

Sasanian Architecture with a Concentration on Shapur II's Reign

Research Goal: My goal is to examine Sasanian architecture with a concentration on Shapur II's reign (309-379 AD), to explore the perceived lack of architectural remains from this era. Despite Islamic writers like al-Tabari and Hamza al-Isfahani give credit to Shapur for urban development, scholars attribute very few actual remains to him. It is important to note that despite the Sasanians' long reign, the absence of architectural documentation, including the lack of inscriptions on buildings, and challenges with dating, has prevented the establishment of a precise typology for the architecture of this period. The earliest French travellers such as Eugène Flandin and Pascal Coste, and Jane and Marcel Dieulafoy, arrived in Iran in the 19th and 20th centuries. Although they did create precious images from the physical architectural remains, they relied on old sources written centuries after the Sasanians, whose incorrect dates or descriptions misled these travellers. Later, O. Reuther published a complete review of Sasanian architecture based his own scholarship on older writings and French travellers' reports that were not completely accurate because of their mistaken analysis and descriptions of palaces, houses, and religious buildings. Subsequently, additional researchers, including E. Herzfeld, A. Godard, R. Ghirshman, M. Siroux, and R. Naumann, made notable contributions to the understanding of Sasanian architecture. Yet, most of them followed Reuther and considered most discovered buildings to be palaces and avoided re-examining them. During the 19th and 20th centuries, archaeologists primarily focused on identifying distinct architectural components of monuments, rather than conducting comprehensive analyses of the spatial relationships between these parts or discussing the functions of each individual component. In other words, the buildings were only seen as monumental based on western assumptions of eastern architecture. These scholars arrived at decisive conclusions without giving any details about the structures. I intend to provide a more complete picture of the Sasanian political, religious, and social situation through a more comprehensive examination of Sasanian architecture during the time of Shapur II.

A second reason for the lack of understanding of the period is due to assumptions drawn from western sources. Various Western, Armenian, and Arab historians narrated accounts of the persecution of Christians by Shapur II, attempting to portray him as an ineffective and ruthless ruler. Roger Blockley (1992) in his book *East Roman Foreign Policy* believes that the persecution of Christians in Persia began after Constantine's famous letter to Shapur because Blockley thought that after the legalization of Christianity, Constantine might have changed his foreign policies regarding Christians who live under Sasanian rule. Blockley argued that Shapur considered the Christians inside Iran spies and started persecuting them. For many years, Western scholars have held this perspective, although it has now been challenged by scholars like Kyle Smith (2016). By employing diverse research methods, my aim is to critically examine secondary writings and question their reliability. It is possible that the influence of colonialism and Western propaganda have shaped these narratives. Additionally, the lack of architectural remnants from Shapur's era could be due to the silence of accurate historical accounts about his achievements. Therefore, I intend to uncover and expose the role of Western propaganda and colonial influences in the study of Sasanian architecture.

Research Questions: 1. *What factors contributed to the scarcity of information regarding architecture in the Persian Empire from the early to the late fourth century?* 2. *What specific architectural styles and structures should be sought after during the reign of Shapur II?* 3. *Did Shapur II introduce innovative architectural concepts, or did he prefer to repurpose existing structures?* 4. *What types of evidence can be utilized to trace the evolution of architecture during*

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Shapur II's rule? Could the accounts of numerous travellers and explorers, particularly European colonialists who showed significant interest in the region from the 18th to the early 20th centuries, have influenced the unsuccessful archaeological attempts to understand Shapur II himself, his activities?

Methodology: The analysis of seals, reliefs, inscriptions, and surviving architectural fragments, along with the study of Syriac, Roman, Arab, and Armenian writings, and hagiographies will serve as the primary sources of knowledge for my project. Methodologies like numismatics, spatial analysis, and the comparative method will also play a significant role in my analysis. In the field of numismatics, for example, the comprehensive examination of coin distribution and spread will aid in determining the approximate dating of the sites and their different periods of habitation. Spatial analysis involves studying the relationship between space and ancient architecture in conjunction with human behavioural patterns. In fact, the comprehensive exploration of the physical space in which the architectural work was created can offer a deeper understanding of Sasanian society. The third approach involves examining ancient cultures within a specific region over time.

Timeline: My chapters include an introduction, literature review, a discussion of what we know of Shapur II's architecture based on primary and secondary sources, the analysis of research questions through knowledge has been drawn from previous chapters, and conclusion. In the first chapters, I provide the historical background of the Sasanian Empire, the kings' activities, wars, and political, social, economic, art, and religious situations along with my research questions, hypothesis, and the significance of this study (Oct- Dec). The second chapter requires much more time (Dec-March) because I have to read and examine the weaknesses and strengths of works that have been done so far by scholars about Sasanian architecture. Moreover I will identify gaps in the literature that my project aims to fill them. In the third chapter, I will looking for primary and secondary sources including monuments, inscriptions, coins, and seals, which will be happen between March to June. In the analysis chapter, the found data from the previous chapters will help me to analyze my hypothesis. By the same token, my analysis should support or challenge former scholarships. Furthermore, concentrating on my limitations and weaknesses in my methodology is another task in this chapter.(Jun- Aug). Finally, the conclusion section, notes, and bibliography probably require 1-2 months (Aug-Oct). I expect to defend my dissertation by January 2025.