



QAL'A-YE DOQTAR

QAL'A-YE DOQTAR, a vast barrier fortress with a lofty palace of royal dimensions, built by the founder of the Sasanian empire, [Ardašir I Pāpakān](#) before his decisive victory against the last Parthian king in 224 CE ([FIGURE 1](#)). It is built on a high spur of rock above a bend of the Tang-āb gorge, which is the main access point to the plain of [Firuzābād](#) from central Fārs. It is mentioned by earlier travelers (see Curzon, II, p. 228, n. 2), but Ernst Herzfeld (1926, pp. 252-52; idem, 1935, p. 95) was the first to recognize the correct layout of the fortress. [Aurel Stein](#) provided a more comprehensive description with a good topographic map of the palace, but he misunderstood the outline of the palace, and his interpretation of the building was not accurate (Stein, pp. 123-27). The site was surveyed in 1966 and 1972 on behalf of the German Archeological Institute. Between 1975 and 1977, excavations were carried out in preparation for a UNESCO restoration program on behalf of the Department of Conservation of Archeological Sites and National Monuments (Edāra-ye koll-e ḥefāzat-e ātār-e bāstāni wa banāhā-ye tāriḳ-i; Huff, 1969-70; 1971; 1973; 1976; 1978; 1983-84; 1993; Gignoux).

The rocky plateau stretching in an east-west direction above the river bend was fortified against the adjoining mountainside by a traverse wall that ran up from the northern and southern cliffs to a semi-circular bastion on the spine of the crest. There are simple rubble stonewalls along the steep northern and southern precipices with occasional fort structures on specially protruding outcrops, altogether forming a spacious outer fortification. The inner fortress containing the residential part is separated from the outer fortifications by



another system of traverse walls, with the main part of the palace rising as a huge, round donjon exactly in the line of the defense from the highest outcrop of the crest. The inner fortification is entered by a rectangular gate room in a protected corner of the southern traverse wall at the very edge of the cliff. A kind of casemate wall with long, narrow, barrel-vaulted rooms, probably used as barracks for the soldiers and reinforced by rounded, protruding bastions, runs along the cliff, surrounding the tip of the plateau from both ends of the inner traverse walls. There is a lower line of fortifications with turrets, bastions, galleries, and connecting walls at half height of the spur, making use of every outcrop and crag. Two heavily fortified outworks run down to the ancient road along the river on the north and south side, closely controlling the passage through the gorge. Two rectangular water shafts, about 20 m deep, were cut downward from these outworks and were connected by horizontal tunnels with the river, which at that time flowed about 3 m higher than today. The plateau of the inner fortification was covered by simple rubble stone and mud brick buildings, which probably housed servants, soldiers, offices, and workshops (FIGURE 2).

For the construction of the residence, the highest ridge of the spur, running in an almost east-west direction, was artificially enlarged by three steps of terraces. The lower section was entered through a gate hall that contained areas obviously for new arrivals and guards, as well as by a flight of stairs that led to the lower courtyard with a cistern in its southwest corner. Opposite the entrance is a hall with an exceptionally wide gate and lateral podiums above vaulted niches, and at the back there is an elevated bench with five semicircular seats with armrests behind a pedestal with decorated corners. A door opens on the right hand beside this hall into a square winding stair tower, which connects the three terraces of the palace. On the intermediate terrace, large, barrel vaulted halls, some with lateral low benches, others with podiums accessible by stairs, and one with cooking facilities, surrounded a courtyard on three sides; the eastern side is occupied by a raised platform with a central flight of steps, with the dado decorated by blind arches. The third, uppermost terrace was accessible from the stair tower across the roofs of the barrel-vaulted halls below and carried the palace building proper. A deep, barrel vaulted *ayvān* with lateral halls led to the domed main room measuring fourteen square meters, where traces of ceremonial furnishings are preserved. It is surrounded on the three sides by oblong, rectangular halls with curved outer walls, thus forming the circular, donjon-like construction that stands as a menacing tower in the front line of the inner fortification. The



corners between the side halls are filled by triangular rooms. Above their somewhat lowered squinch vaulting, traces of triangular chambers of an upper floor are visible. The southwest corner contains a spiral staircase that, passing by a tiny guardroom in the thickness of the wall, leads up to a wide entrance gate into the corridors and rooms that surround the dome above the height of the squinches, and which must have been the private area of the princely family.

Most of the top-floor corridors and rooms, as well as the curved rear hall and sections of the curved side halls at ground level, were walled up with solid masonry soon after the construction was done, because the thrust of the vaulting on the under-dimensioned walls caused serious damage early on. Later buttresses also reinforced and disfigured the building from outside. Still preserved and not walled up is the northwestern, triangular top-floor chamber, which has windows to the outside as well as to the high lateral side hall. Windows from now walled-up corridors and rooms also opened into the domed main hall and the *ayvān*. The combination of high halls of representation with private rooms on the top floor, always with view connection, is the most typical characteristic of Iranian palaces and rich houses throughout the ages (Huff, 1993; 1999; contra, Bier, p. 36). This is demonstrated also by the Safavid and Qajar buildings and can be deduced from the archeological evidence of the Achaemenid *Apadāna* at Persepolis (Huff, 2005). The architectural decoration of the palace and fortifications is modest and dignified. Outside walls are articulated by shallow, two-stepped niches with horizontal lintels, unlike the arched niches of the later great palace. The main rooms, like those in the later palace on the Firuzabad plain, have deep arched niches with Egyptianizing cornices, evidently derived from Achaemenid models.

Given its strategic situation and character, and in comparison with Ardašir's greater palace in the plain, it becomes clear that Qal'a-ye Doğ-tar was built by Ardašir I Pāpakān as a palace and barrier fortress together with the round city of *Ardašir-Ğorra* during his struggle for supremacy in Persia, that is, before his final triumph over the Parthian great king *Artabanus IV* in 224 CE, an event represented by the two rock reliefs in the gorge below the fortress. This dating is corroborated by pre-Sasanian coins, excavated on the intermediate terrace (Huff, 1978, pp. 128-29). Although the importance of Qal'a-ye Doğ-tar certainly declined after Ardašir had become the king of all Persia and interior fighting had ended, especially after it had been replaced by the greater palace in the



plain, its later use is demonstrated by a dirham coin of Šāpur II (r. 309-79 CE). It seems to have regained importance at the end of the Sasanian empire, when the last Great King, Yazdegerd III (r. 632-51 CE), tried to organize resistance against invading Arabs in his home province of Fārs. Copper coins of the Yazdegerd type have been excavated behind the walls of the inner fortress (Huff, 1978, p. 140).

A small castle above the next bend upstream in the gorge, Naqqāra-k-āna or Qal'a-ye Pesar, which consists of an inaccessible outcrop with a cistern above a small, fortified plateau, has yielded green glazed Islamic pottery. It is doubtful that its construction goes back to the time of Ardašir I. In Ardašir's program of fortifications, however, certainly belongs a barrier wall with semicircular bastions, crossing the gorge still further upstream, as well as the Tol-e Naqqāra-k-āna, a fortified narrow ridge at the riverbank immediately behind the exit of the gorge in the plain (Huff, 1974, pp. 155 ff.).

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