

The Sasanian Palace of Bandiān Dargaz, Iran


Mehdi Rahbar¹

Abstract

A series of architectural spaces were discovered from the excavation of Tepe C of Bandiān Dargaz, a site revealing both the Islamic and Sasanian periods. The surface layer is related to the Ilkhanid period followed with the layer of the Sasanian period, which further consists of two phases. The architecture of the first phase is the remains of a palace, which had probably been transformed into a set of industrial-production workshops in the second phase of architecture. The remains of the palace include a pillared hall, long halls, and a part that is probably a Mithraeum and was built during the reign of Yazdgerd I.

Keywords: Bandiān Dargaz; Yazdgerd I; Sasanian Palace; Mithraeum.



¹ Research Institute of Cultural Heritage & Tourism, Tehran, Iran.  Mehdi.rahbar@gmail.com

Article info: Received: 3 November 2024 | Accepted: 30 December 2024 | Published: 1 July 2025

Citation: Rahbar, Mehdi. (2025). "The Sasanian Palace of Bandiān Dargaz, Iran". *Caspian*, Vol. 2 (4): 173-188.

<https://doi.org/10.22034/cj.2024.488279.1020>

Introduction

Archaeological excavations revealed many remains of the culture and civilization of the Sasanian period, and researchers studied various aspects of this period of Iranian history, such as history, culture, art, etc. (see Rostami & Aryamanesh, 2020; Maksymiuk, 2021; Skupniewicz, 2021; Matloubkari & Shaikh Baikloo, 2022; Skupniewicz, 2022; Gugushvili, 2023; Rahbar, 2024; Mehriban Xosbext, 2024; Hozhabri *et al.*, 2024).

A lot of research has also been done on the Zoroastrian religion (Nourallah, 2022; Dara, 2023; Aryamanesh, 2023; Kakouris, 2024). Bandiān Dargaz is a significant Sasanian site that, based on discovered inscriptions, has been identified as Dastkard-e Yazd Shahpouran (Bashshash Kanzag, 1997: 33; Gignoux, 1998: 253). In this site, three Tepe, all bearing traces of the Sasanian period, are located in close proximity to each other (Fig. 1). This article focuses on the excavation of Tepe C located at 37°27'38.47" North and 59°5'14.59" East. This oval-shaped site has a diameter of about 60 meters, a minor diameter of about 50 meters, and a height of approximately 2.5 meters.

First Architectural Phase

By comparing the plan of this building with that of previously discovered palaces in Iran, it can be attributed to a Sasanian palace hall. The orientation of this hall follows the trend of most Parthian and Sasanian buildings, which deviate between 15 and 44 degrees from north, and about 40 degrees from west. In its current state, the hall is 24 meters long and 13.5 meters wide with walls being constructed with mudbrick. However, the piers,

which must support the vault of the hall, are made of bricks measuring 10x40x40 centimeters. The enclosing walls of this hall are about 90 centimeters thick. The length of the hall is divided into three aisles by four rows of double piers. The width of each side aisle is about 140-120 centimeters, while the central aisle is 630 centimeters wide. The distance between the north-south piers is about 300 centimeters. The width of the eastern aisle is not uniform throughout its length and is about 10 to 15 centimeters wider in the southern section compared to the northern section. The two northern piers are L-shaped, while the other six are cubic, measuring approximately 190x190 centimeters (Fig. 3).

Dimensions and Space of Northern Section of the Hall

The space between the two piers, similar to the northern wall, which served as the seating area for the king or ruler, is designed to be wider (Fig. 2). In some places, such as the Tepe Hissar Palace and the Hājiābād Palace in Fars (Azarnoush, 1994: fig. 10), the space designated for the king is covered with a dome, but in cases like the Dastowā Palace (Rahbar, 2004: 169; Rahbar, 2023) and Chal Tarkhan, this part is covered with a barrel vault. In the southeastern most part of the hall, there is a corridor of 230 centimeters wide that connects the southeastern section to the hall. This doorway is located precisely between the two end piers of the hall. Between the two southeastern piers, a mass of bricks measuring 10x40x40 centimeters and 10x40x20 centimeters was discovered, placed vertically on the ground. There were more than 38 rows of bricks,

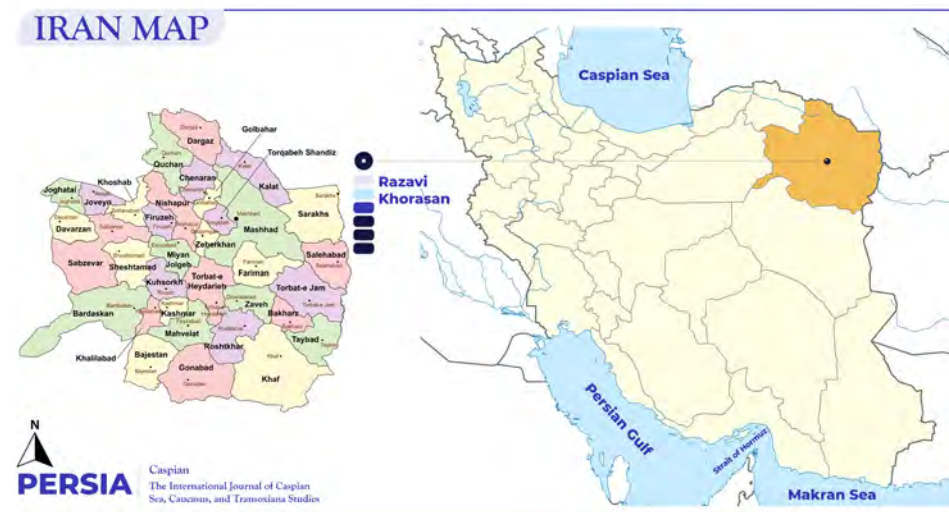


Fig. 1. Map of Iran and Razavi Khorasan

(Adapted by Caspian from a Map from Wikimedia Commons under a Creative Commons Licence CC BY-SA 4.0)

and if we consider the thickness of each brick, including the mortar between them, to be 12 centimeters, the length of this brick mass in its current state is nearly 5 meters. This brick mass, which had collapsed between the four end piers of the hall, was the part of ceiling (Fig. 5). A coin of Khosrow II was found on the floor of this section. The architectural plan is similar to that of Sasanian-era palaces (Fig. 7).

Palace Courtyard (Mithraeum?)

At the northern end of the western corridor of the hall, we reach a space that is 15 meters long from east-west oriented and 6.6 meters wide. On the north and south sides, two walls approximately 90 centimeters wide enclose it. On the inner side, there are several piers at regular intervals whose width varies between 65 and 90 centimeters. The mentioned piers are similar to buttresses that were usually built behind the walls of Sasanian-period for reinforcement.

The distance between the piers is about 2.5 meters. The question that needs to be answered is whether these small spaces had vaults. If it is proven that the small spaces between the piers, which number seven, are niches, we should approach the issue differently. In recent years, several buildings similar to what we have conceived as a palace courtyard have been discovered. Yaghmaei refers to a building in Mohammad Abad, Borazjan, which measures 90.2 by 5.85 meters. On three sides of this, there are 14 niches, each measuring 68x68 centimeters and 70 centimeters in height (Yaghmaei, 2008: 56-76). Yaghmaei has proposed a flat roof for this building and compared its plan with the Mithraeum of Saint Clement of Rome, confidently identifying it as a Mithraeum.

Near Mohammad Abad and the Dalaki Bridge, in a place called Gow Saiidi, a space similar to the building in Mohammad Abad has been discovered, with seven niches on each longer side. The



Fig. 2. Tepe C, Bandian



Fig. 3. The Plan of The First and Second Phase of The Palace Architecture

presence of seven niches is indicative of the seven stages of the spiritual journey or seven ranks, which are: Corax (raven or crow), Nymphus (bridegroom), Miles (soldier), Leo (lion), Perses (Persian), Heliodromus (sun-runner), and finally

Pater (father) (Claus, 2000; Iravanian, 2022).

A New Interpretation of the Northern Space

In the southern part of Kuhdasht County,

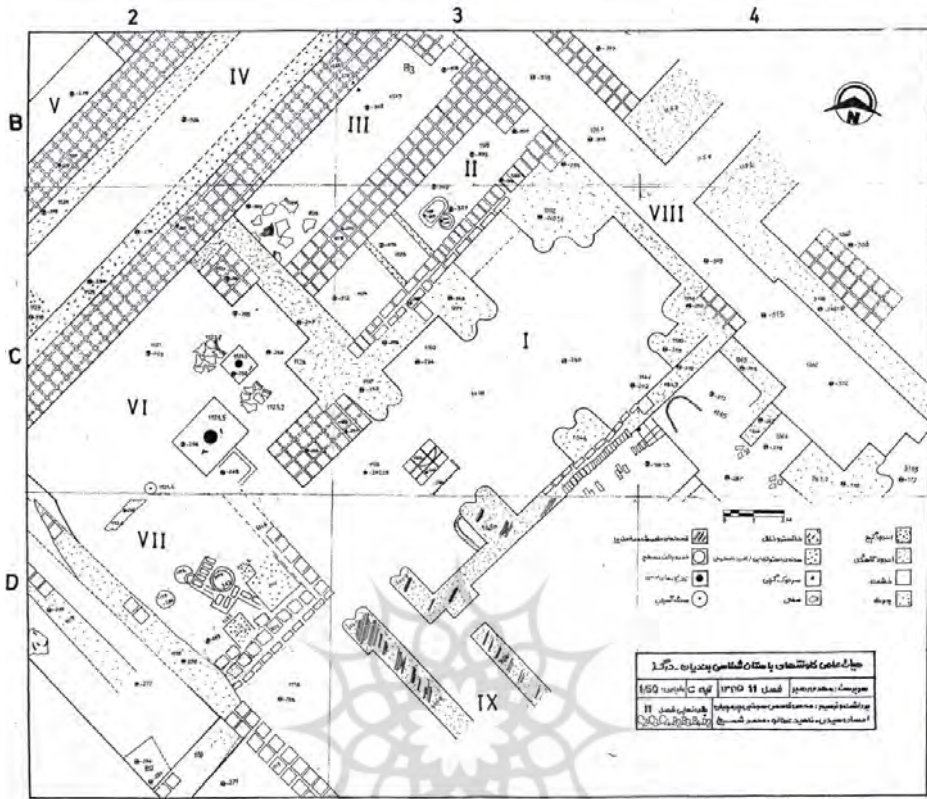


Fig. 4. Industrial Workshops of the Second Phase of Architecture

a structure similar to Mohammad Abad has been discovered, known as the Qaleh Gori Ramavand fortress (Hassanpour, 2014: 264). The overall plan and niches of this building, which are located in two adjacent halls, are similar to that of Mohammad Abad and Gow Saiidi Mithraeum in terms of dimensions and the low height of the niche relative to the hall floor. In this building, stucco decorations of rams, pigeons, and boars have been discovered. The excavator attributes this building to a Sasanian aristocratic mansion (Hassanpour, 2014: 265). Among the symbolic seals, those of rams, falcons, pigeons, cows, and boars have been mentioned (Razi, 1992: 93). Therefore, all

evidence suggests that this building is a Sasanian-era Mithraeum.

Previously, due to the lack of information, the author named the northern section of the hall as the palace courtyard. Now, given the similarities between the plan of this space and those of Mohammad Abad and Gow Saiidi Mithraeums and the Qaleh Gori fortress, it is highly probable that this space can also be considered a Sasanian-era Mithraeum, built upon the order of Yazdegerd I.

The width of the Mithraeum Hall, from wall to wall, is 660 centimeters. Considering the two rows of northern and southern piers, each 115 centimeters long, the width remaining for the roof



Fig. 5. The Collapsed Roof Mudbrick of the Pillared Hall



Fig. 6. Excavation of the Area

covering is 430 centimeters. No traces of an arched ceiling or wooden beams used for a flat roof were found on the floor of

this space, as all the collapsed debris resulting from the destruction by the Hephthalites during the creation of work-



Fig. 7. Coin of Khosrow I, Found on the Floor of the Palace Hall

shops in the second phase was collected and removed.

Cross-Shaped Building VI

Behind the space attributed to the courtyard, in the northwestern section, the remain of a cross-shaped space was discovered. Only a small part of the eastern section of this building remains intact (Fig. 4, VI). Its function cannot be understood due to the extensive destruction. The floor of this building, in its current state, is made of compacted earth, and the walls are made of mudbricks.

Long Halls V-II

On the northwestern part of the palace complex, the remains of several halls were discovered. These halls, which are parallel to each other, are precisely aligned with the walls of Hall VII and Space I. Since the excavation of this site was left unfinished, we are unaware of the number of these halls and their actual function. All the walls of these halls are made of bricks measuring 10x40x40 cen-

timeters. There is evidence similar to the walls of Hall VII, mudbrick was used in the construction of some of these walls.

Hall Dimensions and Features

Halls II and III, each measure 180 centimeters in length. However, both are different in width that is 190 centimeters and 250 centimeters, respectively. The entrance to both halls, measuring 75 centimeters wide, is located on the eastern side. The southern wall of Hall II is 70 centimeters wide, while the northern wall is 130 centimeters in width. The space of Hall II is divided into three parts in the transverse direction by two semicircular handrails, each approximately 20 centimeters high. The distance between the two handrails is 110 centimeters. On the eastern side of the hall, an oval-shaped structure made of mud, measuring 70x90 centimeters, was discovered, currently surrounded by a wall about 10 centimeters high. The interior of this structure is filled with ash, and the entire structure was baked. Beside it was a basin with a flat base, with a diameter of 50 centimeters, the widest halls discov-



Fig. 8. Backgammon Sandstone and 2 Bone Dice, Northwest Corner of the Hall



Fig. 9. Bone Dice

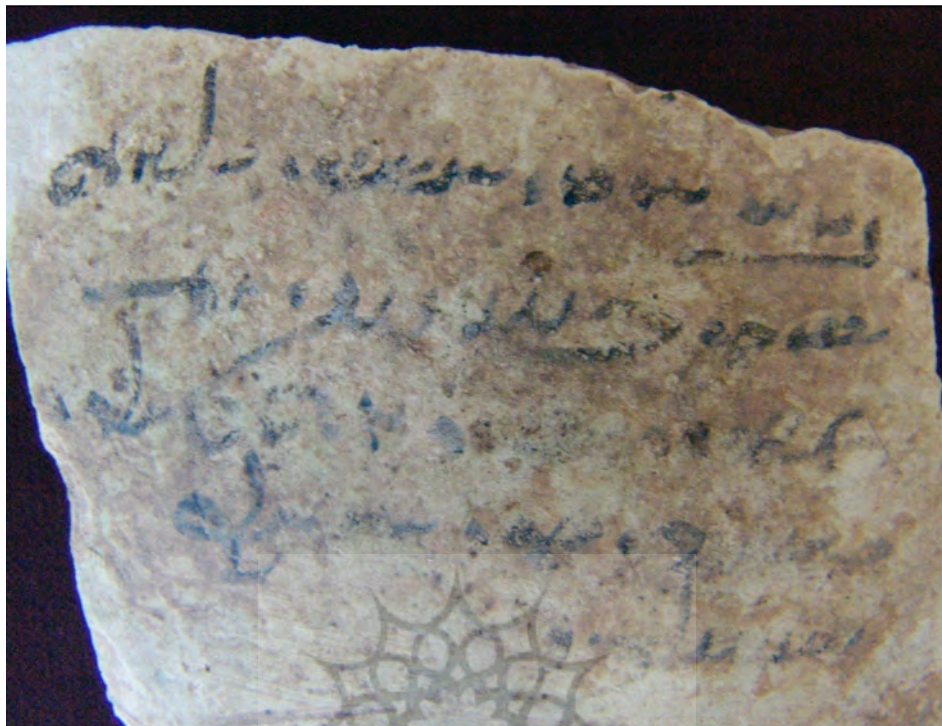


Fig. 10. An Ostraca found inside the Well of the Second Phase

ered on this site are Hall IV, measuring 317 centimeters. On both longitudinal sides of this hall and adjacent to the side walls, a platform (?), 20 centimeters high and 65 centimeters wide, is visible. The floor and the platforms are all covered with gypsum plaster. No objects were found inside these halls (Fig. 4, IV).

This palace remained intact until the time of Khosrow I. From the northwestern corner of the palace hall, in addition to a coin of Khosrow I, two backgammon dice made of bone or ivory were found (Fig. 9), as well as a flat sandstone piece measuring 32x39 centimeters with a thin thickness, which could have been a game board (Fig. 8).

on the western part of the hall and outside it, in Trench C2, inside a well-

used for preparing grape juice for wine, an inscribed pottery sherd measuring 8x8 centimeters was discovered. It contains 5 lines of writing in ink in the Sasanian Pahlavi script (Fig. 10). Although this inscribed pottery sherd is from the second phase, that is, from the industrial workshop phase that was created after the destruction of the palace, it certainly belongs to the first phase, the palace itself. The text of the inscription reads: "(In) the month of Ardibehesht of this sixteenth year and the day of Mehr, with the offering of 2000 goats ... it was decided" (Nasrollazadeh, 2007: 142).

From the text of the inscription, it can be understood that the offering of 2000 goats is related to the palace. Although this inscribed pottery sherd is from the



Fig. 11 & 12. Inscriptions in Sasanian Pahlavi Script and Language on the Wall of Hall 8102

second phase and was found in the industrial workshop, it is uncertain wheth-

er it belongs to the time of Yazdegerd I or to the kings after him until the era of



Fig. 13. Iron Objects Found Next to the Kiln-like Structure

Khosrow I. As Nasrollazadeh has pointed out, since no king's name is mentioned in this inscription, it is impossible to determine its exact equivalent in the Gregorian calendar.

On the northern face of pier 8102 in the palace hall (the second eastern pier from the south), an inscription was dis-

covered that contains 11 lines. It is written in parallel lines but from top to bottom in a Chinese style, and due to extensive damage, only some of the letters are legible (Fig. 11, 12). This writing style is also seen in the hall of the Bandiān Dargaz fire temple during the time of Bahram V.



Fig. 14. Pottery

Phase Two Architecture: Industrial Workshops

Excavations in the second phase of architecture at this site led to the identification of several workshops. These excavations reveal that the architecture of these workshops lacked a systematic order (Fig. 4).

Metal Smelting and Extraction Workshops

Facilities related to metal smelting con-

sisted of structures approximately 84x100 centimeters in size and 15-20 centimeters in height, built with kneaded mud on the floor. It appears that these workshops, in addition to producing tools and equipment for farmers and residents of this village, were also involved in the production of weapons and tools such as arrowheads, darts, and others.

Grape Juice Processing Workshop for



Fig. 15 & 16. Stone Object

Wine Production

Other workshops, including a wine-mak-

ing, were discovered in Trench D2. This workshop consisted of a space enclosed



Fig. 17. Dastas (Quern-Stone)

by mudbrick walls, with a floor slopping gently towards a well in the center. The diameter of this well is about 80 centimeters, and its depth relative to the gypsum floor is about 85 centimeters. At the bottom of this well, a flat-based ceramic basin was placed, with a wall 35 centimeters high and a diameter of 65 centimeters. The well was embedded in a platform of mudbricks measuring 15x100x120 centimeters.

Bread Ovens

In the first layer of Tepe C, which belongs to the Ilkhanid period, three bread ovens were identified. A lime kiln and a charcoal kiln were also discovered from this layer. In the second phase, which corresponds to the Sasanian period, several bread ovens were found in different trenches.

Conclusion

By passing through the uppermost layer of this site, which is dated back to the Ilkhanid period, we reach a layer from the Sasanian period, which consists of two phases. The architecture of the first or oldest phase includes the remains of a palace, which in the second phase of architecture, was transformed into a complex of industrial workshops. Khosrow I had peaceful relations with the Hephthalites at the beginning of his reign (Zarinkoob, 1975: 495). Therefore, there was complete peace in the region. However, when the Hephthalites realized that Khosrow had refused to pay the annual tribute, they began to invade the borders of Iran and engaged in looting and destroying Iranian cities, such as the palace of Dastkard-e Yazd Shahpouran. This audacity of the Hephthalites caused



Fig. 18. Dastas (Quern-Stone) Upper Stone

Khosrow to ally with the Turkish Khagan, destroy them, and divide their country between them. During the time of Khosrow II, several years after the destruction of the palace, industrial workshops were built on the ruins of the palace.

Acknowledgments

I hereby express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Shahin Aryamanesh for his helpful comments and suggestions.

Bibliography

- Aryamanesh, S. (2023). "A Review of Zoroastrianism: An Introduction", *Ancient Iranian studies*, 2(6), 85-89. <https://doi.org/10.22034/ais.2023.404145.1046>
- Azarnoush, M. (1994). *The Sasanian Manor House at Hajiabad, Iran*, Firenze, Casa editrice Le Lettere.
- Bashshash Kanzag, Rasoul. (1997). "Translation of Inscriptions Discovered at Bandiyan Darreh Gaz (Dastkard-e Yazd Shahpouran)", *Archaeological reports of Iran*, Vol. 1, 33-38 (In Persian).
- Clauss, Manfred. (2000). *The Roman Cult of Mithras: The god and his mysteries*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Dara, M. (2023). "Zoroaster as the Epic Hero to Prove His Legitimacy", *Ancient Iranian studies*, 2(6), 51-56. <https://doi.org/10.22034/ais.2023.404144.1045>
- Gignoux, Philippe. (1998). "Les inscriptions en moyen-perse de Bandiān." *Studia Iranica* 27, No. 2: 251-258.
- Gugushvili, M. (2023). Middle Persian Private Inscriptions in the Sasanian and Post-Sasanian Period: Funerary and Memorial Inscriptions. *Persica Antiqua*, 3(4), 65-67. <https://doi.org/10.22034/pa.2023.159970>
- Hassanpour, Atta. (2014). "Comparative study and comparison of plaster casts obtained from the excavation of the castle building", In Leila Niakan (ed.), *Archaeological Researches of Simareh Dam Basin*, Tehran: Cultural Heritage Research Institute and Iranian Water and

- Power Industries Development Company (In Persian).
- Hozhabri, A., Kamali, S. H., & Norouzi, A. (2024). "Introducing Troglodytic Spaces in Bostanu; Sasanian Rock-Cut Tombs on the Edge of the Persian Gulf", *Sinus Persicus*, 1(1), 7-17. <https://doi.org/10.22034/sp.2024.194210>
- Iravanian, A. (2022). "Iconography of Mithras from Surkh Kotal to Bourg-Saint-Andéol". *Ancient Iranian studies*, 1(3), 105-115. <https://doi.org/10.22034/ais.2022.368275.1022>
- Kakouris, G. (2024). "Frashokereti: Restoring the Creation from a Zoroastrian Eschatological Perspective", *Ancient Iranian studies*, 3(8), 43-56. <https://doi.org/10.22034/ais.2023.416550.1062>
- Maksymiuk, K. (2021). "Armenia in Political and Military Activities of Ardaxšir I", *Persica Antiqua*, 1(1), 87-96. <https://doi.org/10.22034/pa.2021.133726>
- Matloubkari, E., Shaikh Baikloo Islam, B. (2022). "Climate Change and Challenges of the Last Ancient Dynasty of Iran: The Decline and Fall of the Sassanid Empire", *Persica Antiqua*, 2(2), 61-76. <https://doi.org/10.22034/pa.2021.138159>
- Mehriban Xosbext, A. (2024). "Middle Persian Inscriptions of the Era of Khosrow Anushirvan in Darband, Caucasus (Dagestan)", *Caspian*, 1(1), 53-56. <https://doi.org/10.22034/cj.2024.194241>
- Nasrollazadeh, Cyrus. (2007). "Translation of Bandian Dargaz's Ostraca", *Archaeological reports of Iran*, Vol. 2, No. 2: 142 (In Persian).
- Nourallahi, A. (2022). "An Archaeological Survey of Kolm Fire Temples, Dostan District of Badreh, Ilam in the Central Zagros", *Ancient Iranian studies*, 1(1), 135-173. <https://doi.org/10.22034/ais.2021.133755>
- Rahbar, M. (2023). "An Investigation of Parthian-Sasanian Stuccoes of Dastowā Shushtar, Khuzestān, Iran", *Ancient Iranian studies*, 2(6), 57-75. <https://doi.org/10.22034/ais.2023.404142.1043>
- Rahbar, M. (2024). "Miniature Motifs on the Ossuaries of the Bandian Dargaz Fire Temple", *Caspian*, 1(1), 7-27. <https://doi.org/10.22034/cj.2024.194208>
- Rahbar, Mehdi. (2004). "Le Monument Sassanide de Bandian, Dargaz, un Temple du feu d'après les dernières découverts 1996-98." *Studia Iranica* 30, No. 1: 7-30.
- Razi, Hashem. (1992). *Mithraism*, Tehran, Behjat (In Persian).
- Rostami, H., Aryamanesh, S. (2020). "Investigation on Symbolic Badges in Sasanian Rock Reliefs and Stuccoes", In: Niknami, KA., Hozhabri, A. (eds) *Archaeology of Iran in the Historical Period. University of Tehran Science and Humanities Series*. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-41776-5_25
- Skupniewicz, P. (2021). "Mounted Combat Scenes on the Bronze Plaque from Sana'a, Amazonomachia in Yemen?", *Persica Antiqua*, 1(1), 69-86. <https://doi.org/10.22034/pa.2021.133724>
- Skupniewicz, P. (2022). "Some Formal Remarks on "Shapur Cameo" and Few Points on Practical Methodology in Researching Sasanian Iconography", *Persica Antiqua*, 2(3), 75-99. <https://doi.org/10.22034/pa.2022.347322.1014>
- Yaghmaei, Esmail. (2008). "Archaeological excavation at Mitra Temple of Mohammad Abad (Dashtestan-Borazjan)", *Bastanpazhuhi*, Vol. 3, No. 6: 5-76 (In Persian).
- Zarinkoob, Abdolhossein. (1985). *History of Iranian people*, Tehran, Amirkabir (In Persian).



© 2025 The Author(s). Published by Tissaphernes Archaeological Research Group, Tehran, Iran. Open Access.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

The ethical policy of Caspian is based on the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) guidelines and complies with International Committee of Caspian Editorial Board codes of conduct. Readers, authors, reviewers and editors should follow these ethical policies once working with Caspian. The ethical policy of Caspian is liable to determine which of the typical research papers or articles submitted to the journal should be published in the concerned issue. For information on this matter in publishing and ethical guidelines please visit www.publicationethics.org.