



ARCHITECTURE I. SELEUCID PERIOD

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i. Seleucid

The Seleucid architecture of Iran encompasses the buildings constructed during the period of Greek power from 330 B.C. through the 2nd century B.C. The terminal date varies from region to region, since the Seleucid Greeks continually lost control of area to the Parthians invading from the northeast and to various local warlords. The scarcity of historical documents complicates the identification of structures erected under Greek rule, and archeological investigations have produced no Seleucid site comparable to Ai Khanum (see [Āy Kānom](#)) in Afghanistan or Failaka in the Persian Gulf. The situation is further confused by the fact that Greek masons and stonecutters were employed by the Achaemenids as early as the late 6th century B.C. It is entirely likely that elements of their influence persisted in later times. Thus mere classical appearance is not a reliable indication of Seleucid date.

The spectacular temple at Kangāvar exemplifies the problems of identifying Seleucid architecture. The large structure with its great Ionic columns set on a high stone platform has been equated with a Greek temple noted by Isidore of Charax (*Parthian Stations* 6; tr. W. H. Schoff, London, 1914, repr. Chicago, 1976) and mentioned in a royal Seleucid inscription dated 193 B.C. found at



Nehāvand, some 50 km to the southeast of Kangāvar (E. Herzfeld, *Iran in the Ancient East*, London, 1941, p. 281; L. Robert, “Inscriptions séleucides de Phrygie et d’Iran,” *Hellenica* 7, 1949, pp. 5-29 and pls. I-IV; “Addenda au tome VII,” *Hellenica* 8, 1950, pp. 73-75 and pl. XXIII). Recent excavations, however, support Sasanian rather than Seleucid dating (T. Cuyler Young, Jr., “An Archaeological Survey of the Kangavar Valley,” *Proceedings of the III Annual Symposium on Archaeological Research in Iran, Tehran, 1974*, Tehran, 1976, p. 27; S. Kambakhsh-Fard, “Kangavar,” *Iran* 11, 1973, pp. 196-97; and V. Lukonin, “*Khram Anakhit v Kangavar*,” *VDI*, 1977, no. 2, pp. 106-11; M. Azarnoush, “Excavations at Kangavar,” *AMI* 14, 1981, pp. 69ff.; for a different opinion see K. Schippmann, *Grundzüge der parthischen Geschichte*, Darmstadt, 1980, p. 100).

The Ionic structure at Kōrra, near Qom in central Iran, is similarly problematic. The ruin has been called both a Parthian temple and a Seleucid heroon (K. Schippmann, *Die iranischen Feuerheiligtümer*, Berlin, 1971, pp. 424-30; W. Kleiss, “Qal’eh Zohak in Azerbaidjan,” *AMI* 6, 1973, pp. 173-74 and 180-83; and A. D. H. Bivar, in *Journal of Roman Studies* 59, 1969, pp. 307-08). Kōrra is distinctly Greek in style but finds no real parallel in any other Greek or Iranian monuments.

Random finds of fragmentary Ionic bases and portions of pilasters suggest that classical, or classicizing, buildings also existed at Bīsotūn and at least three sites in Azarbaijan (H. Lushey, “Bisotun,” *Archäologischer Anzeiger*, 1974, p. 124; and W. Kleiss, *op. cit.*, pp. 174-75). Whether these are Seleucid or Parthian is not certain.

A better indication of Greek architecture may be the presence of fired clay roofing tiles. These tiles are not characteristic of Iranian architectural practice in any period and thus may serve as clear indication of a strong Greek presence. Such tiles, known from Qal’ā-ye Zoḥāk in Azarbaijan and from the great city of Susa in Kūzestān, show that gable-roofed structures in the Greek style existed in Iran (Kleiss, *op. cit.*, p. 182; and A. Labrousse and R. Boucharlat, “La fouille du Palais du Chaour à Suse en 1970 et 1971,” *CDAFI* 2, 1972, pp. 89-99). Furthermore, the ridge tiles from Susa are ornamented with palmettes, another Greek characteristic. The type of buildings constructed in the Seleucid period at Susa is unknown, though a temple of Herakles and a theater have been placed in the section known as the *Ville des Artisans* by Roman Ghirshman (“Un basrelief parthe de la Collection Foroughi,” *Artibus Asiae* 37, 1975, p.23).



The architecture of Fārs (classical Persis) shows little Greek influence, in contrast to western Iran, perhaps because of the brevity of the Seleucid period, which evidently ended in that region with the death of Seleukos I in 280 B.C. Parts of the burned ruins of Persepolis, particularly Palace H, were repaired and occupied for some time in the 3rd century B.C. The elaborate columns remained as testaments to the past, models for the future, and sources of readily available building materials (A. Tilia, *Studies and Restorations at Persepolis and Other Sites in Fars*, Rome, 1972, pp. 315-16). During the same century a moderate-sized building, usually considered a temple, was reshaped below the Persepolis terraces somewhat to the northwest. Construction methods paralleled those of the buildings on the terraces where the doorways and window frames were stone, while the walls were mud brick. Column bases from the terrace were used within the structure, and additional bases of a simpler design were also produced. (For illustrations see R. Ghirshman, *Persian Art*, New York, 1962, p. 26, fig. 34; for a more detailed consideration see E. Schmidt, *Persepolis I: Structures, Reliefs and Inscriptions*, Chicago, 1953; and Herzfeld, *op. cit.*, p. 275 and pls. LXXXV and LXXXVI). No trace of distinctly Greek building techniques have appeared so far. Thus the architecture of Fārs in the 3rd century B.C. may better be called post-Achaemenid rather than Seleucid.

Little is known of the Seleucid period in eastern Iran, and no buildings in that region can as yet be surely dated to the time.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Given in the text.