Published: December 15, 1989
Last Updated: November 28, 2016

BĪŠĀPŪR

BĪŠĀPŪR, ancient and medieval town in Fārs, in the Sasanian period the administrative center of one of the five districts in the province of Fārs. The name of the city derives from Middle Persian Bay-Šāpūr "Lord Šāpūr" (for a discussion of the name see Sundermann, pp. 294-95). The name is found on bullae (Herzfeld, 1936, p. 418; Byšpwhr), on a seal (Gignoux, pp. 15f.; Byšʾpwhr), in the 5th-century Middle Persian inscription of Eqlīd (Frye, p. 155; probably Byhšpwhl), and in the Coptic Manichean homilies (Sundermann, p. 294; Bašabahōr). Finally, the letters BYŠ on Sasanian coins clearly refer to Bīšāpūr (the practice of including mints on coins was introduced in the 4th century; Walker, pp. 185-86). The form Weh-Šāhpūr found in the *Šahristānīhā ī Ērānšahr* is thus not likely to be correct (Markwart, *Provincial Catalogue*, pp. 14, 19; cf. Le Strange, *Lands*, p. 262; Ghirshman, 1971, p. 14, n. 1). The important role of the city in the 3rd and 4th centuries is attested by the existence of no fewer than six royal rock reliefs on cliffs flanking the adjacent stream, Tang-e Čowgān (for general surveys of these reliefs, see Vanden Berghe, 1959; Ghirshman, 1962), three of them owing to Šāpūr I himself.

A visit by Šāpūr in the twenty-fourth year of his reign may reflect the date when construction of the city was completed. This visit was recorded by the scribe Apsʾy in a bilingual (Middle Persian and Parthian) inscription on one of a pair of columns forming part of a commemorative monument located at the main intersection in the center of the city (Ghirshman, 1936, pp. 123-29; Back, pp. 378-83, with notes p. 507). It must have occurred around 266 (there is some uncertainty concerning the date of Šāpūr's accession; see, e.g., "Ardašīr I, i," in

EIr. II, p. 374). In the Coptic translation of the autobiography of Mānī, a contemporary of Šāpūr, it is reported that the king fell sick while on a visit to Bīšāpūr and died there (Polotsky, p. 42 ll. 11-15; Ghirshman, 1971, p. 11 n. 1).

It has often been claimed that Roman engineers captured by Šāpūr after his defeat of the Roman emperor Valerian in 260 participated in building Bīšāpūr. According to Ebn Qotayba (p. 654; cf. Ghirshman, 1971, p. 11), Roman prisoners were installed by Šāpūr I at Bīšāpūr (as well as at Jondīšāpūr and Šūštar); Šāpūr himself, in his inscription on the Kaʿba-ye Zardošt at Naqš-e Rostam (ŠKZ), describes his battle with and victory over Valerian and the subsequent settling of Roman prisoners of war in Fārs and other provinces, without, however, giving specific geographical details (ŠKZ; Maricq, pp. 314-15; Back, pp. 324-26; see also Gagé, pp. 314-16, for Christian accounts of the deportation). Some of the architectural remains excavated by French and Iranian archeologists at Bīšāpūr have been thought to reflect the influence of these Roman prisoners, although that influence should not be exaggerated. Of the buildings uncovered by Roman Ghirshman in intermittent seasons between 1935 and 1941 only building D reveals any Western influence, in the stone mosaic floors (see below). ʿA.-A. Sarfarāz found part of the original northern city wall, where the river imposed an irregular boundary on the otherwise rectangular city plan (1969). It was articulated by an evenly spaced series of rounded towers at intervals of less than a meter, a technique that may have been derived from an antique model now known only from literary sources, for example, a reference in Philo of Byzantium that F. E. Winter (p. 117) has interpreted as a “semi-circular wall trace” and related to a rare practice of the Hellenistic period. Whether or not the northern wall reflects the work of Roman prisoners remains a matter for speculation, however.

Rock reliefs. The earliest of Šāpūr’s reliefs, on the right bank of Tang-e Čowgān, consists of a scene of investiture and triumph executed in a style characteristic of the period of Ardašīr (r. 224-40). The king receives a diadem from Ohrmazd. Both figures are mounted; the god’s horse tramples a prone figure interpreted as Ahriman beneath its hooves, and the king’s horse tramples the slain Roman emperor Gordian III. Philip the Arab, kneeling and suppliant, is the only other figure represented (for a summary of the problems in identifying these figures, see Herrmann, 1969, pp. 80-83). The fact that Valerian is not included in this relief suggests that it should be dated before his defeat in 260, perhaps even before the formal foundation of the city. Šāpūr’s two other reliefs, however, do include Valerian. The first, located on a sheltered concave surface

carved in the cliff on the left bank reflects a new formula for the representation of triumph: In the center the mounted king receives the diadem, not from the god but from a putto, an obvious borrowing from Western iconography. Gordian is shown beneath the horse's hooves and Philip kneeling, while Šāpūr grasps Valerian by the forearm. Tiers of horsemen flank this scene; clearance work by Sarfarāz (1976, fig. p. 31) has revealed another register of horsemen along the bottom of the relief. According to Georgina Herrmann (1969), Roman influence accounts for the lively style of this relief, though she believes the format represents continuation of an old Near Eastern formula for depicting several events in a single composition. The central victory scene is repeated on a larger scale in the third relief, on the right bank, which Herrmann believes to be a copy of the second. In this relief Šāpūr and the three defeated enemies are represented as before; courtiers and horsemen are arrayed in two side registers (for Šāpūr's account of his battles with the three Roman emperors, see ŠKZ; Maricq, pp. 306-13; Back, pp. 290-313).

Of the three remaining Sasanian reliefs, all on the left bank, the first and second repeat the older investiture formula. In the first Bahrām I (r. 271-74) is shown face to face with Ohrmazd, and both figures are mounted. At a later date Narseh (Bahrām's younger brother; r. 293-302) substituted his own name on the relief (see Herzfeld, 1924, p. 120; MacKenzie). When Sarfarāz (1976, figs. pp. 32-33) cleared a stone conduit (*jūb*) away from the foot of the relief, a previously unknown figure was revealed prostrate beneath the king's horse. This figure, which may also be a later insertion, has been variously interpreted as Narseh's defeated nephew, Bahrām III, or the latter's supporter Wahnām, the evil councilor of Bahrām III, supported by "Ahriman and the devils" (see Herrmann, 1981, p. 19, citing personal communication from P. O. Skjærvø; Humbach and Skjærvø, III/1, pp. 28-29, III/2, pp. 12-13). The second relief, of Bahrām II (r. 274-93), shows the mounted king receiving the submission of a party of Arabs on foot before him. The third is a rather crude victory relief of Šāpūr II (grandson of Narseh; r. 309-79); the king is seated frontally on a throne while in the registers to the side various trophies are presented to him. Careful observations by Herrmann (1977, p. 94) have produced evidence that this rude stone carving served simply as the base for what would have been a more elaborate painted plaster surface, a technique familiar in the realm of the Kushans, where Šāpūr conducted extensive campaigns (for all these later reliefs, see also Hermann, 1980, 1981).

Sasanian buildings. Of the buildings discovered by the French (see Ghirshman,

1956), three are particularly worthy of attention.

1. Building B (ibid., plan II), a cruciform palace, for which Ghirshman has proposed an improbable vault over a vast court 22 m square flanked by walls articulated with stuccoed and painted niches. More conservatively the space can be defined as an open, four *ayvān* enclosure.

2. Building A (ibid.), a partially subterranean temple, built of rubble masonry faced with cut stone and roofed with beams carried on capitals with bull protomes. The discovery by Sarfarāz of a water channel leading to this building from the river (Sarfarāz, 1975, p. 95) lends support to the idea that it was a temple devoted to Anāhīd (cf. Herrmann, 1977, p. 103).

3. Building D (ibid., plans II-IV), a court with elaborate floor mosaics on which reclining nobles and musicians are depicted. There is no denying that stone mosaic is a Western medium, though Ghirshman has pointed out the decidedly non-Western compositions. He conceded that the artisans may have been Roman, though employed in a building by an Iranian architect. This conclusion is based on his erroneous identification of Building D as the central hall of a triple *ayvān*, thus emphasizing the Iranian contribution to the building. The mosaics, however, though probably datable to the time of Šāpūr I, are not associated with the *ayvān* remains. The matter is clouded by the fact that Ghirshman's 1956 plans III-IV are at variance with his descriptive text. Careful scrutiny of his words reveals, however, that the mosaic floor was carefully and deliberately covered over in the late Sasanian period and also partly damaged when a new wall with openings was cut into it—the supposed back wall of the central *ayvān*. (The original deception has unfortunately been erroneously repeated by von Gall, Herrmann [1977], Kröger, Matheson, Shepherd, Vanden Berghe, and others.) Because scholars have generally focused on the relations between Iran and the West, there has been a tendency to emphasize remains of the 3rd and 4th centuries and to ignore the subsequent history of the site, even though the archeological record contains significant remains from the later Sasanian and early Islamic periods. For example, the new wall was clearly part of a later colonnaded court, reminiscent of features found at Taḵt-e Solaymān. It carried stucco decorations in a style comparable to those at 6th-century Ctesiphon (Ghirshman, 1956, figs. 41-55). J. Kröger (p. 194) has dated them to the end of the 6th century or the beginning of the 7th. Coins of Ḵosrow II (r. 590-628) were found in debris of the associated stratum (Walker, pp. 185-87).

Medieval histories contain several traditions about Sasanian Bīšāpūr (see Schwarz, *Iran*, pp. 30-32), some of which have been substantiated by archeologists. It is tempting, for example, to identify the black flagstones that Maqdesī (ca. 375/985; Moqaddasī, p. 433) reported in the citadel mosque with the 3rd-century mosaic pavement, for Ghirshman recorded a damaged black flagstone adjacent to the mosaics. A great statue of a king found in a cave high above the gorge (Ghirshman, 1962, pp. 162-65) may be the colossal statue in a wind- and rain-swept cave mentioned by Maqdesī on the way to Nowbandagān (pp. 444-45). Maqdesī also referred (p. 444) to a black statue, larger than life size, standing in the road at Bīšāpūr; it may have been the same statue (*pahikar*) referred to in Apsʾy's inscription and represented by the remains of a plinth excavated in the monument at the main intersection of the city (Salles and Ghirshman, 1936). In the 8th/14th century Mostawfī (*Nozhat al-qolūb*, ed. Le Strange, pp. 126-27) reported a colossal black statue standing in a temple outside the town, but he may simply have been repeating the earlier tradition.

Remains from the Islamic period. Further modifications to Building D occurred in the Omayyad period. Coins found in the associated strata (Walker, pp. 187--91) document activity under Arab governors both before and after the Omayyad coin reforms in 73/692. One issue, according to John Walker, was possibly ʿAbbasid in date. Ghirshman has acknowledged that some of the stucco decorations (figs. 56-73) are related to those at Samarra; it is possible that they were forerunners of what was perhaps the earliest "Samarra style" (which Herzfeld labeled III and was later relabeled A). Kröger dated them between the second half of the 7th century and the first half of the 8th, in the early ʿAbbasid period preceding the construction of Samarra. Ghirshman also found other Islamic remains at Bīšāpūr (1956, 1971). Considering the importance of the city, as revealed by such remains, it is surprising that it does not figure as prominently in Muslim chronicles as do some less important towns. Aside from the citadel mosque (see above), Maqdesī referred to a Friday mosque outside the city, a mosque facing the citadel, and the mosque of Ḵeżr also near the citadel (Schwarz, *Iran*, pp. 31-32; Moqaddasī, p. 433); no trace of these buildings has been found, however. Outside the city walls Iranian archeologists have found material dating from the centuries leading up to the Mongol period (Yasi). As for the city itself, however, already in the 10th century Maqdesī reported it in ruins, eclipsed by Kāzerūn (p. 433). Ebn al-Balḵī, the author of *Fārs-nāma* (6th/12th century, p. 142) also described the city as in ruins (cf. *Nozhat al-qolūb*, ed. Le Strange, p. 125).

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See also *Camb. Hist. Iran* III/2, index, p. 1413.

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