



DEZKŪH

DEZKŪH (or Šāhdez), a medieval mountain fortress situated in central Persia on the summit of Mount Šoffa, about 8 km south of Isfahan. No information is available on the construction date of this strategically situated fortress, which guarded the routes to Isfahan, but, like some other ruins in the same region, it may have been built as early as the Sasanian period (Minasian, pp. 17-18, 20, 61-62, pls. 1-45). Ebn al-Aṭīr attributed (X, pp. 109-10) the construction of this fortress, which he called the “fortress (*qal’a*) of Isfahan,” to the Saljuq sultan Malekšāh (465-85/1072-92), but this attribution does not seem reliable. It is more likely that Malekšāh merely rebuilt the fortress as a major military outpost of Isfahan, the chief Saljuq capital; it was from his time that the fortress became more generally designated as Šāhdez, reflecting his reconstruction of the existing Dezkūh (Zahīr-al-Dīn, p. 40; Rāvandī, p. 156).

The historical importance of Dezkūh is particularly related to the activities of the Nezārī Isma‘ilis in Persia during the early Alamūt period (487-654/1094-1256). Isma‘ili *dā’īs* (missionaries) had been active in the region of Isfahan during the 11th century, and by the 460s/1170s ‘Abd-al-Malek b. ‘Aṭṭāš, the chief *dā’ī* of Persia and Iraq at the time, had established his headquarters at Isfahan. Ḥasan Šabbāḥ’s seizure of Alamūt in 483/1090, which marked the effective foundation of the Nezārī state in Persia, further encouraged the *da’wa*, or missionary activities, of Aḥmad b. ‘Abd-al-Malek b. ‘Aṭṭāš, who had succeeded his father as *dā’ī* of Isfahan. Aḥmad, posing as a schoolmaster, gradually succeeded in converting the garrison of Dezkūh, comprised mostly of Deylamī soldiers with Shi‘ite tendencies. By 494/1100, or



possibly a few years earlier, Aḥmad had gained possession of Dezkūh, which he fortified like other Nezārī mountain castles in Persia (Zahīr-al-Dīn, pp. 40-41; Rāvandī, pp. 155 ff.; Rašīd-al-Dīn, 1338 Š./1959, p. 120; idem, 1960, pp. 69-74; Kāšānī, p. 156; Mīrkvānd, Tehran, IV, pp. 306 ff.; Hodgson, pp. 85-86; Daftary, pp. 354-55).

The Nezārī capture of Dezkūh was a serious blow to the Saljuqs, especially as soon afterward Aḥmad b. ‘Abd-al-Malek began to collect taxes in the districts around the fortress. Accordingly, the chief focus of the anti-Nezārī campaign conducted by Sultan Moḥammad b. Malekšāh (498-511/1105-18) was Dezkūh. The sultan with a large force besieged the fortress in 500/1107, but the tactics of Aḥmad, who involved the Sunnite ‘*olamā*’ of Isfahan in a long religious disputation, in which he argued that the Isma‘ilis were also true Muslims, delayed the conquest for almost a year, until the ‘*olamā*’ had rendered their judgment. Eventually battle was joined; Aḥmad and his small band of Nezārīs fought the Saljuqs gallantly from tower to tower. In the final assault most of the Nezārī defenders of Dezkūh were killed; Aḥmad was captured and later executed in Isfahan (Zahīr-al-Dīn, pp. 41-42; Rāvandī, pp. 158-161; Bondārī, pp. 90-91; Ebn al-Aṭīr, X, pp. 151-52; Ebn al-Qalānesī, pp. 151-56, containing the text of the victory statement issued on the occasion; Rašīd-al-Dīn, 1338 Š./1959, pp. 121-22; Kāšānī, pp. 156-57; Hodgson, pp. 95-96; Lewis, pp. 53-55; Daftary, pp. 361-62). The conquest of Dezkūh is celebrated in one of the versions of the introduction to the *Bahman-nāma* (Storey-de Blois, V, 564-65).

Dezkūh was demolished soon after on the sultan’s orders, as he feared its recapture by the Nezārīs. The extensive ruins have been investigated and described by Caro O. Minasian (1897-1972), who was evidently the first person to identify and study the site in modern times (pp. 21-39, 52-54).

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