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Sassanid Artifacts in Western Iran

Sarvin Moradi

Tabriz University of Islamic Art

Tabriz, Iran

sarvin.moradi60@gmail.com

Abstract

The western Iranian region was one of the important regions in the Sassanid lands and played a commercial role. The presence of important sites such as Bisotun, Taq-e-Bostan, and Qasr-e-Shirin in this geographical region indicates the importance of this region during the Sassanid period. The good climate and lush lands directed the Sassanids' attention to western Iran. The presence of numerous buildings, from palaces and caravanserais to magnificent rock carvings and bridges, especially during the time of Khosrow Parviz, indicated the importance of this region. The presence of numerous buildings in western Iran, including the provinces of Ilam, Kermanshah, Lorestan, and Kurdistan, clearly demonstrate the grandeur and power of the Sassanid period. An attempt is made to introduce and examine the most important existing buildings from the Sassanid period. Taq-e-Bostan, Khusrow Palace, Taq-e-Shirin, Farhad-e-Tarash Wall, Zij-e-Manijeh Building, Bisotun Bridge, Khusrow Bridge, and Taq-e-Gara are among the most important buildings that will be discussed in this article. The method of collecting materials is library-based and descriptive-analytical. The questions raised here are:

1. What was the use of each building and for what purpose were they built?
2. What was the reason for the Sasanians' attention to the west of the country and what work was done in this region?

Keywords

Sasanian period, West Iran, Bisotun, Taq Bostan, Khosrow Palace, Qasr-e Shirin

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Артефакты эпохи Сасанидов в Западном Иране

Сарвин Моради

Тебризский университет исламского искусства
Тебриз, Иран

sarvin.moradi60@gmail.com

Аннотация

Территория современного западного Ирана была одним из важных регионов на землях Сасанидов. Она играла значительную роль в торговых контактах Сасанидской державы. Наличие в этом географическом регионе таких важных исторических памятников, как Бисотун, Так-э-Бостан и Каср-э-Ширин, подчеркивает значимость этого региона в период правления Сасанидов. Благоприятный климат и плодородные земли привлекли к этим территориям внимание сасанидских правителей. Наличие многочисленных архитектурных сооружений, от дворцов до караван-сараев, а также великолепных наскальных рисунков, мостов (особенно здесь выделяются объекты, относящиеся ко времени Хосрова Парвиза), многочисленных архитектурных памятников на территории западного Ирана, включая провинции Илам, Керманшах, Лурестан и Курдистан, наглядно демонстрирует влияние сасанидских правителей в период их присутствия в данном регионе. Так-и-Бостан, дворец Хусроу, Так-и-Ширин, стена Фархад-и-Тараш, здание Зидж-и-Маниджа, мост Бисотун, мост Хусроу и Так-и-Гара являются одними из наиболее важных архитектурных объектов, которые будут рассмотрены в данной статье. В работе предпринята попытка проследить историю исследования объектов, ответить на вопросы о функциональном назначении каждого строения и целесообразности их сооружения. А также попытаться уточнить, в чем причина такого пристального внимания представителей сасанидской династии к западу страны.

Ключевые слова

Сасанидский период, Западный Иран, Бисотун, Так Бостан, дворец Хосрова, Каср-и-Ширин

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Introduction

The Zagros foothills, which stretch from north to southwest, are full of lush and fertile valleys that have been a privileged location for the settlement of various cultures since ancient times. Kermanshah, as such a region located in the western parts, was taken into the attention of the Sassanid kings in the

final years of the 4th century AD (the second half of the Sassanid kingdom), and Fars province was ranked second. During this period, Kermanshah was part of Mai or Media located in the Khurbaran Coast region, and later this region was called Kermanshah, which covers lands from Nahavand to Ctesiphon. There are several reasons for the Sassanid kings to pay attention to the western regions of Iran in the second half of the Sassanid era, including military factors, religious beliefs, good climate, the existence of the vast Khorasan Road (Silk Road), the desire for independence from religious centers, as well as commercial and economic factors [Amiri, 2013, p. 693]. The Zagros foothills have a privileged position for the establishment of various cultures since ancient times. Kermanshah province in western Iran is a semi-mountainous region with most of its mountains parallel to each other and extending from the north-west to the south-east and east. Part of the Zagros mountain range covers a significant part of this province, and the foothills and plateau of the watershed are only seen in parts of the low and wide plains of this mountain range or in wide valleys. Other vital features of this region that bring its admirable advantage to the people include the rich and nutritious forests of oak, walnut and almond, the remains of which can still be seen long and long. The difficult mountains that were relatively used during the time of war and escape, abundant water and also livestock farms were special features of the logic [Afshar Sistani, 1371, p. 95]. During the time of Khosrow Anushirvan, two other cities were also built on the old and very important road. This road reached from the capital, namely Ctesiphon, to the province of “Mah” in ancient times and was very useful for the movement of soldiers, government employees, courtiers and even silk, which began in the time of Khosrow Shad Hormuz and reaches a city called “Bazengan Khosrow” [Bruner, 1393, p. 163]. In the late Sassanid period, especially during the reign of Khosrow II, due to the special prestige and importance of Bistoun, many constructions were carried out there, including the Bistoun Bridge, Khosrow Bridge, the famous Farhad-e-Tarash Bridge, and a dam from this period on the banks of the Gamasiyab River. Archaeological research and excavations have shown that these constructions remained unfinished and were never completed. In fact, the carved stones scattered over a seven-kilometer stretch from Farhad-e-Tarash to Sanqarabad are a telling document and tell the story of the great constructions in Bistoun, and show that these activities had made remarkable progress before they were suddenly stopped by the death of Khosrow II in 628 AD. Probably, at the end of this period, the center of construction activities in the Bistoun plain was in the historical area of Bistoun and Takht-e-Shirin, of which Sarmaj and Hajiabad are branches [Klais and Kalmeyer, 1330, p. 138]. The Sassanid capitals are the first works of the Sas-

sanid period that brought archaeologists to Biston for study, exploration and research. From 1840 to 1967, four capitals were discovered in the historical area of Biston and transferred to Taq-e-Bostan. These capitals have remarkable human and plant motifs, which are attributed to Anahita, Bahram and Khosrow II [Khan Moradi and Mohammadi Ghasrian, 1391, p. 387]. Since the end of the 4th century AD, the Sassanid kings preferred living in the beautiful plains around Kermanshah to residing in the remote valleys of Fars. Bahram IV, who was the viceroy of Kerman for a while and therefore had the title of “Kermanshah”, built the city of Kermanshah and immortalized his mother. Before him, two kings had settled in the area and left two monuments in Taq-e-Bostan. Around the end of the 4th century, Shahpur III had built a small cave next to the spring to rest after hunting. Next to this cave, Ardashir II had depicted the scene of his enthronement on the rock. Later, Khosrow II or Khosrow Parviz built a larger cave on the left side of the old cave to mirror the first cave and make their combination resemble the triple Roman gate [Hertzfeld, 1381, p. 332].

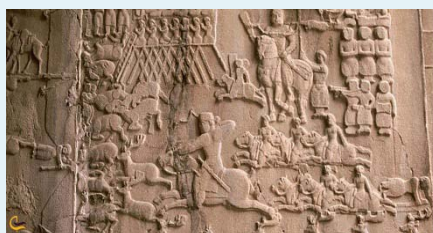
Taq-e Bostan

Taq-e Bostan is the name of a place in the northeast of Kermanshah that has gained world fame due to its valuable reliefs from the Sassanid era. There are two arches in this place, with a total of six reliefs carved in them and on the wall next to them. The larger arch has four reliefs that show the Sassanid king in different positions [Mahmoudi, 2009, p. 115]. The most notable rock carvings from the Sassanid period are in Taq-e Bostan. There, on the wall of the porch dug into the heart of the mountain, an image of the Sassanid king, Khosrow II, being given a robe is engraved. At the bottom of this image, the king is shown riding a horse, and on the side wall of the porch, the king is shown hunting boar and deer [Curtis, 1387, p. 134]. A 4th century rock relief of the coronation of Ardashir II is located on the left side of the Bostan Arch. The coronation scene of Ardashir II (379–383) is carved in stone. In this relief, the king is standing and two gods are seen on either side of him. One of them is Ahura Mazda who is giving the crown and the other is Mithras who holds a bunch of barmaids in his hand and light shines from his head and is also recognized by this symbol. At the feet of the great god and the king, a slain enemy lies on the ground. Although we do not know anything about this king's military operations, it seems that the slain enemy is a Roman. Mithra stands on a large lotus flower [Girshman, 1350, p. 191]. Ahura Mazda wears a long robe with two robes draped over his shoulders, the edges of which are decorated with pearls, he has a long beard and a crown tied with

a ribbon. Mithra holds a sable in his hand. The sable represented the heavenly waters and the source of divine mercy on earth. His robe is long and on it is a jeweled robe. His crown resembles the crown of Ahura Mazda, and under it four strands of hair fall on his shoulders and chest [Sami, 1388, p. 315]. It is difficult to accept that this clumsy scene, whose visual elements lack balance and coherence because all the effort is spent on showing the superiority of the king, was executed by the same sculptor who executed the distinguished role of the warrior and his war horse on the lower part of the same stone body [Faryeh, 1374, p. 76].

To immortalize the events of their reign, Ardashir II and his successors chose the Taq-e Bostan rock, which is located on the old Silk Road, which Herzfeld called the Gate of Asia [Girshman, 1350, p. 190]. On the two lateral walls of the great cave of Taq-e Bostan, the royal hunting grounds are depicted in relief. The left panel shows a scene from a painting of one of the “pardis” or hunting grounds that were guarded and enclosed by a hedge. A boat is moving in the middle of a pond, and the king is standing in the middle of it, hunting boars. Following the king's boat, other rowing boats are moving, in which the rowers are singing songs or singing a melody to coordinate the strokes of the oars, and the hunted animals are returning on elephants. The tower on the right is carved with a scene of a deer hunt. It is very similar to the Susa wall painting [Girshman, 1931, p. 193] and also shows two other boats. In one of them, the king is wearing a crown and holding a bow in his left hand. In the lower part of the painting, the elephants, after the hunt, gather the dead animals with their trunks and place them on their backs [Vandenberg, 1987, p. 103]. In Kangavar, there are a number of inscriptions in the Sassanid Palavi script on some stones used in the construction of the temple attributed to Anahita, which are mainly seen as single letters and sometimes as names of individuals. The most frequently used name is “Pirouz”. According to Kambakhsh Fard, these inscriptions were used instead of the marks of the stonemasons and have a votive function [Kambakhsh Fard, 1995, p. 223–206]. Their history dates back to the 5th century AD [Mohammadi Far, Amin, 2015, p. 254]. Christensen describes the reliefs of the Bostan Arch in his book *Iran in the Sassanid Period* as follows: “On the right wall of the arch, a deer hunt is depicted. The middle part of this relief is enclosed in lines that resemble a fence. The hunters are chasing the deer, and the frightened and fleeing animals jump into the fence through the opening that is installed on the right side of the fence. The king, riding a horse, is depicted in three places on this fence. At the top, the king is standing on horseback, and his horse is ready to jump. A woman is holding an umbrella above his head, which is an ancient symbol of royal splendor. Be-

hind him is a row of women, some standing in respect, and some are busy with the ramming. Two of them hold trumpets, and one plays a tambourine. On a wooden platform, on which a ladder has been placed, sit women, some playing harps, and some clapping their hands. Below those images, the face of the king is seen, who is shooting a bow and chasing fleeing animals on horse-back. In the lower part of that relief, there is another image of the king, who is trotting his horse, and his quiver in his hand, returning from a hunt. On the left side of the aforementioned fence, donkeys are seen carrying a killed deer. The relief on the left wall, which is made with extraordinary precision, shows a boar hunt. Here, almost the entire relief is enclosed in lines in the form of a frame, with only a narrow margin on the right, where a large crowd of people and animals has crowded. The hunting ground is a place of reeds and swamps, where fish and ducks abound. On the right side, five rows of elephants are seen, on each of which two elephant handlers, one in front and one behind, are busy hunting boars, and the boars are dragging themselves through the reeds. At the top we see a boat, in which many women are sitting, singing and clapping their hands. At the front and back of the boats, women are rowing. In the middle of the painting, a pair of falcons are seen, whose rowers are also women, and this pair of falcons is shown twice, telling the story of two hunting occasions. Right in the middle of the picture, the king, carved to a height above life size, is standing in the first boat, and he is shooting a bow; a woman, standing on his left, is offering him an arrow; another woman, on his right, is busy playing the harp. Another boat, located in the back, is filled with harpists. The king has killed two large boars with arrows. The same two boats are seen on the right side of the picture. Here the king, who has a halo around his head, is holding a slack bow in his hand. It is clear that the hunt has ended. In the lower part of this painting, elephants are busy collecting the prey, holding the bodies of the animals by the trunks on their backs [Christensen, 1399, p. 610–613].



Taq-e Bostan

Zij Manijeh

Zij Manijeh is a building from the Sassanid era with a special and unique architecture. This building is located at the beginning of the Shahrin Castle Plain. This building was built in the Pataq Pass, on the Khorasan trade route. Pataq Pass has a strategic and extremely sensitive location and has great military value. The building in question is located 15 kilometers from the city of Sarpol Zahab or Helvan, which was one of the most important cities of the Sassanid Empire during the Sassanid era. Helvan was the capital of Shadfiroz province. This city was one of the most important centers of Christianity and Judaism in Iran during the Sassanid era. The Zij Manijeh building has been introduced as a caravanserai due to its location on the Khorasan highway. Due to the lack of archaeological excavations in connection with the building in question, it is not possible to definitively consider its use [Gholami, 2019, p. 24].



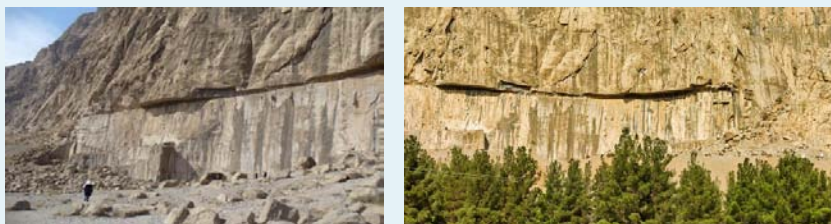
Zij Manijeh

The Zij of Manijeh is a relatively intact building, with a rectangular plan and an east-west orientation. The dimensions of the building are about 57.5×35 meters, the total area of the building is 1995 meters, and it is located at an altitude of 550 meters above sea level. The building consists of a number of rooms and corridors throughout. In the central part of the building, there is a hall measuring $6,4 \times 80$ m, surrounded by a corridor. On each side of the central hall, a doorway measuring 1.20 meters wide and 1.70 meters long has been created, through which one can access the peripheral corridor. Each of these doorways has a keyhole arch made of unhewn stones. 44 examples of these keyhole arches have also been observed in the hall of Khosrow's mansion in Qasr Shirin. The roof of the building is covered with a vaulted ceiling. The materials used to build it are rubble stone and plaster mortar. This type of mortar was used in most Sassanid buildings [Jalili, Golzari 1346, p. 83].

The entrance to the building is on the western side. On the eastern side, there are remains of a canal, the end of which is not known, probably this canal was responsible for supplying water. The small Marab River, which originates from the Marab Mirage, passes right through the middle of the village. It is likely that the water of this river supplied the water needed by the aforementioned building and the village [Gholami, 1398, p. 24].

Farhad-e-Tarash

Farhad-e-Tarash or Faratash is located in the Bisotun area, west of the Great Inscription of Darius the Achaemenid, and about 500 meters east of the western end of the old Hamedan-Kermanshah road. This architectural phenomenon is a wall carved into the heart of Bisotun Mountain, 200 meters long and 30 meters wide, which can only be compared to the Darius Inscription in Bisotun in terms of grandeur. The presence of a carving of Khosrow II of Sassanid on a column in the Taq-e-Bostan mirage, which is attributed to the Farhad-e-Tarash site, suggests that this site dates back to the period of Khosrow II of Sassanid. The clothes and the carving of the crown of the Sassanid emperor on the aforementioned column identify him as Khosrow II. Also, the presence of the image of the goddess of water, Anahita, on another pillar in the Taq-Bostan mirage proves that the water supply and water fountain facilities of the Farhad Tarash site were formed in connection with the tradition of the ritual of worship and the sanctity of water in the Mazdaworship religion of ancient Iran, and in this regard, it can be compared and identified with the Anahita Temple of Neyshabur in Kazerun, Sarab Taq-Bast. A prominent image of Anahita can be seen in the Taq-Bostan mirage. The porches carved in front of the Taq-Bostan mirage and carved in them serve the function of a desk, a royal residence, a monument, and a prayer for Anahita. It is very likely that the Sassanid sculptors and architects intended to create a porch and a similar porch to the Taq-Bostan mirage in the carved but unfinished facade of Farhad Tarash, so that, like it, the image would be reflected in the water [Mansouri and Ajarloo, 2008, p. 49].



Farhad-e-Tarash

Taq Shirin

Chahar Qapu (Chahardor) is one of the fire temples of the Sassanid period in the border city of Qasr Shirin. This four-arched structure is a type of fire temple that has a circumambulation corridor, whose portico has now collapsed, but its traces remain on the body of the four-arched structure. This building consists of a square room measuring 25×25 m, whose dome has collapsed, but the piers can be seen in the four corners of the building. Its materials are mostly rubble and mortar (sand and lime mortar). To the north of this fire temple are the ruins of Khosrow Parviz's palace [Sarafraz, Firouzmandi, 1375, p. 403]. This building is located 40 kilometers east of the city of Avan, a part of Islam province, and 7 kilometers from the village of Chehel Zari, Zarneh district, in a gorge called Tangeh Kushk, near the Avan-Sumar road, which the local people call Taq Shirin. The mentioned building is a type of stone vaults and has a square plan that is built facing southeast. This building consists of a semi-underground chamber 320 cm long and 290 cm wide, and on the lower level of the northern wall there is a lake with a cover without a perimeter (flat) measuring $125 \times 130 \times 80$ cm. The construction site of the building was selected on the natural slope of the foothills, then the sloping surface was cut and part of half of the building was built inside the cut. Only the stepped roof and the two sides of the doorway have an external view. The building's construction materials are all hewn stones that are placed on top of each other in a dry-stacked and ridge-like manner. After the walls are built, the arch begins with a precise and calculated geometric and architectural movement at a height of 110 cm, and the building's cover is created in the form of a barrel vault or a 220-meter-high vault [Pirani, 2006, p. 31].

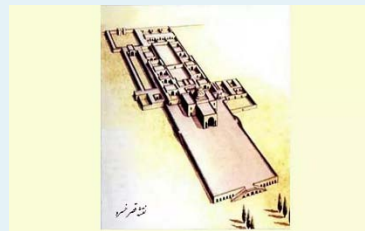


Tag Shirin

Khosrow's Mansion in Shirin Palace

One of the most famous Sassanid buildings in western Iran is a building in Shirin Palace, which is called "Khosrow's Mansion" or the Palace of

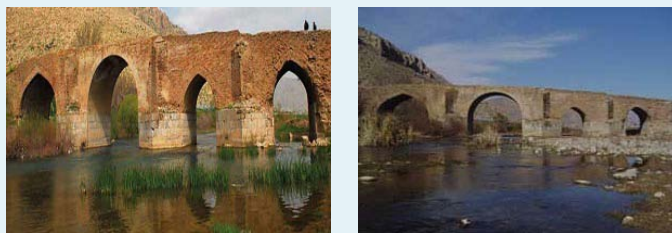
Khosrow Parviz [Tahmasbi, 1392, p. 164]. This building is located to the north of the “Shirin Four-Four-Stone” fire pit. The corridors that were built instead of the foundation for the throne room can still be seen [Vandenberg, 1387, p. 99]. The entire complex is very large and is about 372 meters long and 190 meters wide. In the eastern part, a courtyard is seen with a length of 285 meters, a width of 98 meters, and a height of about 8 meters. On the first floor, there is a porch and behind it a large room and then a colonnaded courtyard. Rutter imagined this room as domed, but he did not provide evidence for this. Next to the porch there was a series of courtyards with rooms and porches, some of which had service functions. In the southwest of the complex there is also an entrance and a large, square courtyard that continues into a very long courtyard. In general, due to the doubts that exist about the plan and the supposed reconstructions of the eastern part of the complex, as well as the date of construction of the artifact, we cannot examine it properly and make a statement about it [Tahmasbi, 2013, p. 164]. Khosrow Parviz Palace had a large garden around which there were chambers for keeping animals, in fact it was in the form of a wild garden. The palace itself was built on a mastaba that had a moonlit courtyard and a large veranda on the eastern side. Behind this veranda, there was the main hall that was connected to this veranda, the hall was square and had a dome. In the western part of this hall, a small courtyard was built, with four columned porches on all four sides, and a smaller porch on the west side, and numerous arches on the other two sides [Sarfaraz, 1375, p. 404]. In terms of its general design, it is similar to the “Havsh-e-Kuri” in Iraq and is different from other buildings of the Sassanid period. Like Firuzabad, it consists of private and public sections. The arch of the main porch, like what is seen in the Damghan Palace, Sarvestan, and Kish Palace, is not built on the wall but on the adjacent columns. The palace in question is attributed to the period of Khosrau II [Mohammadifar and Amini, 1394, p. 90].



Khosrow's Mansion in Shirin Palace

Bisotun Bridge

Bisotun Bridge, known as Safavid Bridge, is located in the east of Bisotun city and on the Dinurab River. This bridge was founded in the Sassanid period, but like other Sassanid works in Bisotun, it has been abandoned. In 2001, Yousef Moradi excavated this bridge. He identified 6 construction periods on this bridge. He believes that the bridge piers were built during the Sassanid period, and probably during the time of Khosrow II. Based on the visible parts, Bisotun Bridge is 145 meters long and has six spans. The inner part of the piers is made of rubble stone and a large volume of limestone, and their surfaces are arranged with cut stones of various sizes. The walls, abutments, and arches of the bridge are built with square bricks of various sizes and in red and yellow colors in different shades [Moradi, 1401, p. 110].



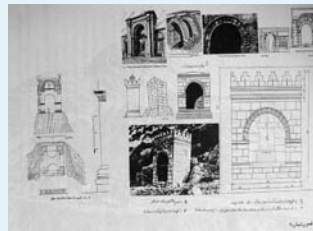
Bisotun Bridge

Khosrow Bridge

Khosrow Bridge is a Sassanid period monument located two kilometers southwest of Bisotun city and 170 meters from Kermanshah-Hamedan road, built on the Gaumasi River. According to the evidence, it remained unfinished for some reason, like other Sassanid monuments in Bisotun. Fladen was the first to mention Khosrow Bridge and attribute it to the Sassanid period [Khan Moradi, 2011, p. 113]. This bridge is 152.8 m long, has 10 piers and 9 spans. Great order was observed in the construction of the piers, and each of them is 2.7 meters wide and 3.14 meters long. Also, each of the bridge spans is 8.8 meters wide. The piers of the bridge are made of hewn and polished stones measuring 80 by 80 centimeters and have carving marks. Considering the observation of the dense mass of stones between the piers, it seems that they were built on a paved platform. These bases are hexagonal and each has three sections [Cheramchian, Mafi, 2011, p. 85].



Khosrow Bridge



Taq-e-Gara

Taq-e-Gara

At the neck of the Pataq, at a point with an excellent view, there is a stone arch called Taq-e-Gara. Its height from the ground level to the highest point of the complex is 11.7 meters, from the floor to the bottom of the ceiling is 29.5 meters, the height of the entrance to the arch from the ground level is 1.20 meters, the depth is 10.3 meters, and the niches on each side are 1.80 m. At the end of the arch, there is a rectangular stone slab that seems to have been prepared for carving an inscription or pattern [Azarang et al., 2009, p. 440]. Taq-e-Gara is a small building from the Sassanid period that was built in the form of an iwan with cubic stone slabs. The slabs were placed on top of each other without mortar. The upper part of the building is a crescent-shaped arch. It is likely that this building was a resting place during hunting days, or a memorial or altar or a resting place on the way used by the king [Vandenberg, 1348, p. 102]. The only horseshoe arch in Sasanian architecture known from a long time ago is located in the Taq-e-Gara, which stands alone near the highest point of the Zagros Gate, located at its western entrance to Iran. The date of construction of this small building, which is a barrel-vaulted porch without side rooms, is still in doubt. The monumental building, apart from its large dimensions, is built of carefully hewn stones laid on top of each other without mortar. The Greek stucco on the column base,

the stucco on the upper cornice and the decorative border of the pediment designed in the Greco-Roman style, are all considered as evidence for dating the building to earlier centuries, to the point that some even consider it to be Parthian [Pope and Ackerman, 2008, p. 654].

Discussion and Conclusion

The western part of Iran is one of the important regions in the Sassanid territory. Many reasons, including good climate, fertile lands, and the presence of high mountains, and most importantly, the existence of the Silk Road, which was a connection between the East and Mesopotamia, caused the Sassanid rulers to pay attention to this region. The existence of numerous and magnificent buildings as well as rock carvings in various regions of the west of the country, especially in Kermanshah province, is evidence of this claim. This region was chosen as the second largest Sassanid capital after Bishapur in the fourth century AD, and the glory and authority of the Sassanid state was manifested in palaces, bridges, fire temples, and rock carvings in various regions of western Iran. Taq-e-Bostan, one of the most important buildings left from the Sassanid period, has well shown a symbol of the glory and authority of the kingdom. The existence of numerous magnificent buildings such as Taq-e-Bostan, Khosrow Palace, Farhad-e-Tarash, the Zij-e-Manijeh building, and the Khosrow and Bisotun bridges, which were discussed in this article, have fully demonstrated the greatness of the kingdom of an era and the power and ability of Sasanian architects and artists. There are many buildings that have not yet been fully explored or their information has not yet been made public, which are scattered throughout Kermanshah province and the vast Bisotun plain. Although numerous books and articles have not been written about the remains of the Sasanian period, there are still many places, especially in western Iran, about which information is incomplete and insufficient. It is hoped that the day will come when researchers and archaeologists will make all the newly discovered information available to lovers of Sasanian culture and art.

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Information about the Author

Sarvin Moradi, Archaeometry Student

Информация об авторе

Сарвин Моради, студент археометрии

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