Published: December 15, 2002
Last Updated: September 25, 2018

GONDĒŠĀPUR

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i. THE CITY

In the Sasanian epoch, Gondēšāpur was one of the four major cities of Ḵuzestān, the other three being Karḵa (Ērān-xwarrah-Šābuhr, q.v.), Susa, and Šuštar. The extensive irrigation systems developed there by the early Sasanians were probably aimed at supplying a large population; the four cities "must have had a total population of about 100,000" (Christensen, p. 111). Although agricultural products, mainly rice and sugar, were the main exports of the area (Gondēšāpur's sugar was sold in Khorasan and farther east; Schwarz, *Iran*, pp. 347-48; Le Strange, *Lands*, p. 238), the textile industry also made this province rich and famous (Christensen, p. 111).

It has been argued by Daniel T. Potts (pp. 327-34) that Gondēšāpur might have had a Parthian antecedent. This argument is based on the mention in two Greek inscriptions from Susa of the term Gondeisos as the name of a waterway (Potts, pp. 328-29). The name would seems to represent an Iranian **gund-dēz* "military fortress," which led Potts to pose the hypothesis that *Gond-dez was the original Iranian name of the place, from which the name of the river Āb-e Dez (q.v.) had been derived. According to him, when Šāpur I rebuilt the town,

"*Gund-dēz became *Gundēz/Gund-dēz-i Šāpur, while his resettlement of the deportees from Antioch-on-the-Orontes accounted for the epithet '(the) better (is) Antiochia of Šāpur'" (Potts, p. 234). This conclusion is contradicted by the fact that the archeological survey of the site of Gondēšāpur revealed no trace of a Pre-Sasanian occupation (Adams and Hansen; see below).

With the fall of the Sasanian Empire in the middle of the 7th century, Gondēšāpur fell into decline. The fact that most of its inhabitants had been Christians, who probably did not want to convert into Islam and therefore left their city, must have contributed to this decline. Nevertheless, the city flourished as a prosperous town in the early Islamic period (Schwarz, *Iran*, pp. 345-50; Le Strange, *Lands*, p. 238), and Yaʿqub b. Layṯ, "aspiring to imitate the Sasanians," chose it as his capital (Masʿudi, *Muruj*, ed. Pellat, sec. 601). He died in 265/879, and was buried there, and his tomb became the main feature of the early Islamic Gondēšāpur (Eṣṭaḵri, p. 93; Ebn Ḥawqal, p. 256; *Ḥōdud al-ʿālam*, ed. Sotuda, p. 139, tr. Minorsky, pp. 381-82).

The site of Gondēšāpur (Figure 1) was identified with the extensive ruins south of Šāhābād, a village situated 14 km southeast of Dezful. Clement August De Bode described the site as a vast plain with "broken walls in masonry scattered here and there, red bricks and tiles strewn about the fields, a line of mound and traces of aqueducts, with others still extant" (Rawlinson, p. 72; De Bode, II, p. 168). In the 1930s, Roman Ghirshman (p. 138) studied the remains of the city and noted that it had been built like a Roman military fort: a rectangular walled city, with the longer northern and southern sides some 2 km long and the shorter eastern side some 1 km long, with streets arranged in a grid system, just as Ḥamza Eṣfahāni (p. 49) had described it. When Nikolā Rāst visited the site in 1947, the destruction of the ruined structures was almost complete due to constant plowing (pp. 126-28).

Although the agricultural history of the Ḵuzestān plain has been extensively investigated (Adams, 1962; Wenke 1975, 1981; Christensen, pp. 105-12), the only published archeological study of the city of Gondēšāpur was carried out in February and March 1963 by Robert McC. Adams and Donald P. Hansen on behalf of the Oriental Institute of Chicago (see also Adams 1962, pp. 116-21; Wenke, 1975, p. 145; Idem, 1981, p. 313). They had already recognized the "rectangular outline of the city" and "a grid pattern suggesting regularly placed intersecting streets" on aerial photographs (p. 53). Their important surface survey and finds from soundings in the Spring of 1963 produced valuable, if negative, results. They made an accurate map of the site (fig. 1) and

were able to delineate its main features as well as the extensive irrigation system that had watered the town and its surrounding fields (Adams and Hansen, pp. 55-62). A stream called Siāh Manṣur ran along the western edge of the site, but water was supplied by a canal from the Dezful River (Adams and Hansen, p. 61, Fig. 2). This entered the bed of Siāh Manṣur at the northwest corner, passed through a tunnel, and resurfaced on the other bank where it served a mill and then branched off into several waterways which supplied the town (Adams and Hansen, pp. 59-67).

The fortification was evidently not substantial. The western side was protected by the Siāh Manṣur River and, possibly a canal; the other sides were defended by an inner ramp, a moat, and an outer wall (Adams and Hansen, pp. 56 ff.). The evidence for occupation was consistent with the report of geographers and historians (Schwarz, *Iran*, pp. 346-50; Le Strange, *Lands*, p. 238; *Ḥōdud al-ʿālam*, ed. Sotuda, p. 139, tr. Minorsky, pp. 381-82) that the city was a new foundation by Šāpur I, for no trace of habitation prior to the early Sasanian period was found there (Adams and Hansen, pp. 53 ff.). This rules out the argument of Potts (see above) that there was originally a Parthian fortress that Šāpur I rebuilt as Gondēšāpur. The finds from Šāhābād, consisting of pottery from the Sasanian down to the early ʿAbbasid periods suggest that the town flourished for some seven centuries until it was abandoned in about the 10th-11th century. Only a small fort (Qalʿa-ya ḵān) was built apparently in the Timurid time just over 1 km north of the ruins (Adams and Hansen, pp. 54-70).

The most prominent feature of Gondēšāpur from the 9th century onwards was the tomb of the Saffarid Yaʿqub b. Layṯ. A little Muslim shrine located on the outskirts of the Šāhābād village has long been the focus of attention. Baron Clement August de Bode (II, p. 166) knew it as “the Imam-zadeh Abdul Kazim,” and Nikolā Rāst (p. 128) as “Emām-zādeh Shah Abu’l-Qāsem.” Rāst visited it and noted that in structure it very much resembled the Tomb of Dāniāl (q.v.) in Susa. He heard “several informed locals” saying that it was in fact the tomb of Yaʿqub b. Layṯ; one of them told him that “up till sixteen or seventeen years ago” the wall of the shrine “bore an inscription in old Arabic script (*ʿarabi-e qadimi*) that clearly named Yaʿqub” (Rāst, p. 129). Today, the identification of this shrine as the tomb of Yaʿqub is so widely believed that some refer to it as “Emāmzāda Yaʿqub b. Layṯ” (Matteson, p. 155). My own investigation in 1973 could not secure any evidence to support or reject this identification.

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ii. HISTORY AND MEDICAL SCHOOL

Gondēšāpur (< Mid. Pers. Weh-Andiōk-Šābuhr; Mid. Pers. Inscription: why-ʾndywk-Šhypwhry “Better Is Šābuhr’s Antioch,” ŠKZ l. 32″; for the successive transformation of the Mid. Pers. form into subsequent Ar. Jondaysābur, cf. the

Gk. Bendosabora and Nöldeke's observations on similar changes from Mid. Pers. /*v*/ to NPers. /*g*/), name of a Sasanian and post-Sasanian district and its urban center in Ḵuzestān; its site has been located "south of the village of Šāhābād, three km below the last of the low ridges marking the northern limit of the Ḵuzestān plain" (Adams and Hansen, p. 53), between Tostar and Dezful (q.v.).

According to epigraphic, archeological, and literary evidence, the city owed its existence to the Sasanian Ardašir I's son and successor, Šāpur I (r. 242-72). Following the long-established royal custom, Šāpur commemorated his role as founder (and possibly patron) in the new establishment's name, including also a reference to his recent victory over the Roman emperor Valerian III (r. 253-60) by claiming superiority for his "Antioch" over the homonymous metropolis of Syria. Consequently, the date of Šāpur's founding act is contingent on the much debated chronology of his Roman war(s) and conquests of Antioch-on-the-Orontes (see antioch). Even though the existence of the "parallel" Syriac name of Bēṯ Lāpāṭ (q.v.) would seem to point to a previous settlement in the area, the archeological surface reconnaissance of 1963 (Adams and Hansen, p. 53), which in the absence of a systematic investigation of the site is our only archeological evidence, discovered no trace of a pre-Sasanian occupation.

A literary echo of such occupation predating Šāpur is also found in the late Sasanian list of provincial capitals (Markwart, *Provencial Capitals*, pp. 20, 98, sec. 48) and in the (garbled) legendary account of Šāpur's survey of the site in view of his intended foundation (Ṭabari, I, pp. 830-31, tr., V, pp. 38-39; Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser*, pp. 41-42, n. 2, tr. pp. 87-88, 99-100; Dinavari, ed. Guirgass, pp. 48-49, who mentions two corrupted forms, Nilāṭ and Nilāb, of the original Aramaic name as the town's name in Ḵuzi and in the language of its population, i.e., in Syriac; for the legend of Šāpur's love for a Byzantine princess and the founding of Gondēšāpur on the model of Constantinople to please her, see Ebn al-Qefṭi, p. 133). The transparently etiological tendency of the report, as quoted by the *Anonymous Berolinensis* Sprenger 30 (see Ṭabari, tr., V, p. xxiii) on the one hand and Ṭabari on the other, would seem to discredit it as merely explaining the popular Persianized name Bēlābād, but the early attestation of the Aramaic form as *byl'b'd* and Bēlapat, in the Parthian and Coptic Manichean tradition respectively, would seem to indicate a historical nucleus of the later, embellished accounts, given the fact that in the Sasanian-Arabic tradition, Mani's imprisonment and death was well-nigh

unanimously located in Gondēšāpur (Nöldeke, pp. 42, n., 47 and n. 5).

The architectural remains on the ground permit us to trace an orthogonal street grid within an oblong rectangular walled enclosure, thus approximating Ḥamza Eṣfahāni's idealized description of the site's layout as a chessboard of eight by eight streets (p. 49, ll. 7-9). In addition, primary sources, such as inscriptions and bullae, attest Gondēšāpur only at the beginning and during the last few decades of the Sasanian period; to date, its history in the later centuries are documented archeologically primarily by ceramic finds from the above-mentioned surface reconnaissance. These, casting substantive doubt on the literary evidence, clearly point to the site's rapid decline after the late 9th century. Consequently, the geographers of the 10th and subsequent centuries (e.g., Eṣṭaḵri, p. 93; Maqdesi/Moqaddasi, p. 405) would appear to have derived their information on the site's continued prosperity from uncritical compilations of older texts rather than from autopsy or contemporaneous records (Adams and Hansen, pp. 57-59).

Šāpur's official record of the satrapy of Weh-Andiyōk-Šābuhr in his famous trilingual inscription at Kaʿba-ye Zardošt (ŠKZ) near Persepolis is paralleled in Sasanian narrative historiography as transmitted to, and partially preserved by, later Arabic and Persian authors; thus he is credited with the establishment of both district and city of Gondēšāpur (Ṭabari, I, pp. 830-831; Yaʿqubi, *Taʾriḵ* I, p. 180). Ṭabari as well as Ḥamza (pp. 48-49), or perhaps their common source, even undertook to explain the city's name as deriving from Persian *Beh-az-Andiu-Šāpur; in spite of the obvious interpolation of the word "az," their attempt deserves recognition for the correct identification of the main elements of the name: "weh" and "Andiōk." Also, the possibility of contamination by a later Sasanian pattern of toponymy as exemplified by Weh-az-Āmid-Kawād remains to be considered (see Gyselen 1989, p. 62, no. 47; cf. Weh-Ārdašir and Weh-Kawād, ibid., pp. 61-62, nos. 46, 48).*

The terminus post quem of Šāpur's foundation was his occupation of Antioch. However, he conquered the city twice within a few years, the earlier one was arguably in 256 (according to the patriarch Nicephorus, Demetrianus's patriarchate in Antioch began in 253 and lasted altogether four years; see Schwaigert, pp. 20-23) and the later one in 260, during Valerian III's fateful campaign. If the report of Demetrianus's deportation from Antioch and his incumbency as bishop of Gondēšāpur in the *Chronicle of Seʿert* (*Patrologia Orientalis* IV/3, p. 221) is accepted, the date of Šāpur's foundation would fall into the period between his two occupations of Anitoch, i.e., the years 256-60.

Documentation of Weh-Andiōk-Šābuhr's subsequent history under Sasanian rule is very uneven. The relative prominence of Christians in the region is attested by the *Chronicle of Seʿert*, which mentions the election of a certain Ardaq as the episcopal successor to Demetrianus, thus adumbrating the later importance of Bē(ṯ) Lāpāṭ as the metropolitan see of Bēṯ Ḫuzāyē (Schwaigert, passim). According to the literary tradition, Weh-Andiōk-Šābuhr repeatedly fulfilled the function of royal residence during the 3rd and 4rth centuries, at least un-til the great persecution of Christians under Šāpur II. The earliest relevant witness is that of the Manichean tradition of Mani's doomed confrontation with King Warahrān I and his counselors at 'Bēlapat' and his ensuing fatal imprisonment there in 276-77 (Dinavari, ed. ʿĀmer and Šayyāl, p. 47).

The next firm date is furnished by the Syriac witnesses to Šāpur II's persecution of Christians; in the decade of 340, the Catholicos Šāhdōst and others were tried there in the king's presence and executed (Schwaigert, p. 110). Thus the city must have retained some of its former standing even after Šāpur moved residence from Gondēšāpur after the first thirty years of his reign, if Ḥamza (p. 52) is lent credence, and the coincidence of this date with the (re-)foundation of Karḵā ḏe Lēḏān as Xwarrah Šābuhr in 338 would seem to support it (cf. Schwaigert, pp. 109-10; thus Gyselen's attractive hypothesis, p. 75, against Ḥamza, p. 52, who cites Xwarrah Šābuhr as Susaδs name and, among Šāpur II's foundations, refers to an unnamed town near Sus that the author of *Mojmal al-tawāriḵ* [ed. Bahār, p. 67] identifies with Karḵā ḏe Lēḏān). If this is accepted, then ʿOmar Kesrā's statement (apud Masʿudi, *Muruj* I, p. 295) that Gondēšāpur served as residence from its foundation through the reign of Hormazd II (303-9) would have to be revised.

Sources of Sasanian history mention Gondēšāpur as the hub of Anōšazād's rebellion against his own father, Ḵosrow I Anōširavān, in about 550 (Dinavari, ed. ʿĀmer and Šayyāl, pp. 69-70; Nöldeke, pp. 467-74, tr. pp. 708-14; here, a similar dissociation between the city's two names, Beṯ Lāpāṭ and Weh-Andiōk-Šāpuhr/Jondaysābur, obtains as does generally between the Syriac Christian and the Arabic sources). Thus, Procopius, on the strength of this observation relying on Syriac authorities (see above), cites Anōšazād's place of banishment as Bēlapata, whereas the Islamic texts, beginning chronologically with Abu Ḥanifa Dinavari (ed. Guirgass, p. 71, ed. ʿĀmer and Šayyāl, p. 70), only use the popular Arabic adaptation of the royal Sasanian name: Jondaysābur (see ANŌŠAZĀD). They are paralleled, if not preceded, in this usage by

Theophylactus Simocates' Bendosabōra.

Sasanian rule at Gondēšāpur ended with the city's surrender to the Muslim forces in 17/638 (Ṭabari, I, pp. 2566-68, tr., XIII, pp. 146-49; Ebn al-Aṯir, Beirut, II, p. 553). This event, as well as the city's subsequent history, are well-documented by narrative sources, with the notable exception of the archeological evidence mentioned above. Gondēšāpur figures in the geographic literature of the 9th and following centuries, but in political history it recaptures attention only once, and then briefly, in the latter part of the 9th century. In 262/875-76, in the course of the successive challenges to caliphal authority, one of the contending leaders, Yaʿqub b. Layṯ Ṣaffār, made Gondēšāpur his residence; whatever further ambitions he may have had were, however, cut short by his sudden death in 265/879. His grave there became one of the city's sites for its remaining span of existence (Eṣṭaḵri, p. 93; Ebn Ḥawqal, p. 256; Masʿudi, *Tanbih*, p. 368; idem, *Muruj*, ed. Pellat, sec. 601; *Tāriḵ-e Sistān*, p. 233; Ebn Ḵallekān, tr. de Slane, IV, pp. 320-22; *Ḥodud al-ʿālam*, ed. Sotuda, p. 139, tr. Minorsky, pp. 131, 381-82). During the following century and a half, Gondēšāpur gradually faded out of history, although the literary tradition would have it otherwise.

Gondēšāpur's real fame in the history of Islamic Persia rests on its alleged role in the transmission of Hellenistic learning, or more precisely, of Galenic medicine and the institution of the teaching hospital (*bimārestān*) to the metropolitan ʿAbbasid society and beyond that to Islamic civilization at large (see BĪMĀRESTĀN and BOḴTĪŠŪʿ iv, *pace* Dols, esp. pp. 381-85). The earliest testimony to Gondēšāpur in the context of medical learning refers to a medical-philosophical disputation convened on Ḵosrow II's orders in about 610, in which the *drustbed* (q.v.) Gabriel of Šiggār participated; the hospital itself first finds specific mention in the events of the year 148/765, when the caliph al-Manṣur is said to have summoned the then head of Gondēšāpur's hospital, Jewarjis b. Jebrāʾil b. Boḵtišuʿ, to Baghdad (Ebn al-Qefṭi, pp. 158-60). In spite of the dearth of detailed and reliable information about local and regional conditions in the pre-ʿAbbasid periods, Ḵuzestān and in particular the city of Gondēšāpur must be considered the locale where Syro-Persian Nestorians were weaned on what the later biobibliographical authors celebrated as superior medical learning. The information found in narrative sources concerning the derivation of such knowledge during the Sasanian period from outstanding individual Greek and Indian sources, as well as from the local Aramaic and Iranian roots, (see BOḴTIŠUʿ and Aydın Saylı, p. 1120)

has substantially been corroborated by the extant texts themselves, however limited their scholarly horizon indubitably is. The differential which in the first ʿAbbasid decades obtained between Nestorian medical competence and that of society at large was sufficient to launch the Boḵtišuʿ family and others onto a brilliant career in the orbit of the ʿAbbasid court (cf. Jāḥeẓ, pp. 109-10; idem, apud Dols, p. 382). Moreover, they rose to the challenge and successively improved their theoretical and practical command of the discipline, not least by rediscovering and eventually passing on to the Muslims, Galen and the other classics of Hellenistic medicine (see BOḴTIŠUʿ and EBN BOḴTIŠUʿ).

As regards the Gondēšāpur hospital, which for several generations was under Boḵtišuʿ's direction (see BOḴTIŠUʿ) and presumably the city's only such institution, the sources provide only scattered information on how it fared after the Boḵtišuʿ finally moved to Baghdad (Dols, pp. 377, 381-82); specifically, the question is whether the death of the last known director, Sābur b. Sahl, in 255/869 (Ebn al-Qefṭi, p. 207), also spelled the end of the hospital itself.

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