

# Sasanian Government Hall of Shushtar, Khuzestan, Iran


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## Abstract

An archaeological survey in 2004 in Mianab of Shushtar in Khuzestan, as well as excavations in 2005, led to the discovery of a Sasanian government hall and valuable stucco carvings. This article examines this hall and compares it with sites such as Damghan Hesar Hill and Hajiabad Lord's House, as well as Chaltarkhan and columned halls of Bandian Dergaz Hill C. The result of this research shows that given the Sasanian columned halls that have so far been identified not older than the time of Bahram V (420-438 AD), the Dastova government hall probably dates back to the middle to the end of the Sasanian period.

**Keywords:** Dastova; Plaster Carving; Parthian; Sasanian.



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## Introduction

Shushtar is located at 32° North Latitude and 49° East Longitude. Based on archaeological surveys and excavations at the Dostova site, it has been determined that this site, located 5 kilometers south of Shushtar, was the capital of the Parthian Elimaa around the late 1st century BC or early 1st century AD. Considering the recent discoveries that include a Sasanian government palace and beautiful stuccoes discovered in this city (Fig. 3), it could have been a ruling seat during that period.

In 2004 and 2005, a superficial archaeological survey was conducted in Minab of Shushtar, and the second season was devoted to the archaeological excavation. Various plaster carvings were found in the Jiljilak area and behind the gas station on the Shushtar-Ahvaz Road. The plaster carvings of Jiljilak Dastova can be divided into (a) a group of geometric motifs; (b)

a group of plant motifs; and (c) a group of animal motifs, which were comparable to the plaster carvings of sites such as Kooch Khajeh, Bishapur, and Bandian Dargaz.

## Columned Hall of Dastova

During surveys conducted in 2005 in Dastova, Shushtar, fragments of bricks were found on the agricultural land of a person named Qodratullah Jagir, which was a sign of the existence of an important building such as a tomb or temple. This site is on the left side of the Shushtar-Ahvaz Road and above the Gargar River. The coordinates of the site are N 32° 33" Latitude and E 48°51'49" Longitude

A 2m x 2m test trench was dug, and after 15cm of excavation, a wall was revealed, made of bricks and plaster. The excavation continued and 7 more square chambers were found. These chambers were located in 2 rows and



Fig. 1. Map of Iran and Khuzestan Province

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Fig. 2. Map of Iran and Khuzestan Province Sasanian Period Stucco Discovered in the City of Dastova

approximately aligned in north- south direction. The chambers were all enclosed by brick walls, with interior

dimensions being about 10m×20m. Evidence shows that the hall was completely open on the south side. The



Fig. 3. The First Discovered Column of the Columned Hall of Dastova



Fig. 4. The Eight Columns of the Hall

floor of the entrance to the hall was 155cm wide and was paved with fragments of pottery and plaster. A similar method has also been reported in the Damghan Hesar Hill (Fiske, 1930). The

Dastova Hall was built in a north-south direction and is tilted about 20 degrees to the north. This is seen in almost all buildings of Parthian and Sasanian periods.



Fig. 5. The Columned Hall of Dastova



Fig. 6. Lead Coins from the Sasanian Period Found on the Floor of the Columned Hall of Dastova

The eight bays divide the hall into three spaces. The central space is wider and is 385cm. However, the columns or bays on the sides have a small distance from the walls. While the distance of the side bays from the eastern and

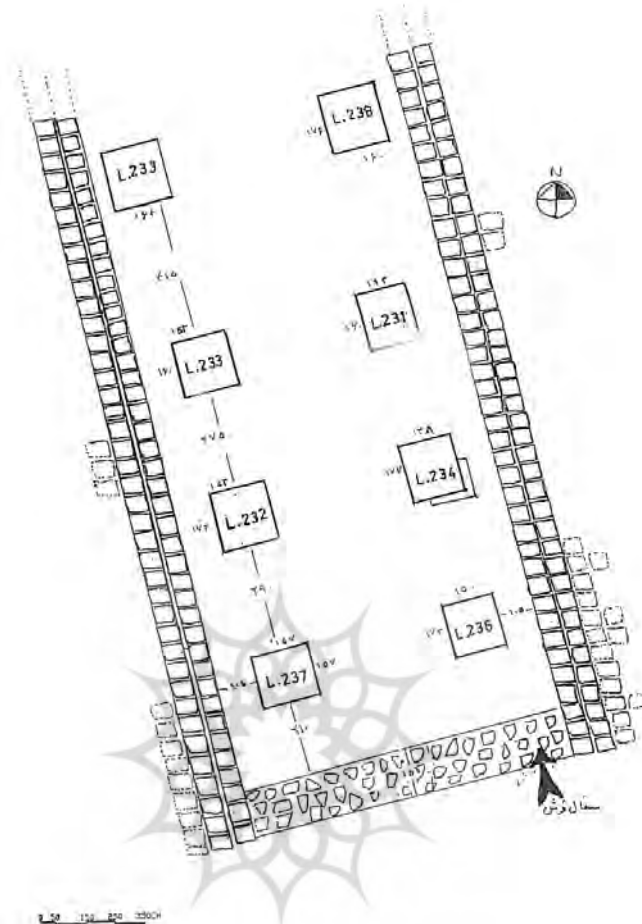


Fig. 7. Plan of the Columned Hall of Dastova

western walls is about 105cm. The distance between the two northern bays is slightly different from the six southern bays. Because in order to create more space in the north of the hall, the two bays above were brought closer to the walls. So that the central space in this part is 415 cm wide. It seems that this measure was used to create more space in the northern part. This part may have been intended for the ruler to sit. On the other hand, probably they

wanted to create a dome over the four northern columns like in Hajiabad and Damghan Palace, because the columns do not have sufficient order to implement a dome.

#### Sasanian Architecture

Most of the important buildings of the early Sasanian period until the middle have arches and domes, such as Kasa Arch. Other palaces of this period include Firouzabad and Sarvestan palac-

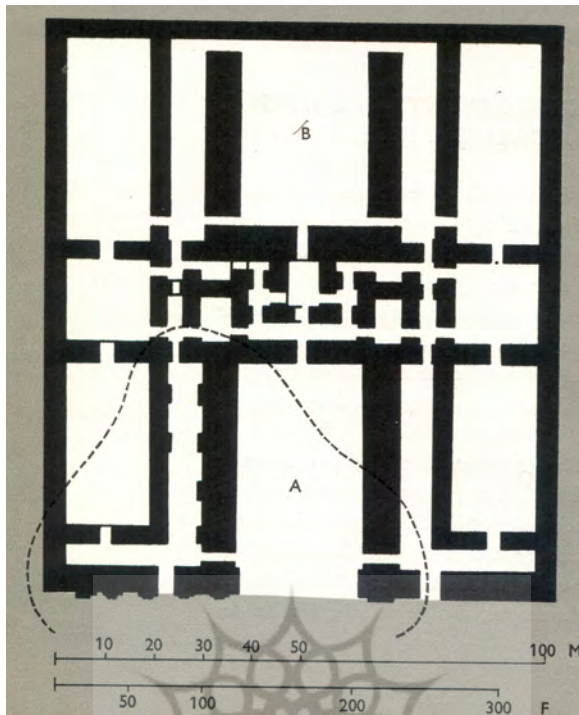


Fig. 8. Plan of Taq-e Kasrā (Ayvān-e Kesrā) (Ghirshman, 1962: fig. 173)

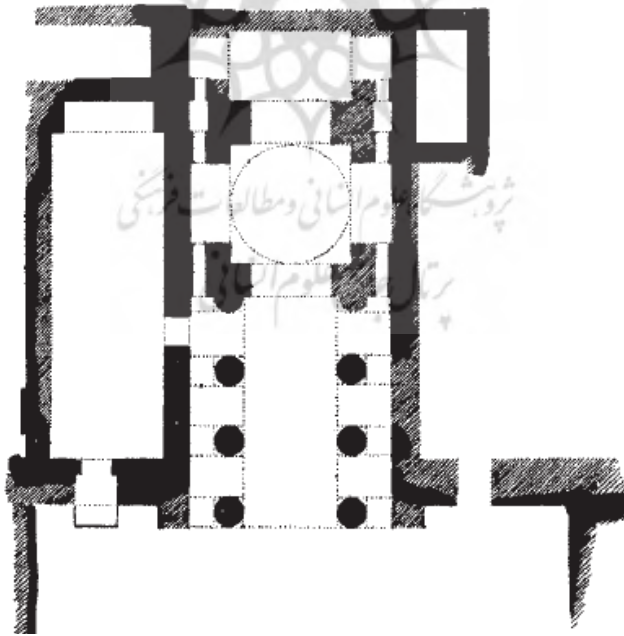


Fig. 9. Plan of the Sasanian Palace of Tepe Hissar (Tappa Heşār) of Dāmḡān (Kimball, 1977, fig. 166)

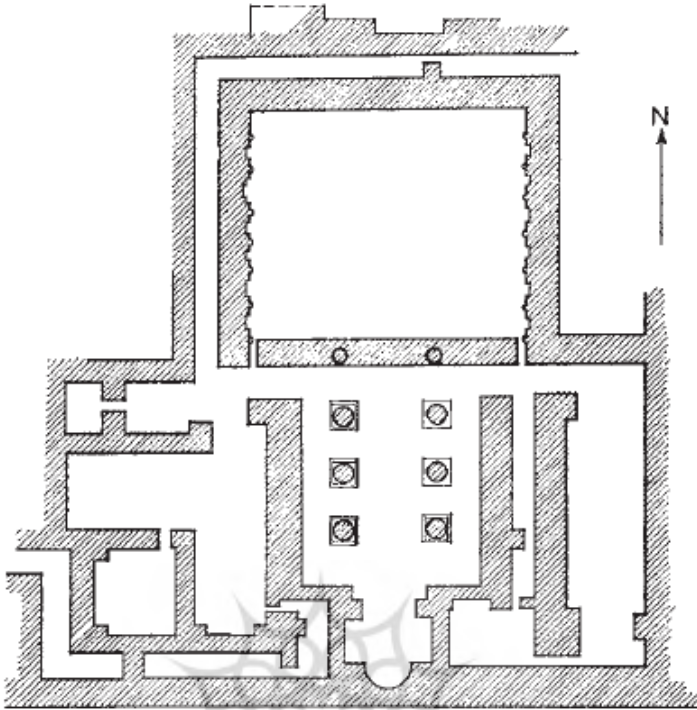


Fig. 11. Palace II, Sasanian Buildings in Kish, Iraq (Watelin, 1977: fig. 169)

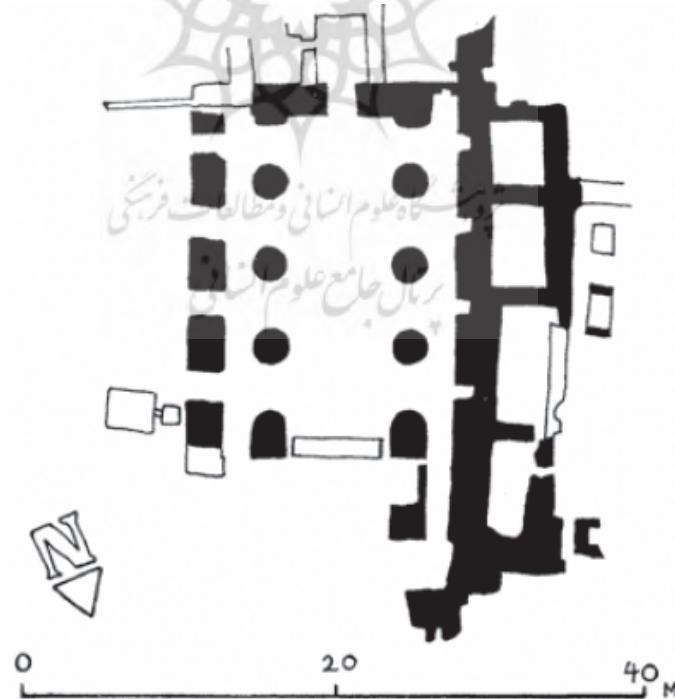


Fig. 10. Plan of the Sasanian Columned Hall in Čal Tarkān, Ray (Kröger, 1982: fig. 130)



es and Iwan Karkheh. However, from about the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD onwards, changes occurred in the architecture of the palaces. These changes include halls with two rows of columns along the length of the building, with each row consisting of a number of columns or piers, and the arch was supported on the piers. Although the construction of halls with barrel vaults was common during this period, columned halls sometimes led to domed spaces, such as Damghan Palace Hall (Fig. 9). The columns are sometimes cylindrical, like those in the palaces of Damghan and Chal Tarkhan (Fig. 10), and sometimes cubic, like the columned halls of Hill C of Bandian Dargaz and the Dastova Hall (Fig. 11).

### Conclusion

Archaeological investigations in 2004 in Minab of Shushtar in Khuzestan, as well as excavations in 2005, led to the discovery of a Sasanian government hall and

valuable plaster carvings. Due to the complete excavation and leveling of the hall by farmers, which seriously damaged part of the floor of the hall, nothing else was found except 5 lead coins. Therefore, the construction of the hall cannot be considered to be contemporaneous with the coins, as the building may have been built much earlier and the coins belong to a later period. The coins belong to Pirouz I (474-459 AD) or Qubad I, the Sasanian king (449-531 AD). Therefore, we can consider the date of the last use of the building to be related to the time of Pirouz or Qubad. However, the possibility of the coin being contemporaneous with the hall cannot be ruled out. Therefore, given that the Sasanian columned halls that have been identified so far are not older than the time of Bahram V (420-438 AD), the Dastova government hall probably dates from the middle to the end of the Sasanian period.

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