



GONDĒŠĀPUR I. THE CITY

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In the Sasanian epoch, Gondēšāpur was one of the four major cities of Kūzestān, the other three being Karkā (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 seem 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 Ya'qub b. Layṭ, “aspiring to imitate the Sasanians,” chose it as his capital (Mas'ūdī, *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 (Eṣṭakrī, p. 93; Ebn Ḥawqal, p. 256; *Hōdud al-ālam*, 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 Eṣfahānī (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 Kuzestān 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 Maṣṣūr 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 Maṣṣūr 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 Manşur 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; *Hōdud al-‘ālam*, 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 ‘Abbasid periods suggest that the town flourished for some seven centuries until it was abandoned in about the 10th-11th century. Only a small fort (Qal’a-ya k̄ān) 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 Ya‘qub b. Layt. 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 Ya‘qub b. Layt; 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 (*‘arabi-e qadimi*) that clearly named Ya‘qub” (Rāst, p. 129). Today, the identification of this shrine as the tomb of Ya‘qub is so widely believed that some refer to it as “Emāmzāda Ya‘qub b. Layt” (Matteson, p. 155). My own investigation in 1973 could not secure any evidence to support or reject this identification.



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