



EŞTAQR

EŞTAQR (ESTAKR, STAKR), city and district in ancient Persia (Fārs).

i. *History and Archaeology.*

ii. *As a Zoroastrian Religious Center.*

i. HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY

Eştaqr is situated in the narrow valley of the Polvār River, between the north flank of the Kūh-e Raḥmat and the cliffs of Naqš-e Rostam. It stands near the point where the valley opens into the broad plain of Marvdašt (q.v.), extending before the Persepolis platform. In origin, Eştaqr was presumably a suburb of the urban settlement once surrounding the Achaemenid royal residences, but of which few traces now survive. After the death of Seleucus I (280 B.C.), when the province began to re-assert its independence, its center seems to have developed at Eştaqr, better protected than the old capital by the surrounding hills, and astride the critical “winter road” from Fārs to Isfahan via Pasargadae and Ābāda. The name, Pahl. *stxl* (e.g., Markwart, *Provincial Capitals*, p. 19), believed to mean “strong(hold),” was presumably transferred to the new site from the Persepolis platform, according to Ernst Herzfeld in the OP form **Parsa-staxra* “stronghold of Pārs.” He interprets certain Aramaic characters, PR BR, appearing on coins of the so-called “Fratadara” Kings of Persis (q.v.), as an abbreviation of Aram. *prs’ byrt’* “the Fortress of Pārsa.” This could be the Aramaic equivalent of the preceding Old Persian words, denoting Eştaqr as the mint of such issues.



The nucleus of the subsequent city thus lay on the south and east side of the Polvār River, within city walls traceable in air photographs and on the ground (Plate I). Masonry remains and columns at the point where the Isfahan road from Persepolis rounds the end of the Kūh-e Raḥmat and enters the Polvār valley apparently represent an Achaemenian gate and check-point controlling travel on this route. On the rising city-mound east of this point stands a nineteenth-century mud-brick enclosure known as Taḳt-e Tāwūs, and a number of Achaemenid columns, re-used in a medieval mosque. Excavations by Erich Schmidt in 1932 and 1934 included several sondages in this area, and also near the center, and towards the western edge of the urban site, but failed to locate Achaemenid deposits. No doubt the town flourished from 265 B.C.E. to 200 C.E., under the Persis kings, whose capital is believed to have been here; and, from A.D. 208, under the Sasanians, when it was the principal city and religious center of the province, but not normally a royal residence.

Closely associated with Eştaqr was the religious precinct of Naqş-e Rostam (q.v.) on the far side of the valley (Plate II). This was the location of the Achaemenid royal tombs, of important Sasanian rock-sculptures, and of funeral installations (*daḳmas*). Beyond this spot, on the open Marvdašt Plain, stand three prominent bluffs known as Seh Gonbadān “The Three Domes.” That nearest to Eştaqr was heavily fortified, and in Islamic times as no doubt earlier regularly served as the inviolable treasury of the rulers of Eştaqr, designated Qal’a-ye Eştaqr, “The Castle of Eştaqr,” or Eştaqr-Yār, “The Friend of Eştaqr.” The cold climate at its crest produced accumulations of snow, which melted into a cistern contained by a powerful dam, built by ‘Azod-al-Dawla to retain water for the garrison. According to Ebn al-Zobayr (pp. 78-79), the Buyid Abū Kālījār (see below) ascended the castle accompanied by his son and a valuer, finding a tank eighty cubits long, wide and deep, piled high with silver, and chambers full of priceless gems.

The last appearance of Eştaqr in numismatics was upon the unique dinar issued in 455/1063 by an obscure Saljuq prince of Fārs, Rasūltegīn, where it indicates the castle rather than the city. It seems likely that the treasures of Qal’a-ye Eştaqr included the legacies of earlier dynasties, to judge by the statement of Ebn al-Aṭīr (X, 36), that when Alp Arslān (q.v.) captured the castle in 459/1066-67, its governor handed over to him a turquoise cup inscribed with the name of the mythical king Jamšīd. The two further bluffs were those of Qal’a-ye Şekasta, used as the textile store, and Qal’a-ye Oşkonvān, for the armory. These fortresses, now seemingly distant from the urban area, were in



medieval times and earlier regarded as within the greater city of Eṣṭaḳr. The city reached its heyday in the Sasanian period, and its mint-abbreviation, ST, for Staxr (Staḥr), is frequent throughout the Sasanian coinage from the reign of Bahrām V (A.D. 420-438), until the end of the dynasty. These mint operations were of course evidence of substantial economic activity.

With the Arab conquest of Fārs, the invaders at first made their headquarters at Bayzā on the Marvdašt plain. In 28/648-49 under ‘Abd-Allāh b. ‘Āmer (q.v.), Eṣṭaḳr was taken by capitulation. After a further rising it had to be retaken by force in the following year, with heavy loss of life to the population. The city long remained a stronghold of Zoroastrianism. As a mint it is well represented in the Arab-Sasanian and Reformed Umayyad coinage, apparently without further involvement in major events: Arab-Sassanian: 31 H; for Zīād b. Abī Sofyān, 51 H, 54 H; for ‘Obayd-Allāh b. Zīād 52 (?), 59 (AE), 60 61; for ‘Abd-Allāh b. al-Zobayr 63 or 66; for ‘Omar b. ‘Obayd-Allāh 69-71(?); for Mohallab 78, 79 (or 69?). Reformed coinage: 79-102; ‘Abbasids 135-67. During the ‘Abbasid period, the economic and political center of Fārs gradually shifted to Shiraz, but Eṣṭaḳr still figures in accounts of the wars between the Saffarids and the caliphal governors in Fārs. Here ‘Amr b. Layṭ defeated the forces of Musā Mofleḥī on 16 Du’l-ḥejja 276/11 April 890 (*Tārīḳ-e Sīstān*, p. 247; tr. Gold p. 196). The last coin attributed to Eṣṭaḳr (cf. von Zambaur, p. 49) is a supposedly Dolafid issue of 282/895-96. There is, however, uncertainty about the coin-issues with the mint-name Fārs, continuous between 202 and 299 and attributed by Eduard von Zambaur to Shiraz, yet overlapping issues of Shiraz in the years 272, 273, 277, 279, 280, 283, 291, 292, 299, 312, 331, and 384. Some or all of these may, in fact, represent unrecognized issues of Eṣṭaḳr. According to his inscriptions in the Tačara, the Buyid ‘Azod-al-Dawla visited Persepolis in 344/955-56. The celebrated, if disputed, gold medal, dated Fārs 359/969-70, and illustrating this amir in a Sasanian type crown, could also represent an issue of Eṣṭaḳr, whether from the city or the castle. According to Ebn al-Balkī (p. 127), breaches of their covenant (including that of 28/648-49 noticed above) had led to several massacres of the population at Eṣṭaḳr. Finally, in the closing years of Abū Kālījār (i.e. ‘Emād-al-Dīn Marzobān, 415-40/1024-48; not, as sometimes said, Ṣamṣām-al-Dawla) the enmity of a vizier towards a landowner caused him to send against the town troops under the amir Qotlomeš, who demolished and pillaged the remaining buildings, leaving the city a mere village with no more than a hundred inhabitants, and bringing its history to an end.



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(A. D. H. Bivar)

ii. AS A ZOROASTRIAN RELIGIOUS CENTER

The religious importance of Eṣṭakr was marked in the 4th century B.C.E. by the setting up at Persepolis by Artaxerxes II (q.v.) of one of his statues to Anaitis (Berossus 3.65; see ANĀHĪD). Other instances show that “at” in this context need mean no more than “near” (Boyce and Grenet, *Zoroastrianism*, p. 203), and that these statues were regularly placed within temples. Artaxerxes’ foundation may, therefore, reasonably be identified with the temple whose imposing ruins, “about one parasang from the town of Eṣṭakr” were visited by Mas’ūdī in the 10th century C. E. It stood, he recorded, at the foot of a mountain, where the imprisoned wind made a noise like thunder, night and day, and where he saw, still standing, “pillars, made from blocks of



astonishing size, surmounted by curious figures in stone representing horses and other animals, of gigantic shapes and proportions.” Around these remains was “a vast empty space enclosed by a strong stone wall, covered with bas-reliefs very elegantly and gracefully wrought” (*Morūj*, ed. Pellat, sec. 1403). This ruined temple was probably the original Achaemenid building, which had doubtless been pillaged by Macedonians and been subsequently restored and further embellished under the Sasanians. Mas’ūdī records the tradition that it had originally been an “idol-temple,” converted into one of fire by Homāy, the legendary predecessor of the Achaemenid dynasty. In fact it was presumably at the beginning of the Sasanian period, or a little earlier, that the Zoroastrian iconoclastic movement (Boyce, 1975; Boyce and Grenet, *Zoroastrianism*, p. 66, n. 71) caused the cult-image of Anāhīd to be replaced by a sacred fire, which Mas’ūdī characterized as “one of the most venerated of Zoroastrian fires.” The association with Anāhīd persisted, however, and Ṭabarī (I, p. 814) says that the sanctuary was known as “the house of Anāhīd’s fire” (*bayt nār Anāhīd*).

The wardenship of this temple was evidently a prestigious office, which according to tradition was held at one time by Sāsān, eponymous ancestor of the Sasanian dynasty (Ṭabarī, p. 814). He is said to have married into the family of the Bāzrangīs (q.v.), vassals of the Arsacids, who were ruling at Eṣṭaḳr in the early 3rd century. Subsequently Ardašīr I is reputed to have sent to “the house of Anāhīd’s fire” the heads of enemies slain in his early campaigns, and in 340 Šābuhr II had the heads of Christians suspended there (Ṭabarī, I, p. 819; Christensen, *Iran Sass.*, p. 166, n. 4). Among the honors conferred on the great Sasanian high priest, Kirdēr, by Bahrām II (276-93) were the offices of master of ceremonies (*ēwēnbed*, q.v.) and warden (*pādixšāy*) of “fire(s) at Staḳr of Anāhīd-Ardašīr and Anāhīd the Lady,” *ādur ī anāhīd ardaxšīr ud anāhīd ī bānūg* (Kirdēr, KZ, l. 8). Considering how great were the other privileges and powers enjoyed by Kirdēr, these appointments, proudly recorded by him, attest the immense regard in which these sacred fires of Eṣṭaḳr were held. Since Bānū (Lady) is a cult-epithet of Anāhīd (see *EIr.* I, p. 1005), the second fire named was evidently that of the Achaemenid foundation. The first, whose name lacks satisfactory explanation, was probably that of “the fire-house which is called that of Ardašīr,” where the nobles of Eṣṭaḳr had Yazdegerd III crowned in 632 (Ṭabarī, I, p. 1067); and it is likely to be this same temple, described as having round pillars with bull capitals, which was subsequently converted into the chief mosque of Muslim Eṣṭaḳr, standing in the town’s *bāzār* (Moḳaddasī, p. 436). Mas’ūdī (*Morūj*, ed. Pellat, sec. 1403) says that, before Anāhīd’s temple was ruined, its fire was



taken away, and it has been argued that this was one of the two exalted fires which were eventually carried to safe obscurity in Šarīfābād near Yazd, where it burns to this day (Boyce, *Stronghold*, pp. 2-3).

In Sasanian times the royal treasury (*ganj ī šāhīgān*; Bailey, *Zoroastrian Problems*, 2nd ed., pp. xlii-xliii, 230-31; Shaki, p. 115, n. 2; Boyce and Grenet, *Zoroastrianism*, p. 78, n. 59) appears to have been in Eştaḵr. It is frequently mentioned in the *Dēnkard* and *Mādayān ī hazār dādestān*, for among its contents were books, sacred and profane. In the later Sasanian period these would undoubtedly have included one of the rare copies of the Great Avesta, possibly that from which the whole existing Avestan manuscript tradition derives (*EIr.* III, p. 36). In 303/915-16, Mas'ūdī (*Tanbīh*, p. 106) saw in the house of a great Persian noble at Eştaḵr the large and very fine manuscript of a work copied in 113/731 from documents in the royal treasury, including, according to his description, the *Tāj-nāma* (Christensen, *Iran Sass.*, pp. 67-69.).

In spite of its religious importance, Eştaḵr is rarely mentioned by name in the Zoroastrian writings.

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Plate I. Aerial view of Eştaḵr. Oriental Institute aerial survey of Iran field negative AE-57. Courtesy of The Oriental Institute of The University of Chicago.

Plate II. Aerial view of Naqš-e Rostam. Oriental Institute aerial survey of Iran field negative AE-278. Courtesy of The Oriental Institute of The University of Chicago.