



## ABYĀNA

---

**ABYĀNA**, a remarkable village in the Barz-rūd subdistrict (*dehestān*) in Naṭanz *šahrestān*, 38 km northeast of Naṭanz (Razmārā, *Farhang* III, p. 3), and 18 km from the asphalt road connecting Naṭanz to Kāšān (*Farhang-e ābādīhā-ye kešvar* VII, Tehran, 1969, p. 46). An upland village of about 2,000 population (2,181 according to the 1966 census, *ibid.*), Abyāna sits at the top of the fairly long (about 25 km) and verdant valley of Barz-rūd, which runs westward from the Hanĵan bridge past the villages of Yārānd, Komĵān, Barz, and Tara. A road leading from Abyāna toward the southwest forks after some 16 km at Morāvānd, one branch reaching Meyma, the other Mūrĉaḳort in the Isfahan direction. Abyāna's houses, built mostly on slanting slopes and generally consisting of three or four stories with balconies and latticed wooden windows, impart an attractive aspect to the village, which is dominated by an ochre color.

The produce of Abyāna is chiefly fruit (apples and plums in particular), wheat, potatoes, and lucerne (alfalfa). Village trees include the plane, ash, poplar, and willow. Animal husbandry—chiefly goats, but also sheep and cattle—is one of the mainstays of the village economy. To a limited extent women weave rugs and make woven cotton shoes (*gīva*). The level of literacy in the village is high, special attention being paid to the education of girls. Communal cohesion is considerable. Until the early 1960s, when the land reform was put through, the earnings from renting *katīrā* (gum tragacanth) shrubs were devoted to communal development.

Abyāna's significance lies in a number of old buildings and in its conservative



ways, which have resulted in the preservation of its local dialect (see [Abyāna`ī](#)), local dress, and many old customs. Men wear very loose black trousers, as in a number of other villages between Kāšān and Isfahan. Women wear long, pleated skirts and blouses of attractive colors with long slits at the sides, often laced along the borders; they cover their heads with square, folded kerchiefs.

In the middle of the village stand the remnants of a Zoroastrian *ātašgāh* (fire temple), as it is still called, which probably dates from late Sasanian times. According to Maxime Siroux, who gives a full description of the monument (“Trois monuments inconnus de l’Iran ancien,” *Iranica Antiqua* 7, 1967, pp. 82-88, pls. XIV, XV, XVI, XVII), the temple, built on a sharp slope and clearly visible from village houses, consisted of three levels and was built in two stages ([Plate XVIII](#)). The lower level, the oldest, of which some parts still survive, dates probably from the 5th century, and the upper levels probably from the 7th. A village lane now passes through the intermediate level, which contained the fire altar and service chambers and was topped by a domed *čahār-ṭāq*. The skeleton of the *čahār-ṭāq* with a broken dome is still standing.

From a number of lingering old customs and practices it appears that the total conversion of Abyāna from Zoroastrianism to Islam took place relatively late. The inhabitants exhibit with pride an awareness of the ancient customs of the village. People still remember that the funerary prayers and the prayer of the feast of Feṭr, now performed while facing Mecca, used to be said facing the sun, ending before sunrise. The work of the *gassāl*, who washes the dead before burial (to Zoroastrians an abomination which pollutes the holy element of water), is rather shunned. In 1969, when the writer visited Abyāna to record its dialect, the village actually did not have a *gassāl*, and the cemetery had been temporarily closed, the dead being dispatched to Qom or Kāšān for burial. Traces of the rites of offering food and drink (*ḵayrāt*) to the souls of the dead—an important and widespread practice among the Zoroastrians (see Boyce, *Stronghold*, chaps. 3, 8, and 9)—is evident in many village customs. Food is offered to the poor for the comfort of the dead on Friday evenings as well as during the holy months of Moḥarram and Ramažān. On the day of the Feṭr festival people visit the cemetery before dawn, with the women taking baskets of bread to be distributed among the poor. Those who have suffered a recent bereavement invite their relatives, on the anniversary of the death, to share a meal with them. Families in mourning place a brazier of charcoal embers in the house during the mourning month of Moḥarram, as well as



during the New Year festival, an event connected in Zoroastrian tradition with the Zoroastrian festival of All Souls. Weddings also involve elaborate customs. *Now Rūz* (the New Year festival) is celebrated for three days, during which families offer a *sofra* (lit., tablecloth) on which all manner of food prepared in advance is placed; visitors are invited to help themselves (“to renew salt” in the villagers’ parlance). *Č(ah)āršanha sūrī* (the celebration of the last Wednesday of the year) includes throwing down jugs of water from the rooftops into a bonfire. The five *gāthā* days, which were added to the 360 days of the year in accordance with a calendar reform of Sasanian times to bring the length of the calendar year closer to that of the solar year, are added in *Abyāna* to the end of Bahman, the eleventh month, and not to the end of the twelfth month.

*Abyāna* treasures also a number of remarkable Islamic monuments and houses. The congregational mosque (*Masjed-e jāme*) has a fine wooden *meḥrāb*, 2 by 1.08 m, built by the order of one Abū Ja‘far Moḥammad b. ‘Alī and bearing the date 477/1084-85. On it is a carved inscription of Koranic verses in both plain and ornate Kufic script. A wooden pulpit of about the same date (466/1073-74 according to Golbū, p. 13; see bibliog.), which has been repeatedly repaired, is another Saljuq relic in the mosque. The mosque itself was repaired in 722/1322 by Mawlānā ‘Ezz-al-dīn b. Moḥammad Bahā’-al-dīn. A number of old carved wooden doors, one bearing the date 701/1301-02, and some dating from the late Safavid and Afsharid periods, are still to be seen in the village. A shrine (*emānzāda*) which is said to house the remains of Yaḥyā and ‘Īsā, sons of Mūsā b. Ja‘far, the seventh Imam, is characterized by an octagonal blue tile dome.

The evidence of old mosques shows that Islam had penetrated the Barz-rūd valley early enough, and Siroux’s claim (*Anciennes voies et monuments routiers de la région d’Ispahan*, Mémoires de l’Institut français d’Archéologie Orientale du Caire 82, Cairo, 1971, pp. 20, 23, 221, 223) that the valley had remained Zoroastrian until the time of Shah Esmā‘īl (1502-24) can not be maintained; nor can his assertion that many Zoroastrians fled *Abyāna* as a result of Shah Esmā‘īl’s intolerance (*ibid.*) be substantiated.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

A little illustrated pamphlet by F. Golbū, *Gozar-ī va nazar-ī be Abyāna* (“A passage through and a look at Abyana”), Ministry of Culture and Arts, Tehran, n.d. (1976?), describes Abyāna mostly in romantic terms with few data; but it does provide several views of the village in color. See also S. A. Matheson, *Persia: an Archeological Guide*, p. 296 (totally dependent on Siroux).

Reliable accounts of the Islamic monuments of Abyāna are still lacking.