



BĀRŪ

BĀRŪ, (or Bāra), fortress in general, defensive wall, rampart. The word is not attested in the oldest sources and goes back at most only to the Sasanian period (communication from W. Eilers). The concept must be distinguished from various other old types of fortification used in Iran to protect parts of fortresses.

Defensive walls and earthworks dating from the start of human settlement in Iran still survive. Their forms evolved in parallel with the development of offensive and defensive weapons. In prehistoric and early historic times, the type of fortification generally depended on requirements imposed by the location of the castle or village and the natural features of the terrain. In all periods, fortifications were as far as possible placed on high ground in order to exploit difficulties of approach presented by a hill or mountain slope and to give the defenders a vantage point and view from above. Structural designs were determined by general knowledge and experience of attack and defense rather than by local traditions. In all periods well-tried and proven methods of fortification were chosen. In the early historic period, ancient Persian fortification technique shows signs of influence from Mesopotamia (Frankfort, p. 215), Anatolia (Kleiss, 1976, p. 28), and other neighboring countries. The same readiness to adopt techniques found effective elsewhere can be traced throughout the architectural history of Iran, right down to the adoption of the “French style” for design of fortresses and city walls in the early 13th/19th century, notably at K̅v̅oy and Tehran (Kleiss, 1980, p. 167).

Another factor influencing fortification design was the local building material.



In arid parts of the Iranian plateau and in the Kūzestān plain adjoining Mesopotamia, dried or baked brick prevailed, while in mountainous regions use of stone, at least for foundations, was usual, though even there upper parts of defensive walls from the prehistoric and early historic periods are often of unbaked brick. Earthworks in the strict sense appeared only in the modern period, under European influence in the 12th/18th and early 13th/19th centuries (Kleiss, 1980, p. 167). The use of timber in combination with stone and earth, common in prehistoric and early historic fortifications in Europe (e.g., in the form of the “*murus gallicus*”), was unknown in Iran, mainly because of the shortage of wood. Even in the timber-rich Caspian region of Gīlān and Māzandarān, no remains of prehistoric or early historic defensive structures of wood and earth have yet been found.

Throughout Iranian history, fortification was primarily a matter of protecting castles, which served both as residences of kings or lords and as strongholds where local people, with their livestock, could take refuge. From the start of the historic period in the first millennium b.c., village perimeters were also fortified, at first mainly for protection from robbers and wild beasts, later increasingly for defense against enemies. Scattered through the country are remains of strongly fortified village or castle settlements dating from as early as the third millennium b.c. (Kleiss, 1979, p. 27).

Fortifications were also built to protect strategic sectors such as passes and valleys, and their outlines are sometimes visible as walls or banks on the ground; unpublished observations indicate that in a few cases they may go back to the Achaemenid period.

Large-scale frontier fortification, like that of the Roman *limes*, is matched in Iran by the so-called “Wall of Alexander,” remains of which survive east of the Caspian Sea in Gorgān. This was a mud-brick wall with forts at regular intervals. In the light of recent research (Kīānī, p. 11) it seems probable that the attribution to Alexander is incorrect and that the wall was built in the Parthian period.



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See also [fortification](#).

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