



DAYR-E GAČĪN

DAYR-E GAČĪN (lit., “gypsum hospice”), Sasanian **caravansary** situated in the desert halfway between Ray and Qom, on the ancient route from Ray to Isfahan ([Plate X](#)). It is recorded in most early Muslim geographies (see, e.g. Ebn Rosta, p. 191), with the name sometimes given in Arabic as Dayr al-jeṣṣ. According to Moḥammad b. Qays Rāzī (ed. Modarres Rażawī, p. 192), the name referred to a dome built with gypsum that once stood there. Eṣṭaḳrī (pp. 230-31) and Ebn Ḥawqal (pp. 403-04) noted that the caravansary, “a fortified construction,” was built of baked bricks and gypsum, with a well of salt water inside and two circular cisterns outside to collect rain water for drinking. It housed a garrison of state guards, apparently to maintain control of the route through the nearby Sīāhkūh and Karkaskūh, well known for the gangs of robbers alluded to in a tale recorded by Neẓām-al-Molk (p. 80). The caravansary was ascribed to the Sasanian period by Abū Dolaf (p. 19), Yāqūt (*Boldān* II, p. 690), Zakariyā’ Qazvīnī (p. 371), and Ḥasan b. Moḥammad Qomī (p. 26); although writers like Yāqūt attributed it to Ardašīr I (224-40) and gave the Sasanian name Kerd-Ardašīr, others, like Qomī, recorded it as a work of ẖosrow I Anōšīravān (531-79). It is not unlikely that the building dates from early Sasanian times and was restored at the time of Anōšīravān.

During the Islamic period the caravansary underwent major reconstruction at least twice. The first occasion was in the reign of the Saljuq sultan Sanjar (511-52/1118-57), whose vizier Abū Naṣr Aḥmad Kāšī repaired the road between Ray and Qom, restored Dayr-e Gačīn, and made the nearby village of Kāj into an endowment for it (Nāṣer al-Dīn Monšī, p. 68). The second was



apparently during the Safavid period, when most of the old vaults, built with large Sasanian bricks measuring 36 x 36 x 8 cm, were dismantled and new vaults were built with smaller bricks 25 x 25 x 5 cm on top of the old walls. A large number of the Sasanian bricks were left around the site and were reused later in surrounding buildings.

The caravansary is a fortified square enclosure, with round towers at the corners and two towers, semielliptical in plan, flanking the main entrance in the middle of the southern wall (Figure 8). The corridors to the towers retain their original vaults with parabolic profiles and the towers themselves their Sasanian domes, also parabolic in profile. The domes of the entrance towers are elliptical in plan, an unusual feature in Persian architecture. Inside the enclosure there is a large central courtyard surrounded by four *ayvāns* and forty rooms, each with a vaulted anteroom and, behind, a row of stables with sixty-six raised niches in the walls for use as sleeping platforms. The plan is similar to that of other Islamic caravansaries in Persia, and it is not clear how much of it is of the Sasanian period and how much of the Saljuq reconstruction. Outside the enclosure the cisterns, domed with Sasanian bricks, are also preserved; one of them still holds water.

Dayr-e GačĪn is one of the largest caravansaries in Persia, and, apart from the usual accommodations, includes some uncommon features. Inside the enclosure each corner was built on a different plan for a specific function. In the northwest corner there is a mill, in the southwest a small courtyard with a bathhouse and kitchen. The northeast corner was built as a private apartment around a small courtyard and must have been intended for the use of royalty or high-ranking officials. Among such personages was the Safavid shah Esmā'īl I (907-30/1501-24), who took this route on his campaign from Fārs to Fīrūzkūh and Māzandarān (Qāzī Aḥmād, p. 268). A mosque was constructed in the southeast corner of the enclosure; it is square in plan, and in the center of the sanctuary there are four massive piers of Sasanian brick, arranged as in a *čahārṭāq*. As with the rest of the structure, the original roof has been replaced by later Islamic vaults, but it is likely that the mosque is on the site of a Sasanian fire temple that had a domed *čahārṭāq* in the center.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abū Dolaf b. Mohalhel, *al-Resālat al-tānīya*, ed. V. Minorsky, Cairo, 1955.

M. Y. Kiani, *Iranian Caravansarais*, Tokyo, 1978, pp. 27-28.

Mojmal, ed. Bahār, pp. 54, 463.

Nāṣer al-Dīn Monšī Kermānī, *Nasā'em al-aṣḥār*, ed. J. Moḥaddet, Tehran, 1338 Š./1959.

Neẓām al-Molk, *Sīar al-molūk (Sīāsat-nāma)*, ed. H. Darke, Tehran, 1341 Š./1962.

Qāzī Aḥmad Ġaffārī Qazvīnī, *Tārīk-e jahānārā*, Tehran, 1343 Š./1964.

Abū Yaḥyā Zakarīyā' Qazvīnī, *Ātār al-belād*, Beirut, 1960.

Ḥasan b. Moḥammad Qomī, *Ketāb-e tārīk-e Qom*, Pers. tr. Ḥasan b. 'Alī Qomī, ed. S. J. Ṭehrānī, Tehran, 1313 Š./1934.

Šams-al-Dīn Moḥammad b. Qays Rāzī, *al-Mo'jam fi ma'ayir aš'ār al-'ajam*, ed. M. Qazvīnī, Leiden and London, 1909; 2nd ed., ed. M.-T. Modarres Rażawī, Tehran, 1336 Š./1957.

M. Shokoohy, "The Sasanian Caravanserai of Dayr-i Gachīn, South of Ray, Iran," *BSOAS* 46, 1983, pp. 445-61.

M. Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Rāhnemā-ye joġrāfiā-ye tārīkī-e Qom I*, Qom, 1355 Š./1976, pp. 66, 208-09.