



BORJ

BORJ (plur. Pers. *borjhā*, *borūj*; Ar. *borūj*, *abrāj*, *abreja*), Arabic and Persian word derived from an Aramaic adaptation of Latin *burgus* (borrowed from Germanic) “castle” (Fraenkel, p. 235). Markwart assumed the occurrence of the word in the Pahlavi phrase *šahrestānī Kōmis ī *panj-burg* “the capital of Kūmish [sic], the five-towered” (*Provincial Capitals*, pp. 12, 56; reference owing to D. N. MacKenzie), but both the reading and the interpretation of the epithet are doubtful. H. S. Nyberg (*Manual* II, p. 150) reads it as *panj-bōr* “having five grey horses.” The word has not been found elsewhere in Pahlavi. In both Persian and Arabic the term *borj* has two principal meanings: 1. a tower, castle, or fortress (*kūšk*, *qaṣr*, *kāk*); a dovecote (Ar. *borj al-ḥammām*; Pers. *borj-e kabūtar*; Beazley, pp. 105-09; Sauvaget, no. 157; for a general description, see Dehḵodā, s.v. *borj*); 2. a sign of the zodiac (Pers. *borj-e āsemānī*, Ar. *borj al-samā*) and by extension a solar mansion, a month.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

E. Beazley, “The Pigeon Towers of Isfahan,” *Iran* 4, 1966, pp. 105-09.

S. Fraenkel, *Die aramäischen Fremdwörter im Arabischen*, Leiden, 1886.

J. Sauvaget, *La poste aux chevaux dans l'empire des mamlouks*, Paris, 1941.

i. In architecture.

ii. As a sign of the zodiac.

i. In Architecture

Primarily *borj* denotes a free-standing or buttress tower in military architecture. Although a great deal is known about such structures in the Near East (Sourdell-Thomine et al., pp. 1315-24; Creswell, 1959, I, pp. 89-125), the information available on early Islamic military architecture in Iran is much less comprehensive (for a recent survey, see [castles](#)). Occasionally free-standing towers can be found in close proximity to city or fortress walls. An example is the tower guarding a narrow bridge outside the walled city of Yazd (*Survey of Persian Art*, pl. 374B; the walls were rebuilt several times in the 6th/12th and 8th/14th centuries). As in most of the Islamic world, however, in Iran towers were usually incorporated into fortress walls, projecting to nearly full circumference at the corners and semicircular, or occasionally rectangular, in plan along the curtain walls; for example, a few rectangular towers can be seen at the fortress of Šamīrān (or Samīrān) near Qazvīn (Varjāvand, p. 438 pl. 227). In addition to their function as buttresses, most of these towers were furnished with arrow slits and topped by machicolations, evidence that they were used for military purposes. According to *Maṭlaʿ al-šams* (II, p. 238), the 10th/16th-century towers of the Mašhad city wall were spaced to facilitate the shooting of arrows between them, so that, should invading forces succeed in taking one tower, they could be repelled by guards in the neighboring towers. Although little remains of such towers, it is possible to see that sometimes the lower portions were solidly filled, as at Dārzīn (Shokoohy, p. 6). Some may have contained baths and storage rooms.

Construction materials varied from region to region. In Azarbaijan brick and dressed stone towers were raised on dressed stone foundations. At Ardabil, for example, the bastions in the city wall were of brick on stone foundations; the outer brick surface was faced with mud brick to cushion it against siege engines (*Survey of Persian Art*, p. 1245). Rubble masonry was used at Šamīrān (Varjāvand, pp. 438ff.) and mud brick at Dārzīn (Shokoohy, p. 18).

Thomas Herbert (p. 120), who traveled in the region around Isfahan between



1629 and 1631, reported the use of towers as shelters for pigeons, so that their droppings could easily be collected and used as fertilizer (cf. *Damīrčī*, pp. 34-37; Beazley, 1966; Wulff, *Crafts*, pp. 269-70). Later in the century Jean-Baptiste Chardin reported more than 3,000 pigeon towers around Isfahan (III, p. 386), some of which according to Richards (p. 78) contained more than 14,000 pigeons (cf. *Damīrčī*, p. 36). These towers were usually cylindrical, 30-50 feet high and about 15-30 feet in diameter, and were built of unbaked mud brick and plastered with mud. Normally a series of smaller towers were spaced around the roof, each pierced with many openings to serve as entrances for the birds and to permit circulation of air. Similar towers were known in the Kabul region of Afghanistan. At Golpāyegān, on the other hand, the pigeon towers were rectangular (Wulff, p. 270; Beazley, 1977, pp. 101-02). Each tower contained 4,000-6,000 perches on the interior. At Isfahan the towers are still opened once a year and the droppings carried to the fields.

Isolated towers had other functions as well. The single tower in the fortress at Baku (*Bādkūba*), called *Borj-e Bādkūba* or *Borj-e Doḡtar* (probably 8th/14th century), was used as a lighthouse (*Farāhānī*, p. 63). The *Mīl-e Nāderī* (Hutt and Harrow, pl. 27; *Meškātī*, p. 150), also called *Borj-e Nāderī*, was probably built as a landmark for travelers and caravans in the Saljuq period (by the Saljuq Sultan of Kermān, Malek Qāvord b. Čaġrī Beg, r. 433-65/1041-73, according to Moḡammad b. Ebrāhīm, p. 11), not by Nāder Shah Afšār (see *Bāstānī Pārīzī*, p. 1010; cf. Hillenbrand, p. 367). A functionally enigmatic tower is the richly decorated “minaret” of Jām in Afghanistan built by the Ghurid sultan Ġiāt-al-Dīn Moḡammad b. Sām (558-99/1163-1203), perhaps as a beacon and watchtower (Moline).

Tomb towers were among the various types of early mausoleum structure; they could be cylindrical, polygonal, or stellate (with projecting flanges) in plan. Examples of the cylindrical type survive at Raskat (early 5th/11th century; Godard, pp. 118-21) and Lājīm (413/1022; pp. 109-18) in Māzandarān. Polygonal examples include the octagonal tower at Šamīrān (*Varjāvand*, pp. 424-29 and pl. 222) and the ten-sided mausoleum of Mo'mena Kātūn at Nakjavān (582/1186; Turánszky, pp. 31-33). Among flanged towers the Gonbad-e Qābūs in Gorgān (397/1006-07; *Survey of Persian Art*, pls. 37-38), the so-called *Borj-e Toġrol* (534/1140) at Ray, and the tomb tower of 'Alā'-al-Dīn (688/1289; Wilber, pp. 117-18, pls. 17-18) at Varāmīn, may be mentioned. The term *borj* was, however, never used in the foundation inscriptions of such buildings, nor was it applied to tombs in medieval chronicles. It appears in this sense for the



first time in the 12th/18th and 13th/19th centuries.

See also [BĀRŪ](#); CASTLES.

M.-E. Bāstānī Pārīzī, “Nāder-nāma,” *Rāhnamā-ye ketāb* 11-12, 1341 Š./1962, pp. 1003-11.

E. Beazley, “The Pigeon Towers of Isfahan, *Iran* 4, 1966, pp. 105-09.

Idem, “Some Vernacular Buildings of the Iranian Plateau,” *Iran* 15, 1977, pp. 89-102.

Jean Chardin, ed. L. Langlès, *Voyages du chevalier Chardin en Perse, et autres lieux de l’Orient*, Paris, 1811.

K. A. C. Creswell, *The Muslim Architecture of Egypt*, 2 vols., Oxford, 1959.

Idem, “Fortification in Islam,” *Proceedings of the British Academy* 38, 1952, pp. 89-125.

A. A. Damīrčī, “Kabūtar o kabūtar-kānahā-ye Eṣfahān,” *Honar o mardom* 115, 1351 Š./1972, pp. 34-37.

Mīrzā Moḥammad-Ḥosayn Farāhānī, *Safar-nāma A.H. 1302-1303*, ed. M. Golzārī, Tehran, 1362 Š./1983.

A. Godard, “Les tours de Ladjim et de Resget (Māzandarān),” *Athār-é Īrān* I/1, 1936, pp. 109-21.

T. Herbert, *Travels in Persia, 1627-29*, London, 1928.

R. Hillenbrand, *The Tomb Towers of Iran to 1550*, unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 1974.

Idem, “Manāra, Manār,” in *EI* ² VI, pp. 361-68.

A. Hutt and L. Harrow, *Iran* I, London, 1977.

N. Meškātī, *Fehrest-e banāhā-ye tārikī wa amāken-e bāstānī-e Īrān*, Tehran, n.d.

G. C. Miles, “Appendix,” in O. Grabar, “The Earliest Islamic Commemorative



Structures,” *Ars Orientalis* 6, 1966, pp. 45-46.

Moḥammad b. Ebrāhīm, *Saljūqīān o ġoz dar Kermān*, ed. M.-E. Bāstānī Pārīzī, Tehran, 1343 Š./1964.

J. Moline, “The Minaret of Ġam (Afghanistan),” *Kunst des Orients* 9, 1973-74, pp. 131-48.

Ḥasan b. Moḥammad b. Ḥasan Qomī, *Tārīk-e Qom*, Pers. tr. from Ar. by Ḥasan b. ‘Alī b. Ḥasan ‘Abd-al-Malek Qomī in 805/1403, ed., S. J. Tehrānī, n.p., 1934.

F. Richards, *A Persian Journey, Being an Etcher’s Impressions of the Middle East*, London, 1931; Pers. tr. M. Šabā, *Safar-e Īrān*, Tehran, 1343 Š./1964.

M. Shokoohy, “Monuments of the Early Caliphate at Dārzīn in the Kirmān Region (Iran),” *JRAS* 1980, no. 1, pp. 3-20.

J. Sourdél-Thomine, H. Terrasse, and J. Burton-Page, “Burdj,” in *EI* ², pp. 1315-24.

S. P. Tolstov, *Drevnīi Khorezm. Opyt istoriko-arkheologicheskogo issledovaniya*, Moscow, 1948.

I. Turánszky, *Aserbaidshan. Palāste, Türme, Moscheen*, tr. from Hungarian by T. and P. Alpári, Hanaur, 1980.

P. Varjāvand, *Sarzamīn-e Qazvīn*, Tehran, 1349 Š./1970.

D. N. Wilber, *The Architecture of Islamic Iran. The Il Khānīd Period*, Princeton, 1955; repr. New York, 1969.

(Abbas Daneshvari)

ii. As a Sign of the Zodiac

The use of a word meaning “tower” in this special astronomical sense presumably arose from the conception of the zodiac as a barrier between heaven and earth through which access was gained by means of twelve zodiacal gates (cf. *Book of Enoch*, chap. 72 of the Ethiopic version, where the zodiacal gates are said to be on the eastern and western horizons; ed.



Neugebauer, pp. 6-9), each of which was assumed to be guarded by a tower. In any case, the word *borj* appears in the sense of “sign of the zodiac” already in the Koran (15:16, 25:62, and 75:1); its first appearance in a technical treatise seems to have been in the *Ketāb at-mawālīd*, which was translated into Arabic from Pahlavi in about 130/747-48 by Sā’ed b. Ḳorāsānḳorra, who ascribed it to Zarathustra. Subsequently the word was translated into Byzantine Greek as *pyrgos* and into medieval Latin as *turris*.

The Pahlavi, Arabic, and Persian, and English names of the specific signs of the zodiac (shown in [Chart 3](#)) are all translated from the ancient Greek names for the relevant constellations, which were in turn based upon, though not identical with, those of Babylonia.

See also [CONSTELLATIONS](#).

Bundahišn (TD₂), p. 51; tr. Anklesaria, pp. 58-61.

W. B. Henning, “An Astronomical Chapter of the Bundahishn,” *JRAS*, 1942, pp. 229-48, esp. pp. 230f. *Al-mawālīd*, mss. Escorial 939 and Nurosmaniye 856 (3), Istanbul. O. Neugebauer, *The “Astronomical” Chapters of the Ethiopic Book of Enoch (72-82)*, Copenhagen, 1981.

Search terms:

برج borj bourj