



ḲANDAQ

ḲANDAQ, a Persian loanword in Arabic meaning a trench or a moat (lit. “dug” <*kan* “to dig”), possibly also a wall or an enclosure.

The famous Ḳandaq Sābur along the southwestern border of Iraq, ascribed to the Sasanian monarch Šāpur II (r. 309-79), was one of four defensive barriers constructed at vulnerable points along the Sasanian frontiers; the other three were in the north. The Ḳandaq Sābur was restored and extended by Ḳosrow I Anošervān (r. 531-79), who ordered a *ḵandaq* to be dug from Hit on the Euphrates along the edge of the desert to the seacoast at Kāḷema (Kuwait) near Basra. He fortified it with watchtowers and garrison posts to prevent the people of the desert from entering the Sawād, the cultivated wetlands in lower Iraq. This Ḳandaq Kesrā was considered to be the boundary between Iraq and the Najd (Arabia). The remains of these fortifications survive at sites such as Ḷab’ south of Ukaydir (Oḵayḷer), Qaṣr Ruḷa at Wādi Bordān, and building A at Qoṣayr South, 60 km southwest of Nāṣeriya. A Sasanian watchtower, called al-Qā’em, survives on the right bank of the Euphrates, below al Ṣāleḥiya.

What is represented in the literature as a single moat-canal was most likely a series of canal systems and oases that included the ‘Oyun al-Ṭaff along the northwestern end of the *ḵandaq*. Musil (p. 347) could find no evidence of a fortified trench southeast of Hit and suggested that the Ṭār al-Haybān escarpment that stretches to the southeast formed a natural line of fortification. He noted that all of the Persian frontier stations lay east of this ridge and that traces of a huge irrigation canal extend from a few kilometers below Hit to the beginning of Ṭār al-Haybān. McGuire Gibson (Gibson and



Field, pp. 16, 24) also noted a massive Sasanian and early Islamic canal system in the gravel desert southwest of the Euphrates in the Najaf-Karbalā' region, suggested that the Ḳandaq Sābur provided water to a line of fortresses and farms before emptying into the Gulf, and identified it with the Nahr Sa'id that left the Euphrates at Hit in the Islamic period.

The expression “ḳandaq” was also used for other canals. The Ḳandaq al-Qādešiya lay to the west of that town where Musil (p. 111) noted the remains of a Persian rampart. This may be the same as the canal called al-'Atiq “the old” near Qādešiya. It went from the Euphrates to the Tigris and is called a ḳandaq that used to belong to the 'Ajam (i.e., the Persians; see Ṭabari, I, pp. 2285, 2543; II, p. 102). There was also a village called al-Ḳandaq in the territory of Behrasīr (Weh-Ardešīr) in the time of Ḳosrow II Parvīz (r. 591-628). According to Mas'udi (*Moruj* I, p. 228; ed. Pellat, sec. 240), another canal, simply called ḳandaq, ran from the Euphrates to the Tigris, between Takrit and Baghdad, along with the Ṣarāt and Nahr 'Isa canals.

The Ḳandaq Sābur has also been identified as the *war ī tāzigān* mentioned in the Pahlavi *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr*. H. S. Nyberg (“Westgrenze,” p. 318) translates it into German as “die Araberfestung” (i.e. the Arab fortress), followed by T. Daryaee, who calls it “the wall of the Arabs” (*Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr*, pp. 19 and 20). H. Mahamedi (pp. 152-56 and 159) argues that it might have been a moat on the Arab side and a wall on the Persian side.

The most famous use of a ḳandaq in early Islamic history is the trench that the Prophet Moḥammad had dug (according to some at the advice of the Persian Companion Salmān al-Fāresi) to protect Medina from a Meccan attack in Ḍu'l-Qa'da 5/April 627, an event called the Battle of the Ditch (Bal'ami, I, pp. 202-7). In modern times, it referred in Persian to the defensive ditches that surrounded a number of cities (e.g., Tehran; Karimān, p. 223).

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