlaid with ivory and precious metals.¹

¹ Matheson, *Persia*, p 229.
Hall (or Palace) of 100 Columns.¹
This is the second largest building, measuring 70 metres square and containing a hundred stone columns. The north portico gives onto a vast courtyard, which suggests that it had a major ceremonial function.² The use of paired beasts, such as lions and bulls, is a tradition going back to the Neo-Hittites.

• Tripylon, or Audience Hall of Xerxes
This, which was possibly a private audience hall, has the columns of the eastern doorway decorated with Xerxes on his throne, borne by the representatives of twenty-eight countries, with their arms linked.¹ The staircase on the south side has been removed to the museum in Tehran.²

¹ Burke & Elliott, Iran, p 282.
² Matheson, Persia, p 232.
Tachara [Winter Palace, Palace of Darius].
The Tachara [the word, which means ‘winter palace’, appears in inscriptions on the southern door jambs] consists of a central columnar hall surrounded by rooms, and because of the highly polished stone surfaces
has sometimes been called the Hall of Mirrors. It was completed by Xerxes, and the western staircase was added by Artaxerxes III. Both staircases carry bas-reliefs of tributaries and offerings. The door jambs leading in have large bas-reliefs of the king fighting a lion, bull and chimera, and of servants carrying various objects.\(^1\) Egyptian influence is apparent, notably the *gorge cornice*.

- **Hadish**
  The Hadish [meaning 'dwelling place'] was Xerxes’s private palace. It is another square hall surrounded by rooms, this time with a portico on the north side and thirty-six columns within.\(^2\)

- **Unfinished Palace H.**
  This is attributed to Artaxerxes III.\(^3\)

- **Haremsara [Museum]**
  This was probably not in fact a harem, and may have been a storage area for the treasury. It is now an excellent small museum.\(^4\)

- **Treasury & Tombs.**

![Reconstruction of a column from the Treasury by E F Schmidt. Frankfort, Ancient Orient, p 357.](image)

Darius’s Treasury and the rock-cut tombs of Artaxerxes II and III are at the south-eastern corner. The tomb of the later Artaxerxes is believed to be modelled on those at Naqsh-e Rostam.\(^5\) The Treasury is one building where the columns were not of stone, and Schmidt’s restoration shows an

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ingenious built-up one consisting of a wooden core covered with painted plaster, and with a pattern looking very Greek.

**Naqsh-e Rostam [Naksh-I Rustam]**

![Naqsh-e Rostam: view. Curtis & Tallis, Forgotten Empire, p 15.](image1)

![Naqsh-e Rostam: Tomb of Darius. View: Loveday, Iran, p 368. Elevation and plan. Ferguson, Nineveh and Persepolis, facing p 124.](image2)

Naqsh-e Rostam: relief of the triumph of Shāhpur I over the Roman emperors Philip the Arab (kneeling) and Valerian. Loveday, Iran, p 367.

At Naqsh-e Rostam [Map F5, on the main road ne of Shīrāz] are four tombs cut into the cliff face, believed to be those of Darius II, Artaxerxes I, Darius I and Xerxes I. Below and to the left of the tombs are eight Sassanian reliefs depicting conquests and ceremonies. In front of the tombs is the Kaba Zartosht [Kab'eh-ye Zardusht, Cube of Zoroaster], once thought to be an Achaemenid fire temple, but possibly a royal tomb. It was probably built by Darius I, but the lower outer walls carry a number of Sassanian inscriptions in Pahlavi, Sassanian, Parthian and Greek characters, including a detailed account of Shahpur’s victories.¹

¹ Matheson, Persia, pp 222-5; Loveday, Iran, pp 366-9; Burke & Elliott, Iran, pp 283-4. See also Frankfort, Ancient Orient, pp 368/370. See also Frye, ‘The “Aramaic” Inscription’.
Naqsh-e Rajab

At Naqsh-e Rajab [unmarked but presumably Map F5, opposite the turn-off to Naqsh-e Rostam] are four fine Sassanian bas-reliefs of scenes from the reigns of Ardashir I and Shapur the Great.¹

26 September

Esfahan

The beauty of Isfahan steals on the mind unawares. You drive about, under avenues of white tree-trunks and canopies of shining twigs; past domes of turquoise and spring yellow in a sky of liquid violet-blue; along the river patched with twisting shoals, catching that blue in its muddy silver, and lined with feathery groves where the sap calls; across bridges of pale toffee brick, tier on tier of arches breaking into piled pavilions; overlooked by lilac mountains by the Kuh-i-Sufi shaped like Punch’s hump and by other ranges receding to a line of snowy surf; and before you know how, Isfahan has become indelible, has insinuated its image into that gallery of places which everyone privately treasures.

¹ Matheson, Persia, p 222-5; Burke & Elliott, Iran, p 284; Loveday, Iran, pp 364-5.
One could explore for months without coming to the end of [the monuments]. From the eleventh century, architects and craftsmen have recorded the fortunes of the town, its changes of taste, government, and belief. The buildings reflect these local circumstances; it is their charm, the charm of most old towns. But a few illustrate the heights of art independently, and rank Isfahan among those rarer places, like Athens or Rome, which are the common refreshment of humanity.¹

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Esfahan, engraved by Chelot, from Chardin [the minarets of the Masjed-e Shah, now Imam Mosque, are visible]. Hobhouse, Gardens of Persia, p 103.

Eṣfahān [Map E4] is one of the finest cities of the Islamic world, characterized by its blue mosaic tiles, spreading bazaar and wonderful bridges. It was said in the 16th century 'Esfahan nesf-e jahan' – Esfahan is half the world. Today it is a world heritage site and the third largest city of Iran. Its early history is unknown, but it probably existed in the Achaemenian period, as the city of Gabae, and is known to have been a provincial capital under the Parthians. The earliest remains are Sassanid. Construction boomed in the Buyid period, and by the tenth century it was a walled city with dozens of mosques and hundreds of mansions. In 1047 it became the Seljuk capital, and several prominent structures remain from the period, which ended with the Mongol conquest. Although it escaped the invasion of the Mongols, in 1235 their armies were let in by treachery. In 1397 Tamurlane slaughtered seventy thousand inhabitants.

¹ Byron, Road to Oxiana, p 174.
Only in the reign of the Safavid Shah Abbas I, from 1547, did Esfahan again become the first city of Iran.¹ Artists and craftsmen were summoned from Italy, India, and later China.² Abbas converted the irregular site of the original

² Blunt, Isfahan, p 67.
marketplace into a rectangle 570 x 175 metres\(^1\) called Royal Square or Naqsh-e Jahan Square, and now known as Imam Square. Subsequent Safavid rulers adorned the city further for a little over a century until the dynasty ended and Shīrāz became the new capital.\(^2\) According to Marco Polo the Isfahanis boiled wine, making it sweet and, they argued, acceptable under Islam for consumption.\(^3\) In 1670 the French visitor Chardin recorded that the new Isfahan had 162 mosques, 48 religious schools, 1802 caravanserai, 273 public baths, and at least 600,000 inhabitants.\(^4\)

The Great Square is called Naghshe Jahan [design of the world]. On the perimeter of the square are two mosques: the Imam, formerly the Shah Mosque, with a gargantuan doorway, and the Sheik Loftullah, where the women of the court used to worship. The Palace of Ali Qapu is a tall tottering structure within which you climb a tiled stairway to emerge upon the Verandah of the Kings, with eighteen tapering columns supporting an exquisitely frescoed ceiling, and a rear wall with frescoes of courtesans. In one of the upstairs chambers bottle motifs in the decoration suggest carousing.\(^5\) The Abbasi Hotel is a ponderous classical structure built onto the royal caravanserai.\(^6\)

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The Chahar Bagh (avenue of the four gardens) west of the Maidan, was developed from a series of vineyards. On either side, divided by descending water rills and flanked by elms and planes, were gardens such as the Garden of the Nightingale, the Mulberry Garden, the Garden of the Vineyard, the Garden of Barberries and the Octagon Garden.¹ The Chahar Bagh originally continued across the thirty-three arch Allahverdi Khan (or Sio Se) Bridge on the road to Shiraz to the vast garden or fruit forest of Hezar Jarib.²

Masjed-e Jameh, Esfahan, probable plan of C9th -10th; form in Saljuq times. Ettinghausen & Grabar, Art and Architecture of Islam, pp 210, 263

- Masjed-e Jameh [Jameh Mosque]
  The Masjed-e Jameh [Allameh Majlesi St] is a conspectus of Islamic architecture containing over twenty distinct structures, dating from the eleventh century or earlier to the eighteenth. It has been much fought over, repeatedly damaged, reconstructed, and at times all but ruined, but at 20,000 square metres it remains the biggest mosque in Iran. It seems that a large (c 140 x 90 metre) hypostyle mosque was built possibly in the ninth century, and that in the tenth, possibly under the Buyids, an additional arcade was built around the court.³ The sanctuary and mihrab room were built as an isolated kiosk by Nizam al-Mulk in about 1080.⁴

¹ Hobhouse, Gardens of Persia, p 112.
² Hobhouse, Gardens of Persia, p 113.
⁴ Burke & Elliott, Iran, pp 236-8; Matheson, Persia, pp 184-6; Loveday, Iran, pp 304-8; Hutt & Harrow, Iran 1, pp 50, 88-90, 170-1 [illustrated].
Masjed-e Jameh, Esfahan, at least early 12th century onwards: plan. Loveday, Iran, p 305.


In 1086-7 Malik Shah and Nizam al-Mulk authorised the construction of a monumental domed chamber in front of the mihrab, with the largest dome yet built in the Islamic world.\textsuperscript{1} In 1088 Nizam al-Mulk’s political rival Taj al-Mulk, built another grand though slightly smaller (10 m square) domed chamber, the purpose of which is unknown, on the same axis but outside the enclosure.\textsuperscript{2} The latter is known as the Gunbad-i-Khaki [Gunbad-i-Kharka] or Brown Dome, and though it is smaller Wilfrid Blunt regarded it as the more perfect of the two.\textsuperscript{3} It may have been designed by Omar Khayam, who was a mathematician as well as a poet, and was then living in Esfahan.\textsuperscript{4}

According to Robert Byron:

> The very material is a signal of economy: hard small bricks of mousy grey, which swallow up the ornament of Kufic texts and stucco inlay in their puritan singleness of purpose. In skeleton, the chamber is a system of arches, one broad in the middle of each wall, two narrow beside each corner, four miniature in each squinch, eight in the squinch zone, and sixteen in the squinches to receive the dome.\textsuperscript{5}

According to Pope:

> Aesthetically, the most important unit in the Jami is the small but superlative north dome known as the Gunbad-i-Kharka, dated 1088, and located at the opposite end of the central axis from the sanctuary. This is perhaps the most perfect dome known. Its solemn, memory-gripping power is not a matter of dimensions (65 feet high and 35 feet diameter) [19.5 x 10.5 m], but of design. Every feature has been meticulously studied, and with the perfection of a sonnet, fused into a

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1} Pancaroglu, ‘The Turkic Dynastic Presence’, p 74.
\item \textsuperscript{2} Ettinghausen & Grabar, \textit{Art and Architecture of Islam}, px 257.
\item \textsuperscript{3} Blunt, \textit{Isfahan}, p 43.
\item \textsuperscript{4} Matheson, \textit{Persia}, p 185.
\item \textsuperscript{5} Byron, \textit{Road to Oxiana}, pp 175.
\end{itemize}
completely unified whole. Mechanically it matches the mathematical requirements of the ideal dome, achieving an accuracy at critical points that approaches exact duplication. In each corner, four narrow arched recesses framed by slender angle colonettes, form the downward extension of the squinch. From floor level, these colonettes lead the eye swiftly up to the typical tri-lobed squinch. The squinch itself is enclosed by a larger arch that, together with identical arches along the side walls supports an octagon ring of sixteen shallow panels merged with the base of the dome.¹

The north portal has a faience mosaic inscription in kufic script with the Persian date 768 [1366].² The two large domes above the north [ne] and south [sw] ivan survive from the Saljuq period, but most of the rest was destroyed by fire and was rebuilt from 1121.³ The north ivan has a monumental porch with the Saljuqs' customary Kufic inscriptions.⁴ The south ivan was built in 1475-6, but rebuilt under Abü'l-Nasr Bahadur, known as Uzunj Hasan (r 1469-1477).⁵ It is more elaborate than the north, north, with Mongol period stalactite mouldings, fine 15th century mosaics on the side walls, and two minarets.⁶ Blunt describes it as containing the finest tile mosaics surviving from the reign of Tahmasp.⁷ The two storey loggias around the main courtyard date from the late fifteenth century,⁸ with mosaic tilework of the seventeenth century,⁹ but whether this two storey elevation reflects the original, of the ninth or tenth century, is uncertain.¹⁰ The west [nw] ivan, which has a small pavilion on top used to call the faithful to prayer, is a Saljuq construction with the original stalactite shapes remaining under decoration from the period of the last Safavid monarch, Shah Soltan Hosein, in the early eighteenth century.¹¹

Internally the room of Sultan Öljeytû (a 14th century Shiite convert: see below) contains an exquisite mihrab covered with Quranic inscriptions and floral designs.¹² It is signed by one Badr, and consists largely of Nashki calligraphy set against complex foliate scrollwork, with birders of twisting vine leaves and a panel of what are usually described as lotus flowers.¹³ According to the inscription within the head of the larger arch it was executed in 710/1310 by ‘Azad ibn ‘Ali al-Mastari with funds supplied by

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¹ Pope, *Persian Architecture*, p 107
³ Burke & Elliott, *Iran*, p 237.
⁴ Burke & Elliott, *Iran*, p 237.
the minister Sa’d Al-Haqq w’ad-din Muhammad al-Sava in the reign of Öljeytû.¹

The winter masjid dates from 1447,² and is described as a large bare low-ceilinged room with intersecting arches which run down from ceiling to floor as thick pillars.³


- **Bāzār-e Bozorg [Bāzār Qaisārieh, Great Bazaar]**
  The Bāzār-e Bozorg [from Iman square to the Jameh Mosque, main entrance by the Qeysarieh Portal, north end of Imam Square] extends from the Jameh Mosque to Imam Square, and includes fabric from the 11th century. Most of what can be seen today dates from Shah Abbas's period in the early 17th century, and includes many passages with small domes lit by oculi. The Qeysarieh Portal on Imam Square is decorated with tiles and with frescoes by Reza Abbasi of Shah Abbas's war with the Turks.⁴

- **Imam Square [Naqsh-e Jahan Square, Nagshe Jahan Square, Royal Square]**
  Naqsh-e Jahan Square, as it is more generally known, has been described at the most majestic collection of buildings in the Islamic world, and 'Naqsh-e Jahan' means ‘pattern of the world’. It was begun in 1602 as the centerpiece of Abbas's new capital and measures 512 x 163 metres, second in size only to Tiananmen Square. The goal posts were used for polo games, but the open space has undergone many changes, including the fountains added by the Pahlavis.⁵

Pietro della Valle arrived in February 1617 when the work was in progress, and the square was

2 Golombek & Wilber, Timurid Architecture, p 378.
3 Loveday, Iran, p 308.
4 Burke & Elliott, Iran, p 238; Loveday, Iran, pp 321-2.
5 Burke & Elliott, Iran, pp 238-9; Loveday, Iran, pp 309-10.
completely surrounded by finely designed symmetrical buildings, uninterrupted by streets or anything else, made with large porticoes and floors underneath for shops with diverse merchandise set out in order .... and above with balconies and windows filled with a thousand pretty ornaments ...

Around the Maidan, on four sides, flows a big channel of water, beautifully straight, lined with parapets, and accompanied on the inside by a very smooth promenade made of stone. And beyond the flowing water, towards the porticoes, extends a very dense and even row of green trees which, when they put forth their foliage in a few days’ time will, I believe, be the most beautiful sight in the world.¹

- Masjed-e Imam [Imam Mosque, Royal Mosque, Mosque of Shah ‘Abbas]

The Masjed-e Imam [Imam Square] dates from 1611-29 and is one of the most beautiful in the world, covered with rich blue tiling. There are some deliberate lapses in symmetry to reflect the creator’s humility before Allah. The portal is 30 metres tall, decorated with floral motifs and calligraphy, and with niches of complicated muqarnas, each different. The walls of the courtyard contain niches decorated with haft rangi painted tiles of deep blue and yellow. The main sanctuary has a domed ceiling with a golden rose pattern.²

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¹ Hobhouse, Gardens of Persia, p 106.
² Burke & Elliott, Iran, pp 239-40.

• Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque.

The dome is inset with a network of lemon-shaped compartments, which increase in size as they descend from a formalised peacock at the apex and are surrounded by plain bricks; each is filled with a foliage pattern inlaid on plain stucco. The walls, bordered by broad white inscriptions on dark blue, are similarly inlaid with twirling arabesques or baroque squares on deep ochre stucco. The colours of all this inlay are dark blue, light greenish blue, and a tint of indefinite wealth like wine. Each arch is framed in turquoise corkscrews. The mihrab in the west wall is enamelled with tiny flowers on a deep blue meadow.

Each part of the design, each plane, each repetition, each separate branch or blossom has its own sombre beauty. But the beauty of the whole comes as you move. Again, the highlights are broken by the play of glazed and unglazed surfaces; so that with every step they rearrange themselves in countless shining patterns; while even the pattern of light through the thick window traceries is inconstant, owing to outer traceries which are several feet away and double the variety of each varying silhouette.¹

The Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque [Imam Square], is smaller than the Imam but at least as beautiful. It was dedicated to Abbas’s father-in-law, Sheikh Lofollah, a Lebanese Islamic scholar who ran the king’s [now Imam] mosque and theological school, and has no courtyard or minarets. There is a dome clad in delicate cream tiles which change in colour with the light, a portal with splendid mosaics of arabesques and floral designs, and one of the finest mihrabs in Iran.² The entry steps are of Yazd marble.³ It is decorated internally with inscriptions by the greatest calligrapher of the Safavid period, ‘Ali Reza ‘Abbasi.⁴

• Ali Qapu Palace

The Ali Qapu ['Gate of Ali'] Palace was named by Abbas I after his hero, the Imam Ali. There was in existence the Tmurid little palace of Naqsh-i-Jihan and in the first period of Abbas’s work [1598-1606] this was heightened by several storeys and enlarged into the present Ali Qapu,⁵ intended as a monumental gateway to the palace grounds.⁶ It was one of the largest urban palaces in the world, six storeys high and 48 metres tall.⁷ Its cubical form draws inspiration from the Timurid tented pavilions rather than the great traditions of Sassanian or Seljuk architecture of the Safavid constructions across the square.⁸ Kremmer describes it as a tall tottering structure within which you climb a tiled

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1  Byron, Road to Oxiana, facing p 176.
2  Burke & Elliott, Iran, pp 240-1; Loveday, Iran, pp 314-16; 318-20. Illustrated Byron, Road to Oxiana, pp 177-8.
3  Blunt, Isfahan, p 85.
4  Hobhouse, Gardens of Persia, p 106.
5  Bly Isfahan, p 16, 77
6  Hobhouse, Gardens of Persia, p 106.
7  Burke & Elliott, Iran, p 241; Loveday, Iran, p 316. Music Room ceiling illustrated in Michell, Islamic World, p 160.
8  Hobhouse, Gardens of Persia, p 106.
stairway to emerge upon the Verandah of the Kings. This elevated terrace, with its eighteen slender columns and inlaid wooden ceiling, gives a excellent view of the square and the Imam Mosque, while the rear wall has frescoes of courtesans.\textsuperscript{1} The music room on the upper floor has a stucco ceiling modelled with the shapes of vases and other utensils to enhance the acoustics, regarded as one of the finest works of secular Persian art.\textsuperscript{2}

\textsuperscript{1} Kremmer, \textit{The Carpet Wars}, pp 377-8.

Plan of Chehel Sotun. Hobhouse, *Gardens of Persia*, p 111
• Chehel Sotun [Chihil Sotun] Palace
The Chehel Sotun [pavilion of forty pillars], Palace, Ostandari St, built by 'Abbas II in 1642-62\(^1\) as a pleasure pavilion and reception hall, in the Achaemenid-inspired talar or columnar porch style.\(^2\) It was probably part of the overall plan of 'Abbas in 1598, though actually built under 'Abbas II and reconstructed in the Safavid style in 1706, following a fire.\(^3\) The building does not have forty columns, and the name refers to the twenty poplars which originally lined the canal, plus their twenty reflections.\(^4\)

Today the palace is best known for its six frescoes, which comprise:
- The rout of the Uzbecks by the Persian Army
- An engagement between the Persians and the Ottoman Turks under Selim I
- The wars of Nadir Shah with the Indians
- 2 banquet scenes
- Shah Tamasp I receiving Humayan, the fugitive emperor of Hindustan.

When E G Browne visited in 1887-8 he was annoyed to find that the rest of the wall decorations were in the course of being painted out with brick red paint.\(^5\)

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1 Hobhouse, Gardens of Persia, p 106. The source of these dates is unclear. The building had been thought to date from the time of Abbas the Great, and the earlier part may do so, but restoration in 1948 revealed an inscription recording its completion in 1647 under Abbas II: Blunt, Isfahan, p 140.
2 Burke & Elliott, Iran, p 241.
3 Hobhouse, Gardens of Persia, p 107, 111.
4 Browne, A Year Amongst the Persians, p 218.
5 Browne, A Year Amongst the Persians, p 218.

In the gardens of the Chehul Sotun, against the northern boundary, is the re-erected and over-restored portal of the Qutbíyeh Mosque, with an inscription indicating that it was dedicated in honour of Tamasp, and the artist was Qasim of Tabriz. This is interesting because no more important monument remains from Tahmasp’s long and successful reign.¹ Also in the grounds is a surviving column from the structure called the Sar Pusideh, which was located in the vicinity of Ali Qapu. It was built for Said ad-daula Mirza, a son of the Qajar ruler Fath Ali Shah, in the early years of the nineteenth century (or it may have been a renovation of an eighteenth century structure), and it resembles a garden pavilion turned inside-out.²


- Hasht Behesht [Hashr Bihisht] Palace
  The Hasht Behesht (or ‘eight heavens’) Palace, at the end of the Chehel Sotun garden, was built under Shah Soleiman in about 1670 as a reception area for courtly entertainments within the Bagh-e Bolbol, off the Chahar Bagh. It is an octagonal pavilion with four octagonal rooms on the two levels, and has impressive mosaics and stalactite ceilings, reminiscent of the music room of the Ali Qapu Palace. The pavilion was renovated in the 19th and 20th centuries.³ According to Chardin:

  When one walks in this place expressly made for the delights of love, and when one passes through all these cabinets and niches, one’s heart is melted to such an extent that, to speak candidly, one always leaves with a very ill grace.⁴

- Hakim Mosque

¹ Blunt, Isfahan, pp 59, 142.
² Wilber, Persian Gardens, p 106.
³ Hobhouse, Gardens of Persia, p 116; also Burke & Elliott, Iran, p 242.
⁴ Blunt, Isfahan, p 151, from a translation in Curzon II, p 37.
The Hakim Mosque [Hakim Lane, east of Hakim St in the bazaar north of Imam Square, try the west, otherwise the north entrance] contains the Jujir Portal, a remnant of the 10th century Buyid Mosque, with fascinating stucco detailing combining the two decorative systems of the period. The first consists solely of stucco patterns across the wall surface, and the second is formed in the actual brickwork: this was to be perfected in the Saljuq era.¹

- **Do Minar Dardasht**
  This is a portal with a pair of crowning minarets, known as the Do Minar Dardasht, with an adjoining tomb chamber, dating from about 1330-40.²

- **Imāmzāda Ja’far**
  The Imāmzāda Ja’far, near the junction of Khiaban-i-Hafiz and Khiaban-i-Hatif, is an octagonal Mongol shrine built in 1325, externally of pale brick with mosaic-filled spandrels. It is one of many purported tombs of Ja’far, none of which actually contain his bones. It was actually built built for an ‘Alid shaykh and descendant of the fifth imam who died in 1325,³ and it suffered from over-restoration in 1950.⁴

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¹ Hutt & Harrow, *Iran 1*, p 59-61 [illustrated]; Burke & Elliott, *Iran*, p 245.


- Zayandeh River bridges
There are five Safavid era bridges over the Zayandeh (plus six modern ones) four of which are to the east of Chahar Bagh St. The Si-o-Seh Bridge [Pol-e Si-o-She] Bridge of 33 Arches, Allahverdi Khan Bridge] was built in 1599-1602 by a general, Allahverdi Khan, as both a dam and a bridge, and at 295 m is far the longest.

The Chubi Bridge [Pol-e Jubi], of 21 arches and 147 m length, was built by Abbas II in 1665 originally as an aqueduct to irrigate the gardens on the north bank. The Khaju Bridge [Pol-e Khāju], the finest of them, was built by Abbas II in about 1650, 132 m long with 24 arches, and also acting as a sluice gate, with locks to regulate the flow of water. The Shahrestān Bridge [Pol-e Shahrestān] is the oldest, with Sassanian piers and an eleven arched stone and brick superstructure believed to date from the 12th century. Blunt suggests that the design of the piers was influenced by the Roman engineers who were held prisoner in Iran with the Emperor Valerian.2

Pierre Loti wrote, of the Si-o-Seh Bridge:

We gain access to the city by a splendid and unusual bridge. It dates from Shah ‘Abbas, as does everything of luxury in Isfahan … As we arrived, a caravan was making its entry; it was a very long caravan coming from the deserts of the East whose camels all sported barbarian plumes on their headresses. On both sides of the roadway occupying the middle of the bridge and beneath the gracious arcades

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1  Burke & Elliott, Iran, pp 242-3; Loveday, Iran, pp 326.
2  Blunt, Isfahan, p 40.
decorated in earthenware there run passageways for people on foot that resemble Gothic cloisters.¹

- **Ateshkadeh-ye Esfahan [Ateshgah, Atashgah, Esfahan Fire Temple]**
  The Ateshkadeh-ye Esfahan [Saremiyeh St, 2 km west of the Manar Jomban or Shaking Minarets,² a 10 minute climb] is a crumbling mud brick structure³ which originated in Sassanian times, though there is nothing pre-Islamic remaining in the present structure.⁴

3  Burke & Elliott, *Iran*, p 244.
- Pigeon Towers
Pigeon towers can be seen especially on the Zayandeh River, south of
Ateshkadeh. These squat circular towers each housed about 14,000
pigeons, and supplied guano for the watermelon fields, though since the
advent of chemical fertiliser they are unused.¹ Surprisingly, from a western
point of view, the birds, although perfectly edible, were not used for food.

Porter, *Palaces and Gardens*, p 58


Pigeon towers are not typical of the Iranian Plateau in general, but they
have long been features in the Isfahan oasis and there are examples
elsewhere (whether they are so common around Esfahan is unclear to
me). Their purpose is to collect pigeon manure to fertilise melon fields.
Dating of them is difficult, and the only two to which a period is ascribed
are in the great royal gardens of the Hazar Jarin (thousand acres), but
they have the most highly developed plans, and are likely to be the result
of a considerable tradition.²

¹ Burke & Elliott, *Iran*, pp 244-5.
² Beazley & Harverson, *Living with the Desert*, p 103.
27 September
Kashan

Ardestān, Naṭanz, Ābyāneh, Kashan, Qom, ‘Aliabad

Ardestān [Ardistan]

At Ardestān [Map F4, nw of on the main road to Kāshān, on LP map p 222, but not mentioned; on Hutt map, p 11] are two mosques.


• Masjid-e Jameh
The important Jameh Mosque is in the style of the Masjid-e Jameh at Esfahan. It was probably built on the site of a Sassanian fire temple. The corridor leading from the south door to the mihrab room, is the oldest part, incorporated into the mosque in the twelfth century. The stucco mihrab was probably altered in the Mongol period. The brick Kufic inscription around the top of the mihrab room is dated 1158. The domed prayer hall was built towards the end of the reign of Malik Shah (1072-92), and has tri-lobed brick squinches. The four iwans around the courtyard, and the lower portion of the minaret, were built in about 1160, which is the date of the inscription on the south iwan.¹

• Masjid-e Imam Hasan
The Masjid-e Imam Hasan [in a lane southeast of the first roundabout as you come in from Natanz] is all that remains of a 12th century madreseh.² It has a portal which originally had twin minarets, probably the earliest example of this type. It dates from the late twelfth century, though the decoration and inscription are probably later.³

Naţanz

¹ Matheson, Persia, p 174; Hutt & Harrow, Iran 1, pp 40, 19-115 [illustrated].
² Hutt & Harrow, Iran 1, p 124.
³ Matheson, Persia, p 174.
Natanz [Map E4] is an old village on the slopes of Mt Karkas, some kilometres away from an underground uranium enrichment plant.\(^1\) In 1887 E G Browne met locals who spoke their own language, described as ‘Furs-i-kadím’ or ancient Persian, which was said to be distributed from Kohrúd and Natanz westwards to the mountain village of Kamsar, but was in fact much more widespread in Iran. He found that it had some relationship with the dialects of Natanz and Yazd.\(^2\) Whether this Kohrödi tongue is in any real sense ancient Persian is unclear, and claims that it is still spoken today also seem suspect.

Within the town is a complex of structures bearing dates from 1304 to 1325 with an uncoordinated plan and changes of level which suggest that the site was occupied earlier. Schroeder believes the octagonal sanctuary of the mosque is a form which pre-dates the four ivan plan. The tomb tower of Shaykh ‘Abd as-Samad has an eight sided tent dome which was once entirely covered in light blue glazed bricks.\(^3\)

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\(^1\) Burke & Elliott, *Iran*, p 232.
\(^3\) Wilber, *Il Khanid Period*, p 133.
• Masjed-e Jameh [Masjid-i Jumeh, Jameh Mosque]
The Masjed-e Jameh [2 km walk from the usual bus park] is one of the best preserved Ilkhanid buildings. Although it had been begun in the Saljuq period as an octagonal kiosk, it was extended by the Mongols in 1304-5, into a four iwan mosque, and the minaret was completed in 1324. It is richly decorated with mosaic and has a tall portal with turquoise and black and white tiled calligraphy.¹

• Kanehgah [Kanequah]
The beautifully tiled portal of a former kanegha or monastery of 1317 adjoins the mosque.²

¹ Matheson, Persia, p 172; Burke & Elliott, Iran, p 232; Hutt & Harrow, Iran 1, p 53 [niche illustrated].
² Matheson, Persia, p 172; date from Pope, Persian Architecture, plate IX.

• Imamzadeh-ye ‘Abd al-Samad
The Imamzadeh-ye ‘Abd al-Samad [adjacent] is the tomb of an 11th century Sufi mystic, dating from 1307-9.1 ‘Abd al-Samad, the leading Suhrawardi shaykh of the day, died in 1299. In the decade following the vizier Zayn-al-Din Mastari (who was to be put to death in 1312) refurbished the town’s congregational mosque and built an attached tomb, minaret and hospice.2 The minaret, of 1325, has a shaft decorated with glazed bricks.

Shah-‘Abbasi Caravansary, entrance pórtico seen from the courtyard. Haji-Qassemi, Caravansaries, p 22.

• Shah-‘Abbasi Caravansary [Kooh-Ab Fortress]
The Shah-‘Abbasi Caravansary, at the beginning of the Kashan Road, was commissioned by Ab-ol-Ma’ali, known (for short) as Aqa Mirza ebn-e Asad-ollah ebn-e ‘Ali al-Hosseni an-Natanzi, in 1613, and is built of stone and brick.3

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1 Matheson, Persia, p 172; Burke & Elliott, Iran, p 232; Hutt & Harow, Iran 1, p 177, illustrate the minaret.
3 Haji-Qassemi, Caravansaries, p 20.
Ābyāneh [Ab-Yaneh; Abianeh]

Ābyāneh [Map E4, west of the Naţanz- Kāshān road] is an ancient village at the foot of Mt Karkas, with steep twisting lanes and red mud brick houses with lattice windows and wooden balconies. It was almost completely Zoroastrian until the time of the intolerant Safavid Shah Ismail I, in whose reign most of the inhabitants emigrated to India or to Yazd. The costumes and way of life of those remaining are largely unchanged, and they still speak Middle Persian, a form of Farsi otherwise long extinct. There is an 11th century Jameh Mosque, the 14th century Imamzadeh-ye Yahya, with a conical blue tiled roof,

1 Burke & Elliott, Iran, pp 231-2.
2 Matheson, Persia, p 296.
and the Zeyaratgah shrine.\textsuperscript{1} The Masjid-i-Miyān-i-Deh bears the date 1301 on the portal.\textsuperscript{2}

**Kāshān**

Kāshān [Map E3-4, on the Tehran-Kerman Road, but midway on a north-south line between Tehran and Esfahan] became famous for textiles, pottery and tiles during the Seljuk period [1051-1220]. The town was taken and reportedly destroyed by the Mongols in 1224, but the mihrab of the Masjid-i-Maydan is dated 1226,\textsuperscript{3} suggesting that normal life continued. However Kāshān was largely destroyed by earthquake in 1779 and rebuilt during the Qajar period.\textsuperscript{4} It is, like other desert towns, characterized by *badgirs*, or wind towers.\textsuperscript{5}

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\textsuperscript{1} Burke & Elliott, *Iran*, pp 231-2.  
\textsuperscript{2} Wilber, *Il Khanid Period*, p 133.  
\textsuperscript{5} Matheson, *Persia*, p 169.
Plan of part of the bazaar, Kashan. Ardalan, *Sense of Unity*, p 16

- **Bazaar**
The multiply domed roof of the bazaar [off Alavi St] dates from the 19th century, and is worth inspecting from on top.¹

¹ Burke & Elliott, *Iran*, p 227.
Amin-od Dowleh Timcheh, Kashan Bazaar, Faramarzi, * Beauties of Iran, p 152. 
• Hammam-e Sultan Mir Ahmad
  The Hammam [off Alavi St] dates from the mid-16th century, and in the
  second room seventeen layers of plaster have been removed to reveal the
  original sarough, made of lime, soy flour, egg white and milk.¹

• Khan-e Borujerdi [Khāneh-ye Borujerdihā, Borujerdi house]
  The Khan-e Borujerdi [off Alavi St] was built in 1855 by Haji Sayyed Hasan
  Natanzi, a merchant of Kashan, supposedly as the dowry of his daughter.
  Of the two sections of the house, the andaruni and the biruni, only the
  former is open, including the ornate courtyard, pool and fountain, and at
  the end of it the two storey reception hall entered through an iwan with
  stalactite mouldings. The interior plaster mouldings of flowers and birds
  are of particular delicacy. From the roof, if access can be obtained, can be
  seen one of the distinctive six-sided badgirs which have become the
  symbol of Kāshān.²

¹ Burke & Elliott, Iran, p 228.
² Hobhouse, Gardens of Persia, p 150; Burke & Elliott, Iran, p 227; Loveday, Iran, p 297.
Hobhouse and Loveday refer to the badgir, but Burke & Elliott refer to badgirs in the
plural.

- **Imamzadeh-e Habib Ibn-e Musa [Imâmzâda Habib ibn Mûsâ]**
  The Imamzadeh-e Habib Ibn-e Musa [off Iman Khomeini St] is the tomb of the saint Habib Ibn-e Musa, dating from 1269-72. The sarcophagus of the saint is (or was) overlaid with groups of lustre painted hexagonal and star tiles separated by light blue glazed double pentagon tiles, but the faience mihrab is now in the Tehran Museum.¹ The mausoleum also contains the tomb of Shah Abbas I, who chose to be buried here because of his reverence for the saint, but apart from the black porphyry tombstone all the original fabric has been stripped out.²

- **Shahzadeh-ye Ibrahim [Mausoleum of Ibrahim]**
  The Shahzadeh-ye Ibrahim (not to be visited but visible on the main road to Fin) is a shrine built in 1894, with European-style painted ceilings, colourful tiles, tall minarets and a distinctive conical roof.³

¹ Wilber, *The Il Khanid Period*, p 112.
² Burke & Elliott, *Iran*, p 228.
⁴ See also Ardalan, *Sense of Unity*, p 34.
The Bagh-e Tarikhi Fin [9 km sw of central Kāshān at the end of Amir Kabir St] is one of the finest in Iran.

According to tradition, the garden already existed by 1504, when notables entertained Shah Isma‘īl in a walled garden enclosure here. Later Shah ‘Abbas I developed a royal residence, bathhouse and central pavilion. Originally the channels were arranged in three regular rectangles, two longitudinal to either side of the channel running down the central avenue, and one across the whole width of the garden to the rear. Each of this trio of oblongs was divided in turn into parterres segmented into quarters; the main avenues were lined with cypress and plane trees. The parterres married stands of fruit trees (almond, apple, cherry, and plum) and flowers (the most often quoted include lilies, irises, eglantine, rosebushes, jasmine, amaranth, gillyflower, narcissus, violets, and tulips). The finishing touch to this delightful garden was afforded by a hammam built at the time of the garden’s foundation, though enlarged thereafter and completed in the Qajar period.

The garden has ample water bought by qanat and flowing in by way of the octagonal pool called Lasegah, with turquoise tiles, at the south end. The fountains are worked by gravity, bubbling through turquoise tiled channels between cypress probably planted in the 17th century. An ingenious feature is a pool whose base is pierced with 171 openings interconnected by pipes – whence its name Howz-e jush, the ‘boiling basin’.

1 Burke & Elliott, Iran, p 229.
2 Hobhouse, Gardens of Persia, pp 93-4.
3 Porter, Palaces and Gardens, p 112.
4 Burke & Elliott, Iran, p 229.
5 Hobhouse, Gardens of Persia, pp 93-4. Porter gives 1849 for the assassination.
6 Hobhouse, Gardens of Persia, p 93.
7 Porter, Palaces and Gardens, p 40.
As it appears today, the garden has undergone countless transformations and additions; the most important date from the Qajar era, during which Fath ‘Ali Shah had a new avenue laid out parallel to the principal one and to the eastern third of the ensemble; this new avenue leads up to a pavilion abutting the south wall of the garden. Fath ‘Ali Shah’s successor, Muhammad Shah, had another pavilion erected, similarly leaning against the rear wall in line with that of Shah ‘Abbas: it opens in the centre into a *shah-nesin* from which the prince was able to enjoy the perspective of the garden leading up to the entryway, only partially interrupted by the arcades of Shah ‘Abbas’s own pavilion.¹ The tilework has been restored, and the original buildings at the central intersection of the water rills were replaced by Fath ‘Ali Shah between 1799 and 1834² with the present two storey central pavilion, the *Shotorgaluye Safavi*.³ The Prime Minister, Mirza Taqi Khan, known as Amir Kabir, was murdered in 1852 in the bathhouse in the garden to the left of the gateway, by order of Naser ad-Din Shah.⁴

**Qom [Qum, Ghom]**

Qom [Map E3], is after Mashhad, the second holiest city in Iran, the seedbed of the 1979 revolution, and the home of the hard line clerics who have ruled since 1980.⁵ From the first centuries of the Arab conquest of Iran, Qumm attracted the descendants of the family of ‘Ali. Its designation as a holy city, however, dates from the burial there of Fatimah, the daughter of the Imam Musa Kazim and sister of the Imam ‘Ali Riza, whose tomb was the raison d’être for the holy city of Mashhad. Known as Ma’sumah (the Innocent), Fatimah had been on her way from Iraq to visit her brother in the vicinity of Mashhad, when she took ill at Qumm and died there not long before AD 818. Shortly thereafter, her brother stated that whoever visited her tomb would go to heaven, and soon a shrine, called the Astaneh (threshold), grew up at the site.⁶

Today there are seventeen Mongol tomb towers and shrines,⁷ which include:
- Imāmzāda Ja’far, 1278-9 [?1268-9]
- Imāmzāda Mūsā Mobarq, c 1300
- Imāmzāda ‘Alī ibn Ja’far, 1300, 1339
- Imāmzāda Ahmād Qāsem, 1308
- Imāmzāda Ibrāhīm, 1321
- Harath ibn Ahmād Zayin al-‘Abdīn, c 1325
- Gunbad-i-Sabz, c 1330-65
- Imāmzāda Ibrāhīm, c 1330-65
- Imāmzāda ‘Ālī ibn ‘Abd I-Ma’ālī ibn ‘Ālī Sāfī, 1359-60.⁸

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³ Burke & Elliott, *Iran*, p 229.
⁵ Burke & Elliott, *Iran*, pp 222-4.
Later examples include:
Shahzadeh Ahmad b. Muhammad, late C14th
Shahzadeh Muhammad, late C14th
Shahzadeh Ibrahim, of 1321 and 1402-3
Shahzadeh Zayd b. Zayn al-'Abidyn, of 1445-8

In 1965 there more than 600 qanats at Qom, though only from one to ten kilometres long.¹

¹ Porter, Palaces and Gardens, p 22.
• Hazrat-e Masumeh [Hazrat-e Masoumeh; Shrine of Fatima al-Ma'suma]
The Hazrat-e Masumeh is the burial place of Imam Reza's sister Fatemeh, who was interred here in the 9th century. Much of what can be seen today was built under Abbas I and the other Safavids, and it was restored and embellished by the Qajar ruler Fath Ali Shah, who gilded the dome. The second low dome is modern.¹

• Masjed-e Jameh
The Masjed-e Jameh has a Saljuq dome, and had an inscription dating it to 1133-4, though this has disappeared.²

• Imāmzāda Ja'far,
The Imāmzāda Ja'far, of 1278-9, is located 1 km west of the centre of town. It is relessly constructed using many recycled bricks, and has an octagonal tent dome. Sections of the inscription are in the museum at Qumm.³

• Imāmzāda Mūsā Mobarq
The Imāmzāda Mūsā Mobarq, [Tomb of ‘Musa veiled’], of about 1290, is part of a complex to the south of the town.⁴

• Imāmzāda 'Alī ibn Ja'far
The Imāmzāda 'Alī ibn Ja'far, of 1337-9, has an interior decorated with polychrome plaster in low relief.⁵

• Imāmzāda Ahmad Qāsem
South of the town in the area of the former Qal’a gate, is or was the Imāmzāda Ahmad Qāsem of 1308, ruined, but containing fairly well-preserved inscriptions in kufi, nakshi and thulth scripts.⁶

• Imāmzāda Ibrāhīm, 1321
The Imāmzāda Ibrāhīm of 1321 is one of two or three tombs on the outskirts confusingly called Imāmzāda Ibrāhīm.⁷

• Gunbad-i-Sabz, Qumm⁸
The Gunbad-i-Sabz, of about 1330, has twelve sides rather than the usual eight.

¹ Lockhart, Persia, p 30; Burke & Elliott, Iran, pp 222-4.
² Matheson, Persia, p 167.
³ Wilber, Il Khanid Period, p 113.
⁴ Wilber, Il Khanid Period, p 120.
⁵ Wilber, Il Khanid Period, p 132.
⁶ Wilber, Il Khanid Period, p 138.
⁷ Wilber, Il Khanid Period, p 178
⁸ Wilber, Il Khanid Period, p 178
- Tomb of Harath ibn Ahmād Zayin al-‘Abedīn
The tomb of Harath ibn Ahmād Zayin al-‘Abedīn, Qumm, to the east of the town, dates from about 1325.¹

The Imāmzāda ‘Ali ibn Abī’l-Maʿali ibn ‘Ali Safi dates from 1359-60, and is the earliest of four mausolea signed by the craftsman ‘Ali b. Muhammad b. Abu Shuja. One face has been repaired and the present dome is modern, replacing what is presumed to have been a pyramidal [?conical] roof.²

- Shahzadeh Ahmad b. Muhammad
The Shahzadeh Ahmad b. Muhammad, of the second half of the fourteenth century, is outside the Rayy gate north of the town, between the Chahar Imamzadeh and the Shahzadeh Sayyid ‘Ali (a modern structure).³

- Shahzadeh Muhammad
Shahzadeh Muhammad, of the late C14th, is north-east of the town, about 100 metres from the Khak-I Faraj.⁴

- Chahar Imamzadeh
The Chahar Imamzadeh, of the fourteenth to fifteenth centuries, is north-east of the town, not far from the Shahzadeh Ahmad b. Muhammad.⁵

- Shahzadeh Ibrahim
The Shahzadeh Ibrahim, of 1321 and 1402-3, is outside the Kashan gate.⁶

date gate.

- Madrasah Ghiyathiyah,
The Madrasah Ghiyathiyah of 1426-7, is east of the river, at the eastern end of an avenue cut through the old town.⁷

- Shahzadeh Zayd b. Zayn al-‘Abidayn
The Shahzadeh Zayd b. Zayn al-‘Abidayn, of 1445-8, is east of the town in the court of the Chehil Dukhtar.⁸

- Masjid Panjeh ‘Ali
The Masjid Panjeh ‘Ali dates from 1445-8.⁹

¹ Wilber, Il Khanid Period, p 167.
² Wilber, Il Khanid Period, p 185; Golombek & Wilber, Timurid Architecture, pp 399-400.
³ Golombek & Wilber, Timurid Architecture, pp 402-3.
⁴ Golombek & Wilber, Timurid Architecture, pp 403-4.
⁵ Golombek & Wilber, Timurid Architecture, p 403.
⁶ Golombek & Wilber, Timurid Architecture, p 404.
⁷ Golombek & Wilber, Timurid Architecture, p 404.
⁸ Golombek & Wilber, Timurid Architecture, p 404.
⁹ Golombek & Wilber, Timurid Architecture, pp 404-5.


¹ Identified in Wilber, *The Il Khanid Period*, pl 50: Pope describes at is the Tomb of Imad ad-din, Qum, 1390.
'Aliabad

'Aliabad [Map E3 nw of Qom, sw of Savēh] was the site of a major 19th century caravanserai, though it is unclear what remains of it.

Deir-e Gachin

Deir-e Gachin [not on map or in Burke & Elliott, but Loveday says between Rey and Qom] is one of the oldest and largest caravanserais, built in the Sassanian period. It is a perfect square of 135 metres, with forty guest rooms around a courtyard, sixty stables behind, and circular corner towers. A ruined complex 300 metres to the north-east may have been a Nestorian monastery. The name 'Deir-e Gachin' means 'monastery of chalk'.¹ I have not identified this caravanserai,

28 September
Taq-e-Bostan

Taq-e-Bostan, Bisotun & Khosrowabad
Fly to Kermanshah, visit Taq-e-Bostan, Bisotun & Khosrowabad Church; drive back to Kermanshah; fly back to Tehran.

Tāq-e Bostān [Taq-I Bustan] Taq-e Bostan


¹ Loveday, Iran, p 200; also illustration, pp 197-8.
The central iwan: Mackintosh, 'Taq-i Bustan and Byzantine Art', p 152

Relief of the investiture of Ardashir II, who is shown at the centre receiving the crown from the Ahura Mazda. Loveday, *Iran*, p 275

Tāq-e Bostān (the arch of the garden) [Map C3], on the northern edge of Kermanshah, is a cliff face carved with Sassanian bas-reliefs in and around a pair of carved alcoves. The smaller and older of these shows Shahpur II and III. The newer and larger one has scenes of hunting on elephants and the coronation of Khosrow [Khusraw] II (591-628). To the right of the niches is an older relief of Shah Ardashir II (r 379-383). In the garden are fragments of statuary, and capitals known to have come from Bisotun.¹ Robert Byron commented:

¹ Matheson, *Persia*, pp 130-1; Burke & Elliott, *Iran*, pp 197.
More than one sculptor must have worked in the grottoes at Tak-i-Bostan. The angels over the arch have Coptic faces, and their drapery is as low and delicate as a Renascence bronze medal.¹

Bisotun [Bisitun, Behistan]

Bisotun: plan by Prof Wolfram Kleiss. Matheson, Persia, p 125.


¹ Byron, Road to Oxiana, p 50.
Bisotun [Map: on the Kermanshah-Hamadan road], within the ancient Media, is famous for its bas-reliefs of 521 BC, and takes its name from Baga-stāna [place of the god].\textsuperscript{1} The mountain of Bisotun had witnessed the two critical points in Darius the Great’s advance to the throne, the execution of Gaumata and the defeat of Phraortes.\textsuperscript{2} Here Darius [561-486 BC] determined to record for posterity his campaign against ‘the Lie’ or the heresy of foreign nations. And here the Persian language was for the first time turned into written form and transcribed onto the rock face.\textsuperscript{3}

The Bisitun carving, showing epigraphs in Old Persian, Elamite and Babylonian. Curtis & Tallis, \textit{Forgotten Empire}, p 22

According to Darius’s inscription, which is largely confirmed by Herodotus, a Magian called Gaumata pretended to be Bardiya, son of Cyrus, though in fact Bardiya had been killed by his brother Cambyses. Gaumata (whom Herodotus calls Smerdis) was generally believed, and seized control of the kingdom. Darius prayed to Ahura Mazda and then, with five other men, succeeded in killing Gaumata, retrieving the throne, and returning to the people the chattels, herds, servants and cattle which Gaumata had taken from them.\textsuperscript{4} In one relief a giant Darius is shown crushing Gaumata beneath his foot, while a line of tethered liar kings extended in front of him, the last of them Scythian with a pointed hat.\textsuperscript{5} In another relief Darius receives chained supplicants while a

\textsuperscript{1} Frye, \textit{Hertage of Persia}, p 88S.
\textsuperscript{2} Holland, \textit{Persian Fire}, p 54.
\textsuperscript{3} Holland, \textit{Persian Fire}, p 54.
\textsuperscript{4} Frye, \textit{Hertage of Persia}, pp 89-90.
farohar, or winged Zoroastrian angel, hovers above. Surrounding cuneiform inscriptions assert Darius’s greatness in Elamite, Akkadian and Old Persian. It was the casts of these, taken by Henry Rawlinson in 1835, which subsequently enabled the scripts to be interpreted – the Persian equivalent of the Rosetta Stone.¹ Their good state of preservation was due to the fact that Darius had the steps below smoothed away to make the reliefs inaccessible.² To the westward is a statue of Hercules of 148 BC (though the head is modern), and then an eroded Parthian relief of Mithridates II [124-87 BC], partly overlaid by a 17th century Arabic inscription.³

Robert Byron reported ‘Bisitun delayed us a minute, with its great cuneiform inscription cut like the pages of a book on the blood-coloured rock’.⁴ But there is much else at this location. In the Donkey Cave [Ghar-e Khar] are deposits dating from at least the Middle Palaeolithic, about 35,000 years ago, and a smaller cave at the base of the cliff has even older deposits, and traces of Neanderthal occupation. There are the remains of what may have been a 6th century BC terrace with a mud brick balustrade, upon which, it is surmised, were altars to the gods of fire and water. At the foot of the mountain are the

¹ Matheson, Persia, pp 126-9; Burke & Elliott, Iran, p 199.
² Frye, Heritage of Persia, p 88.
³ Matheson, Persia, pp 127-9; Burke & Elliott, Iran, p 120.
⁴ Byron, Road to Oxiana, p 51.
remains of a Sassanian stoneyard with about a thousand unfinished blocks, many with mason’s marks. Alexander the Great passed through in 324 BC, though there is no physical evidence of this. There are the remains of a Sassanian bridge, other Parthian remains, and on the track out a fine caravanserai of 1685, behind which are the remains of Sassanian palace.¹ The caravanserai built under Abbas I was replaced by the present Safavid structure in 1681-5.²

Remains of the Mar Gewargis Church, Khosrowābad, allegedly found in 520. Loveday, *Iran*, p 269.

**Khosrowābad [Khusrow Ābad, Khosrowa]**

Bishop John of Persia, the bishop of Khosrowābad [Map C3, man road west of Kermanshah] is supposed to have attended the Council of Nicaea, and the Mar Gewargis Church, according to an inscription in the western entrance hall, was founded in 520. Loveday makes somewhat cryptic reference to building work in the 11th Century, restored in 1845, but destroyed by earthquake in 1930. Despite this, the remaining fragment looks quite consistent with a 6th century date, and bears comparison with 4th to 6th century buildings in Syria and Anatolia.³

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² Kleiss, ‘Safavid Caravanserais’, p 27.
³ Loveday, *Iran*, p 269; Burke & Elliott, *Iran*, do not mention the building or the village.
Philippopeion or temple of Julius Marinus, Shahba (Philippopolis), 2nd half 3rd century, corner detail showing coursed ashlar. Kalybe (termination of the forum) Shahba, 2nd half 3rd century, detail of the quasi-coursed masonry. Miles Lewis.

Tepidarum of the baths, Shahba (Philippopolis), 2nd half 3rd century, showing rubble concrete vaulting. Church 1, Binbirkilisse, Turkey, c AD 600, showing rubble concrete vaulting. Miles Lewis.
29 September
Maragheh

Kandovan, Bonāb and Maragheh
Fly to Tabriz; drive to Kandovan, Bonāb and Maragheh; drive back to Tabriz.

Kandovan
Kandovan [Map C2, south of Tabriz] is a village of houses and barns carved out of the rock face, reminiscent of Cappadocia.¹

Bonāb
Bonāb [Map C2, near Marāqeh: not to be confused with the Bonab near Zanjan], has the Mehrabad Mosque [near the junction of Bahonar and Ghom Sts] within which are wooden columns with coloured faceted capitals dating from 1083.² There are a number of charming pigeon towers in the surrounding fields.³

Marāqeh [Marāgheh, Maragha]
Marāqeh [Map C2] has four tomb towers. A fifth, the Timuruid Quch-I Burj or Koi-Burj, collapsed in 1938 has been converted into a brick kiln.⁴

- Gonbad-e Sorkh
The Gonbad-e Sorkh [Gunbad-I Surkh, Qermez, Red Tower, near the base of the Koi Burj], is the oldest, completed in of 1148 for Prince Abd-al Aziz ibn Mahmud ibn Sayyid, of the local Ahmadi dynasty. It is a square carrying an octagon on stalactite squinches, and is built of soft red brick with inset terra cotta panels, and some highlights in glazed turquoise tiling. It has been claimed to be the most beautiful known example of brickwork. and it was one of the earliest in Iran to be decorated with glazed tiles.⁵

- Gonbad-e Arqala
The Gonbad-e Arqala [in the gardens near the Gonbad-e Sorkh], is not one of the iconic tombs, but is a domed stone building housing a collection of gravestones and pre-Islamic totems.⁶

¹ Burke & Elliott, Iran, pp 155-6.
² Burke & Elliott, Iran, p 145.
³ Matheson, Persia, p 97.
⁴ Matheson, Persia, p 98. See also Byron, Road to Oxiana, p 61.
⁵ Matheson, Persia, pp 98-9; Burke & Elliott, Iran, p 145; Hutt & Harrow, Iran 1, pp 116-7.
⁶ Burke & Elliott, Iran, p 145.

Gonbad-e Kabud, Marâgheh, 1197: detail of turquoise blue inlay. Hutt & Harrow, *Iran 1*, p 44.
- **Gonbad-e Kabud**
The blue-tiled Gonbad-e Kabud [Blue Tower] of 1197 [in the grounds of the girls' school on Kh Ohadi, access by permission of the headmistress or the caretaker] is mistakenly believed to be the tomb of the sister of Hulagu Khan. It originally had a pyramidal roof with a stalactite cornice and a band of inscription. It is the most ornate of the tomb towers, each side treated as if containing a mihrab capped with muqarnas, and the main shaft of the tower covered in an intricate network of dressed brick like a lace mantle, with the turquoise decoration above.1

- **Burj-e Khohar-e Hulagu Khan**
The Burj-e Khohar-e [or Madar-e] Hulagu Khan [next to the Gonbad-e Kabud] of 1167-8, is equally misleadingly named for the sister or mother of Hulagu Khan (for the Mongols reached Marâqeh only in 1256). It is circular, with an elaborate doorway, partly hidden by a modern wooden one.2

- **Gonbad-e Qaffariyeh [Khafariyeh, Ghaffariya]**
The Gonbad-e Qaffariyeh tomb tower was finished in 1328: It is the tomb of a Mamluk emir, Shams-od-Din [Amir Shams ad-din Qarasunqar], who had been Viceroy of Egypt and then of Syria, before fleeing to Iran in 1311. The paired polo sticks in the decoration are his heraldic bearings.3 Sultan Oljeitu Khodâbandeh gave Marâqeh to him, and he lived there until his death. The tomb stands on a dressed stone base and has a main façade in glazed black, white and blue tiles, similar to those which had appeared a few years earlier at. Solṭānīyeh4

- **Joi Burg**
The Joi Burg [Khoi Burg] dates from about 1330.5

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30 September
Tabriz

Tabriz, Takht-e Soleiman, Soltaniyeh, Zanjan.
Drive to Takht-e Soleiman, Soltaniyeh, Zanjan.

The Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, from Rashid al-Din, Jami’ al-tawārīkh, Tabriz, c 1315.

Tabriz

Tabriz [Map C1/C2, main road from Tehran to Azerbaijan], is an Azari city.¹ A Franciscan monk said of Tabriz ‘a nobler city and better for merchandise than any other which this day existed in the whole world and containing a great store of all kinds of provisions and goods, the whole world having dealings there.’² But although it flourished in Saljuq times, and then became for a time the Ilkhanid capital of Iran, very little early fabric survives.³ The Masjid-i Jami dates from 1453-1478, but the remains are disappointing.⁴ Near the end of the fifteenth century the rulers of the White Sheep dynasty made Tabriz their capital and created the Hasht Bihest [Eight Paradises] garden.⁵

- Bazaar
The Bazaar covers seven square kilometres and contains twenty-four caravanseras and twenty-two timches [domed halls], some of the fabric dates from before AD 1000, and much of the brick vaulting is said to be of the 15th century.⁶

¹ Burke & Elliott, Iran, pp 146-54.
³ Matheson, Persia, p 77.
⁴ Golombek & Wilber, Timurid Architecture, pp 409-10.
⁵ Wilber, Persian Gardens, p 87.
⁶ Burke & Elliott, Iran, p 150.

Tilework. Faramarzi, * Beauties of Iran*, p 66
The Blue [Kabud] Mosque [Masjid-I Muzaffiriyyah]
The Blue [Mosque, Imam Khomeini St. was built in 1465 and over the next twenty-five years covered in blue majolica tiles and calligraphy. It collapsed in an earthquake in 1773 and was reconstructed only from 1951 onwards. Original fabric can be seen in the rear main entrance portal, which survived the earthquake. It is known within Iran as the Turquoise of Islam, Firuzeh-I Islam, because of its extraordinarily rich and varied faience decoration, in which dark blue predominates. The colours of the mosaic faience include light blue, dark blure, white, green, yellow and brown. The plan is unique in Iran, the closest parallel being the Masjid-i Shah of Mashhad, and its precise function is not clear.

Azarbayjan Museum
The Azarbayjan Museum, Imam Khomeini St, west of the Blue Mosque, has finds from Hasanlu, some dating as early as 3000BC.

Arg-e Tabriz [the Ark; Masjid-i-Jami’ of Aali Shah]
The Arg-e Tabriz [off Imam Khomeini St], was built as the Masjid-e Ali Shah in about 1310-20, but by the 1950s has been converted into a cinema. The qibla wall remains as a fragment of impressive plain brickwork, from what was originally a building lavishly decorated in gold ad marble.

1 Burke & Elliott, Iran, p 150.
3 Matheson, Persia, p 79. Burke & Elliott, Iran, pp 144, 150-1 oddly refer to this as a remnant of the early 14th century citadel.
4 Wilber, Il Khanid Period, p 146.
5 Burke & Elliott, Iran, p 151.
• Kalisa-ye Maryam-e [Church of St Mary]  
The Church of St Mary [near the Bazaar], reportedly dates from the 12th century, and was mentioned by Marco Polo in 1294. Some portion of the original walls and vaulting may remain behind the altar.¹  

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¹ Matheson, *Persia*, p 79. See also Burke & Elliott, *Iran*, p 151.
The vault spanned 30 metres and was hailed as larger than the famous arch of Ctesiphon, and the walls were marvellously revetted in marble and tile. But today only the baked brick remains.¹

Takht-e Soleiman [Takht-e Suleyman]

Takht-e Soleiman, Mongol Period. After the German Archaeological Institute, Istanbul. Matheson, Persia, p 101.

Takht-e Soleiman, plan of the fire temple after Naumann.² Bier, Sarvestan, p 86.

Takht-e Soleiman, reconstruction of the wall. Pope, Introducing Persian Architecture, p 37.

Takht-e Soleiman [map C2, near Noşratābād, due east of Zanjan] is a World Heritage site on a dramatic volcanic crater lake, though with only fragmentary ruins. It was known to the Parthians as ‘Ganzak’ or ‘Ganjeh’, to the Romans, as ‘Shiz’ to the Arabs, and as ‘Saturiq’ to the Mongols. It has nothing to do

¹ Blair & Bloom, Architecture of Islam, p 11.
with the biblical Solomon, but was the spiritual centre of Zoroastrianism in the 3rd century AD, containing the supreme fire temple of Adhura Gushnap, from which all the other sacred fires were kindled. Fragments remain of the ceramic pipes through which volcanic gases were channelled to sustain the eternal flame in the *ateshkadeh* or fire temple. This building has walls of fired brick in lime mortar which are nearly four metres thick in places, but the vaulting of the surrounding passages has largely collapsed.

In the seventh century the settlement was fortified by the Sassanians with an eight metre stone wall and towers, of which thirty-eight remain. The masonry of the surrounding wall consists of squarish blocks alternating with narrow ones, which is usually indicative of what the Greeks call *emplecton* - walling consisting of vertical slabs laid to form boxes, which are then filled with lime rubble or other material. The slabs are all the same, but in the face of the wall one sees them alternately side-on and end-on. The basic idea goes back at least to the filled walls of the Hittite capital Hattusas. Whether this wall at Takht-e Soleiman is in fact of emplecton is not apparent from the information available to me, but Pope treats it as a Parthian rather than a Sassanian structure, and claims that the masonry is identical with the foundation depicted on the famous ‘Fortress Plate’ in Leningrad.¹ This is untrue, for the plate depicts only what any unprejudiced viewer must interpret as thick vertical joints, not stone blocks. Pope is on surer ground, however when he compares the vestigial arcade above the archway at Takht-e Soleiman with the machicolated arcade at the top of the fortress. His theory that the plate actually depicts the temple at Takht-e Soleiman does not seem unreasonable.²

In the thirteenth century Abāqā Khān (1265-1281) built one of his summer capitals here, called Sughurlukh [place of marmosets]. He rebuilt the walls in rubble, repaired the buildings, and constructed a vaulted hall which incorporated some Saljuq or earlier fabric and which is today a crumbling ruin.³ The remains of the Khanid palace are protected by a modern roof. In the seventeenth century the site was abandoned.⁴

**Solţānīyeh [Sultāniya, Sultaniyya]**

Solţānīyeh [Map D2] was built by the Ilkhanid Mongols as their Persian capital from 1302, but largely destroyed by Tamerlane in 1384.⁵ On the first of Muharram, the first day of the year 705 [1306], Öljeitü ordered work begun on the city which was to replace Tabriz as the capital, and within the walls of the city a great mausoleum was begun for Öljeitü.⁶

⁵ Burke & Elliott, *Iran*, p 184.
⁶ Wilber, *The Il Khanid Period*, p 23; see also pp 139-141.

Detail of the arcading: Hutt & Harrow, *Iran* 1, p 51.
Oljeitu Mausoleum [Oljaitu Mausoleum]
The Oljeitu Mausoleum [Gonbad-e Soltaniyeh], one of three monuments which survived Tamerlane, is a World Heritage site. When the construction started Öljeitü Khodabandeh had made no serious choice among the Moslem sects, but in 1310 while work was progressing he visited the tomb of ‘Alī in ‘Irāq and accepted the doctrines of the Shi‘ites. He then had the idea of bringing the bodies of ‘Alī and Husayn, the Shi‘a saints, to Sultaniya and turn his own mausoleum into their shrine. He may have envisaged the commercial advantages of attracting crowds of pilgrims to the shrine and to the hostels and bazaars of the new city, and the decoration was carried forward with this idea foremost; the name of ‘Alī can still be read in the brick patterns and in the stucco ornament, and a special chapel was added at the back of the monument, filling out one side of the octagon. At some time Öljeitü had another and much more modest tomb erected for himself which apparently was a simple pyramid of masonry built in a weeks. But Oljeitu later became a Sunnī, and even before then seems to have decided it was impracticable to being the saints, and he reconsecrated the mausoleum as his own tomb.¹ In fact it is reported that the ulemas of Najaf and Krbalā in Iraq, where the relics of ‘Alī and Husayn were held, would not surrender them, and this is why Oljeitu himself was interred in the structure in 1317 It is a domed octagonal brick

¹ Wilber, The Il Khanid Period, p 24.
building, and was to be the prototype for Mongol princely towns in India, down to the Taj Mahal. It is the world's tallest brick dome, almost 25 metres in diameter and 48 metres high, originally covered with blue glazed tiles. The building reportedly had three doors of polished steel, and the trellis around the actual tomb also of polished steel, was brought from India. The interior was decorated in two phases: a first phase in brick and tile and a second one over it in painted plaster. The exterior decoration was complete in 1310 and the interior brick and tile decoration three years later. The internal redecoration in painted plaster was ordered before the Sultan's death on 1 December 1316, and possibly celebrated the brief period when he was recognised as the protector of the holy cities in Saudi Arabia. The building has been described by Pope as ‘one of Persia's supreme architectural achievements’, and Godard referred to the ovoid dome as ‘perfectly conceived and constructed’.

- Khanegah Dervish Monastery
  The Khanegah Dervish Monastery [Hamadan highway, 500 m sw of the mausoleum] dates from 1330, and has a courtyard with restored cells around it, leading to the Boq-e Chelabi-oglu Mausoleum.

- Mullah Hasan Kashi tomb
  The Mullah Hasan Kashi tomb [1.5 km sw] was built by the Safavid Shah Tahmasp to honour the 14th century mystic Hasan Kashi.

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4 Matheson, *Persia*, 76. See also Byron, *Road to Oxiana*, pp 56-7, and illustration facing p 64.
5 Burke & Elliott, *Iran*, p 184.
• Tomb of Chelebi Oghlu
  The tomb of Chelebi Oghlu and its adjacent complex, date from about 1330-1333.¹

Zanjān
Zanjān [Map D2] was an important town in the Sassanian period, but like others on the main east-west route was devastated by the Mongols.² Today it has a long, narrow and largely brick-vaulted bazaar, containing the Dokhtar Caravanserai; the Rasul-Ullah (Sai-Ini) Mosque, with tiled dome and minarets; the 1826 Jameh Mosque; and others.³

¹ Wilber, Il Khanid Period, p 173.
² Matheson, Persia, p 77.
³ Burke & Elliott, Iran, pp 184-5; Matheson, Persia, p 130.
Masuleh & Qazvin
Drive to Masuleh & Qazvin, then to Tehran.

Masuleh [Masouleh]
Masuleh [map D2, centre between Zanjan and Bandar-é Anzali], over a thousand years old, is one of Iran’s most beautiful villages, climbing the mountainside so steeply that the roof of one is the pathway to the next.¹

Qazvin
Qazvin [Map E2, main road between Tehran and Zanjan] is a former capital, possibly worth visiting if access can be gained to the cisterns, which is not normally the case.

- Cisterns.
  These are domed and cooled with wind towers. The Sardar Cisterns and the Haji Kazem Cistern are the most impressive externally.

- Amiiniha Hosseiniyeh
  The Amiiniha Hosseiniyeh [Molavi St at the Amin dead end], is a well-preserved mansion dating from 1773.²

- Jameh Mosque
  The Jameh Mosque is largely Safavid and Qajar, but the prayer hall behind dates from about 1115 and is roofed with one of the two largest Saljuq domes in Iran, 15.6 metres in diameter. The external tiling is later, but internally there is interesting carved plaster decoration doubtless derived from kūfī script, but something like a Greek fret, probably of the 12th Century.³ There is a double inscription frieze encircling the chamber, the upper inscription in Kufic and the lower in Nashki, of white against a blue ground of vines and tendrils, and according to Pope ‘for sheer loveliness’ perhaps unequalled in Iran.⁴

- Haydariya
  Pope refers to the Haydariya as a beautiful little madrassa of the early twelfth century, with a splendid carved stucco mihrab and a stucco frieze with ‘perhaps the finest Kufic in all Persia’. It is today incorporated into a larger nineteenth century mosque – but which he does not say.⁵

¹ Burke & Elliott, Iran, pp 171-2.
² Burke & Elliott, Iran, pp 177; see also Loveday, Iran, pp 228-9.
³ Hutt & Harrow, Iran 1, pp 102-3 [illustrated]. Pope, Persian Architecture, p 129, for the dome diameter.
⁴ Pope, Persian Architecture, p 129.
⁵ Pope, Persian Architecture, p 129.
2 October
optional

free day: some possibilities are Rey and Varamin

Rey [Shah Ray]

Rey [southern outskirts of Tehran], the ancient Rhages, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries was a much larger centre than Tehran, but it was devastated by the Mongols.¹

- Imamzadeh Shah-e Abdal-Azim [Emamzadeh of Abdol Azim], The Imamzadeh Shah-e Abdal-Azim has elaborate tilework, a golden dome and a fourteenth century sarcophagus intricately carved from betel wood.² It is a popular pilgrimage site, and women visitors must wear a chador inside the complex (these can be hired at the entrance).³

- Sassanian fire temple, Tappeh Mil

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¹ Burke & Elliott, Iran, p 131.
² Burke & Elliott, Iran, p 131.
³ Loveday, Iran, p 195.
There are the remains of Sassanian fire temple on a hill called Tappeh Mil, on the right of the Rey to Varāmīn road.\(^1\) It is not clear to me whether this is the same structure which Burke and Elliott refer to as a Sassanid fortress, Qal'-e Tabarak.\(^2\)

- **Gonbad-e Toghoral [Tower of Toghril Beig, Tughril].**
  The Gonbad-e Toghoral (incorrectly so known) is the best preserved building in Rey.\(^3\) It is a fluted Saljuq tomb tower thought to date from 1139, and would have had a conical roof.\(^4\)

- **Yazid's tower**
  Yazid's tower is named after the caliph who ruled in 683-9 and is thought to have contained the graves of two Buyid princes, though it is now empty.\(^5\)

**Varāmīn Varamin**

Varāmīn [sw of Tehran] like Tehran benefited from the flight of refugees from Rey at the time of the Mongol invasion, but was eclipsed by Tehran in the sixteenth century.\(^6\)

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\(^1\) Loveday, *Iran*, p 198.


\(^3\) Faramarzi, * Beauties of Iran*, p 8.


\(^6\) Loveday, *Iran*, p 198.
• Masjed-e Jameh [Friday Mosque]
The Masjed-e Jameh was built in 1322-6 by Sultan Abu Sa'id (son of Oljeitu), and though partly destroyed, still exhibits the four iwan courtyard and the brick and glazed tile decoration. It is a rectangle of 66 x 43 m with a major entrance from the north, and a domed chamber, just over ten metres in diameter. This, according to Blair and Bloom,

    presents the classic elevation developed in the Saljuq period. A square chamber supports an octagonal zone of four squinches alternating with four blind arches. This in turn supports a sixteen-sided zone on which rests the dome.

The complex brick motifs on the porch and on the dome of the mihrab are particularly fine. It was repaired in 1412-19.

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1 Matheson, *Persia*, p 50; see also Wilber, *Il Khanid Period*, p 158.
Imamzadeh Shah Husayn, Varamin, 1437.
Near the centre of the modern town, a few hundred metres south-east of the Masjid-i-Jami, is the Imamzāda Shah Husayn,\(^1\) of 1437. No specially shaped or cut bricks are used and the workmanship is rather crude.\(^2\)

Tower of Ala od-Din [tomb tower of ‘Alā ad-dīn]
The tower of Ala od-Din, in the middle of the town, is a Mongol funerary tower finished in 1289.\(^3\) Robert Byron found it ‘tenanted by an opium fiend who looked up from cooking his lunch to tell us that it was his home and 3,000 years old.’\(^4\)

Portal of the Masjid ash-Sharif
Near the tomb tower of ‘Alā ad-dīn is or was badly ruined portal of the Masjid ash-Sharif, dating from 1307.\(^5\)

Imamzada Yahya
According to Wilber the Imamzada Yahya consists of a square domed chamber of about 1261-3, though variously dated between 1265 and 1307, and it formerly had an octagonal tomb tower, now destroyed, which Jane Dieulafoy thought was pre-Seljuq.\(^6\) How much survives today is unclear.\(^7\)

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\(^1\) Wilber, *Il Khanid Period*, p 177: here the date is given as1330, but this is presumably superseded by the Golombek & Wilber date.
\(^4\) Byron, *Road to Oxiana*, p 55.
\(^7\) Burke & Elliott, *Iran*, p 267.
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*Alas, that Spring should vanish with the Rose!*
*That Youth’s sweet-scented Manuscript should close!*
*The Nightingale that in the branches sang,*
*Ah, whence, and whither flown again, who knows!*¹