

A Road to Fīrūzābād

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Abstract

A serpentine path created by the river Tang-āb through the Zagros Mountains has always been the only access from north to the city of Ardašīr-Xwarrah, located at five kilometers west from the modern Fīrūzābād, in Iran. This inaccessibility prompted the king of Fārs Ardašīr to found his stronghold against the Arsacid power here. This path endured the fall of the Sasanian Empire throughout Islamic times as a crossroads of the routes connecting the port of Sīrāf to other cities. The impervious path allowed both the *coup d'État* that marked the rise of the Sasanian dynasty and the development of trades through Fīrūzābād. The reliefs of Ardašīr's victory over the Arsacid King and his investiture by the god Ohrmazd are carved in the gorge, *ad perpetuam rei memoriam*. Furthermore the rose-water produced in Fīrūzābād travelled on the steep path *farsakh* by *farsakh* (literally, parasang by parasang) so it could spread through the entire *dār al-Islam*. The movement of goods and populations on this road has survived with the Qashqaii nomads, who travel along this path even today, during their seasonal migration.

Keywords: Road, Archaeology, Fīrūzābād, Tracks, Movement.

Introduction

The Zagros Mountains form a geographic barrier between the flatlands of Mesopotamia and the Iranian plateau, spanning from Iran's western border to the Strait of Hormuz. During early ancient times, the Zagros Mountains could serve as temporary shelter or for prolonged occupation (Fig. 1).

The Iranian region called Fārs, that is delimited by the Zagros in the east and by the Persian Gulf in the west, is most widely known because it was the cradle of two important Persian dynasties: the Achaemenid and the Sasanian one (CE 224-CE 650). The most ancient word was *Pārsa*, from which is derived the more famous designation "Persia". This paper will try to underline through a diachronic approach the importance of the narrow path that connects the plain of Fīrūzābād to the rest of Iran. The movement of armies, goods and people through this passage exemplify the movement of Iran through centuries.



Figure 1. Fārs district; image modified from Google Earth©. Credits: Google, DigitalGlobe©.

In first instance, it will be analyzed the symbolic and strategic role carried out by the foundation of the Sasanian city of Ardašīr-Xwarrah in a plain accessible from the northern path. Then it will be described the market exchanges during the Islamic era mainly under the Buyid dynasty, a

dynasty of Daylamite origine ruling over the south and western part of Iran and over Iraq from the middle of the tenth to the middle of the eleventh centuries (...) (Nagel 1990: 578),

which will be exemplified by the caravan route of the rose-water produced at Fīrūzābād. Finally, an excursus concerning the story of a nomadic tribe known as Qashqaii will be used to explain the importance retained by the region of Fārs as well as by the exponents of nomadic pastoralism during the last two centuries.

The Road of the Kings to Ardašīr-Xwarrah

In the first half of the third century CE, the Sasanian dynasty's rise to power started suddenly following a *coup d'État* (Wiesehöfer 1987: 371-376) against the Arsacid King, Ardavān. Indeed, Ardašīr succeeded in conquering such an heterogeneous empire as the Arsacid one was, due both to the weakness in the Arsacid administrative apparatus and to a blessed combination of considerable charm and a successful political ideology. Despite the glorification of the founder of the Sasanian dynasty, observed in the Sasanian and post-Sasanian sources, currently scholars accept Ṭabarī's version (Frye 1971: 216; for further information concerning the origin of Sasanian dynasty, see Widengren 1971; Daryaei 2006, 2010; Olbrycht 2016). The Arabic author, lived at the juncture of the eighth and the ninth century in Baghdad (Rosenthal 1999: 5), reported that Ardašīr was one of the youngest sons of Pābag, chieftain of the small town of Khir which is located at east of Eṣṭaxr, the capital city of the Fārs district during Ardavān's reign (Huff

2010: 32). Despite the fact that he was not the firstborn, Ardašīr triumphed over his eldest brother Šābuhr, between the CE 205 and the CE 208, and became King of Fārs. Ṭabarī reports how the battle between the two brothers never happened: surprisingly, Šābuhr was killed by a stone that fell from the ‘Humay Palace’, which is located in Persepolis (Bosworth 1999: 8).

Ardašīr set the aim of restoration of the Persian hegemony, although it is not possible to establish whether Sasanian dynasty was aware of the ancient grandeur that had been achieved centuries earlier by the Achaemenid court in Persepolis and whether there it had the willingness to revival Achaemenid Empire (see Shayegan 2011; Canepa 2010); after all, the academic debate concerning the Sasanian perception of the Achaemenids is still open.

The events that allowed the ascension of Ardašīr to the position of new King of Kings, usurping the Arsacid throne, must be put into context: one of the decisive factor was the autonomy of the provinces, whose independence is evidenced by the fact that the rulers could call themselves *shah* – literally, king.

The foundation of a new city, Ardašīr-Xwarrah, was the most hostile and aggressive act of provocation that Ardašīr could plan against the central power: indeed, founding cities was a royal prerogative, which only the King of Kings was allowed to do. In the Middle Persian language, Ardašīr-Xwarrah means ‘The Glory of Ardašīr’. The name itself was a provocation, indeed: *xwarrah* is the *pahlavi* form derived from the Avestic *xvarshvanah*, literally ‘the right to rule given by deities’ (Gnoli 1999). By giving this name to his city, Ardašīr declared his right to rule, in order to legitimize himself as ruler of Iran (Huff 2010: 38).

On 28 April 224, the Arsacid King of Kings Ardavān was defeated by Ardašīr. The site of the battle is unclear; some sources, such as Ṭabarī, track it in Hormizdagan, although the real position of this city is still being discussed by the scholars (Huff 2010: 38). A new era began, from the plain of Ardašīr-Xwarrah.

One of the factors that convinced Ardašīr to found a city on his own was the plateau's ideal position: a valley surrounded by the Zagros Mountains, only accessible from the north, through a narrow 15 kilometers gorge created by the Tang-āb river (Fig. 2).

This small but water-rich plain, located 100 kilometers south of Shīrāz, is in line with the border between *sardsīr* and *garmsīr* that they means ‘cold land’ and ‘hot land’ respectively (Barthold et al. 1984: 148); this location is what causes the valley's pleasant climate (Huff 2010: 37).



Figure 2. The plain of Ardašīr-Xwarrah; image modified from Google Earth©. Credits: Google, DigitalGlobe©.

However the practical and strategic value are not enough; indeed, the migration routes of Qashqai nomads nowadays prove that the mountains are not as insurmountable. Several historical Islamic sources reported the plain as a ‘lake’. For example, ibn-Ḥawkal (*Kitāb al-masālik wa’l-mamālik*) wrote that:

Jūr (i.e. Ardašīr-Xwarrah) was built by Ardesbir. It is said that this place was formerly a small lake, and that Ardesbir, having there obtained a victory over his enemy, desired to build a city on the spot, and ordered the water to be drained away (...) (Ousely 1800: 101).

while al-Iṣṭakrī (*Kitāb masālik al-mamālik*) reported that:

Gūr (i.e. Ardašīr-Xwarrah) ist von Ardešīr erbaut worden. Es heißt, an der Stelle der Stadt befand sich ein stehendes Wasser wie ein See. Ardešīr hatte nun ein Gelübde getan, er wolle an dem gewann dort den Sieg, suchte mit großer Umsicht das Wasser, das an jenem Orte war, durch Eröffnung von Abzugskanälen fortzuschaffen und erbaute dann an jenem Orte Gūr (...) (Schwarz 1910: 56–57);

and Idrīsī (*Kitāb nuṣṣaṭ al-musṭaq fi’l-kīraq al-’afaq*) that:

Djour (i.e. Ardašīr-Xwarrah) fut construite par Ardechir dans un lieu très marécageaux, ou plutôt sur l'emplacement d'un etang que ce prince fit dessécher (...) (Jaubert 1836: 394).

Based on these historical Islamic sources that reports the difficulty related to geomorphological features, D. Huff argues that the main reasons for Ardašīr's choice were the uncultivated fields and the low degree of inhabitation, and he elaborated on this assumption claiming that the laborious drainage works carried out to make the plain of Ardašīr-Xwarrah habitable were part of a colonization

program (Huff 2010: 37).

When the city was completed, the ideological value it had for its founder emerged: with its circular layout, it embodied a vision of the ideal State, in which the figure of the sovereign is central and the other social classes orbit around him. As it turned out, this new vision would end up successfully supplanting the Arsacid's semi-feudal system (Huff 2010: 52–53).



Figure 3. Road partly carved in the rock, D. Rossi.

We must underline that the communication routes between Ardašīr-Xwarrah and the rest of the region probably existed even before the Islamic conquest (we use CE 650 as the approximate date of the final pacification of the province of Fārs after the Arab-Muslim conquest); although we mainly have sources dating to the Islamic era, archaeological data can help us to understand how they were moving through the Fārs during the Sasanian times. The surface evidence encountered in the field consists of a road – partly carved in stone – that was used to secure an access from north through the gorge, and a bridge. We can draw limited information from this road: only a small portion (25 meters in length) was investigated,¹ specifically the part where the track is clearly visible. Therefore it was not possible to establish a reliable chronological interpretation, despite the fact that the local archaeologist called it ‘the Road of the Kings’ (Fig. 3).

¹For my MA thesis, I carried out a work on the field concerning the surface evidence in the plain of Ardašīr-Xwarrah. I report the coordinates of the portion of the road observed: 28° 54' 29" N; 52° 32' 33" E.



Figure 4. Rock relief seen from the gorge; imagine modified, D. Rossi.



Figure 5. Rock relief depicting Ardašīr against Ardavān, D. Rossi.

Most of the Sasanian artistic production may be inserted in a context of royal propaganda; actually, the dynastic program used the most perceptible and decisive medium: the image. The rock reliefs assumed the role of expression and paradigm of the political concepts (Harper 1986: 585–594). Hence, during Ardašīr's reign,

most likely after Ardavān's defeat, this access point was considered so important that the king decided to have two rock reliefs carved along the path leading through the gorge and to the plain; the relevance of the passage is confirmed by the presence of those reliefs. The first is located on the cliff wall in the western riverbank of Tang-āb, seven kilometers south from the northern access and it represents the great battle in which Ardašīr defeated the Arsacid King; three couples of warriors are depicted while engaged in an equestrian duel (Fig. 4). The main couple is formed by the Sasanian King, recognisable by his hairstyle which is considered the prototype of the *korymbos* (Ghirshman 1947: 9) and Ardavān, while the former is killing the latter by piercing his shoulder with a spear. Ardavān was identified by the blazon carved as a decorative motif into his horse's chain mail (Ghirshman 1947: 8) (Fig. 5).

The second rock reliefs is six kilometers away from the northern access of the gorge, carved on the cliff wall on the western riverbank, about six meters away from the river. It represents the investiture of Ardašīr provided by the god Ohrmazd; this main couple is accompanied by four characters of smaller dimensions and there is a fire altar between them (Vanden Berghe 1983: 126) (Fig. 6).



Figure 6. The investiture relief of Ardašīr, D. Rossi.



Figure 7. Qal'a-ye Dokhtar fortress, D. Rossi.



Figure 8. The gorge seen from the fortress cliff, D. Rossi.

The fortress called Qal'a-ye Dokhtar (Huff 1971: 127–171; Huff 1974: 156–158) – literally, the Castle of the Girl – was built by Ardašīr upon the heights of the Kūh-e Tang-āb, literally ‘the Mountain of the Tang-āb’, to defend himself from the attacks of enemies, who were tempted by the central authority. The fortress

guards the narrow gorge from above, testifying the key role of the serpentine path formed by the river (Figs. 7-8).



Figure 9. Ruins of the bridge, D. Rossi.

There is little information regarding the city's development after Ardašīr's reign, though we are certain of the following data: the bridge of the Prime Minister Mihr-Narseh, built within the gorge in the first half of the fifth century CE, certifies a continuous inhabitation of the plain because the decision to build a bridge indicates the need to pass along the path that leads to the city (Fig. 9). In fact, the Prime Minister Mihr Narseh was the *nuṣṣurg framādār* – literally, Prime Minister in Middle Persian – of three Kings of the King, Yazdegird I (CE 399-421), Bahrām Gōr (CE 421-439) and Yazdegird II (CE 439-457) (Wiesehöfer 2003: 127). The inscription carved on the rock cliff was translated by Henning:

This bridge was built by the order of Mihr-Narseh, the Vuzurgframadār, for the benefit of this soul, at his own expense. Whoever has come on this road, let him give a blessing to Mihr-Narseh and his sons for that he thus bridged this crossing. And while God gives help, wrong and deceit there shall be none therein. (Henning 1954: 101).

In addition to the inscription carved on the rock cliff, 13 meters above the ground, several architectural features, such as the masonry of solid concrete, proved that the bridge dates back to Sasanian times (Fig. 10).

We know that in the Sasanian period the province of Fārs was divided into five *kūra*, or districts, whose main cities received the province status: Ardašīr-Xwarrah,

Šābuhr-Xwarrah, Arrajān, Eštaxr and Dārābgerd (Lambton 1999: 337–341), although lack of information does not allow us to understand deeply the historical geography of Sasanian Empire (Miri 2012: 1). In fact, the reconstruction of the administrative Sasanian system was carried out thanks to Sasanian royal and other Middle Persian, Pahlavi or non-Persian inscriptions and texts, rock reliefs, coins, as well as seals and sealings (Miri 2012: 2). For this reason, it is very difficult to clarify a homogeneous scenario of the Sasanian administration, even if the figures resulted from sigillographic studies presents that the four provinces were controlled by an *āmārgar*, literally “*a figure who was at the same time also in charge of the financial offices of other provinces*” (Miri 2012: 6).

As outlined by Whitcomb, the Sasanian’s provincial administration system suggests that the hinterlands supplied the regional capital with primary goods, such as food. This would in turn suggest a tight relationship between the city, Ardašīr-Xwarrah in this case, and its surrounding countryside. In order for this kind of relationship to be possible, we must assume the existence and importance of communication routes (Whitcomb 1979: 117).

The Muslim author al-Balādhurī reports that during the Arab-Muslim conquest of Irān (CE 650) Eštaxr and Ardašīr-Xwarrah were the last cities of Fārs to fall, under the attacks of the general ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Āmir (Lokhart 1991: 925). Despite the fact that the last Sasanian king escaped to Merv, abandoning his homeland to the new power and the new religion, the place where the dynasty was born tried to resist, in vain.



Figure 10. Inscriptions of Mihr-Narseh, D. Rossi.

The rose-water of Fīrūzābād

Ardašīr-Xwarrah, the icon of the first Sasanian king's power, changed its name a few centuries after its founder's death. Actually, some Islamic historical sources also report the Arabic name of Jūr, persianized into Gūr. Moreover, al-Muqaddasī (Collins 1994: 382), Yāqūt (Barbier de Meynard 1970: 174–176) and Mustawfī (Le Strange 1919: 116–117) report the story of the tenth century Buyid sovereign 'Adud al-Dawla, for superstitious reasons, changed the city's name to what it is still called today, Fīrūzābād. This was a reaction to the fact that the locals accompanied 'Adud al-Dawla's visits with the following phrase: *malik ba-gūr raft* – the king has gone to the grave; he therefore preferred to rename the city something that meant 'Prosperity Residence' (Barthold et al. 1984: 159). Its importance during the Buyid period came from its strategic location along the road that connected Shīrāz to the port of Sīrāf, which meant that all commercial goods from the Indies – aloe, sandalwood, ebony, amber, camphor and precious stones – had to pass through here, swelling the coffers of Fīrūzābād's citizens (Barthold et al. 1984: 160). Therefore, archeological evidences such as the presence of Chinese ceramics found in the major ports confirm relationship between Iran and China since c. 800 (Whitehouse & Williamson 1973: 48–49). As pointed out by Whitehouse and Williamson,

Sīrāf may have had the special function of protecting the interests of Gūr, the round city founded by Ardašīr in the third century; as Islamic geographers affirmed, the easiest itinerary between Gūr and the coast leads directly to Sīrāf. (Whitehouse & Williamson 1973: 35).

Specifically, rose-water supplanted high-quality textile manufacturing as Fīrūzābād's most exported product in the post-Sasanian era (Whitcomb 1979: 67). Despite this prosperous result of the trades, the new commercial system that had been established after the Arab-Muslim conquest, which placed Shīrāz and Sīrāf at the two ends of its main caravan route, actually reduced the importance that the five capital cities of the five *kūra* had had during the Sasanian period (Whitcomb 1979: 117).

We know that in the Islamic period the routes that connected the port of Sīrāf to the other cities were clearly marked by the presence of cisterns, caravanserais, and some sections of paved road (Whitcomb 1979: 117), so that there would never be more than one day's journey between the following valley's 'service station'. Indeed, the location of all caravanserais had been planned with the express purpose of placing them in a central position or, at least, at around one *farsakh*, which corresponds to 5.6 kilometers, from its destination (Whitcomb 2005: 99). The archaeological evidence which confirms the presence of caravanserai in the narrow gorge is a structure of quadrangular plan located about 6.5 kilometers south from the northern access, on the western riverbank's cliff wall. The plan measures 16 meters in length and 11 meters in width; it was built with stones of different sizes, not longer than 50 centimeters, bound by mortar and its maximum

height is 40 centimeters. Nevertheless, the remains of the two southern spaces are preserved (Fig. 11).



Figure 11. Caravanserai, D. Rossi.

During the Early Islamic era, Sīrāf was the most important city in the province of Fārs with regard to maritime trade; although there was not a proper harbor there, geographers unanimously consider it as a very wealthy city (Whitcomb 1979: 117). In relation to this, Whitcomb reports the words of G. Ferrand:

There is at Sīrāf neither cold water, nor cultivation, nor milk; it is, however, the wealthiest city of Fars (...) [the transshipped goods are] aloes, amber, camphor, precious stones, bamboo, ivory, ebony, paper, sandalwood, and all kinds of Indian perfumes, medications and spices too long to enumerate. In the town itself excellent napkins are made, also linen veils, and it is a great market for pearls. [there are] rich merchants, some having sixty million dirhems (...) (Ferrand 1924: 253).

The excavations carried out under the directions of David Whitehouse confirm the historiographic sources, underlining how remarkable the port was during the ninth and tenth centuries (Whitcomb 1979: 55).

During the twelfth century, the port of Sīrāf started its downfall:

The Sirafians emigrated to [other] shores of the sea and began to flourish again at the capital of Oman, where certain of them had settled. (Ferrand 1924: 253).

Ferrand's words don't underline Sīrāf's decline as much as those of the Islamic

author ibn al-Balkhi who, in 1107, reports the fact that the Amir of Qais Islands stopped the maritime traffic:

It came to pass that a certain one of the Khāns [of Qais Island] named Abū-l-Qasim succeeded finally in getting possession of Sīrāf also, and then every year or two Kumārtagīn would dispatch an army thither with great effort [to make him evacuate Sīrāf], but he could accomplish nothing against him. This, therefore, as matters now stand, no merchant would bring his ship into the port of Sīrāf to refit, nor for shelter would any anchor there on the voyage to Kirmān from Mahrubān or Dawraq or Baṣra. There are no goods but leather and pots and things which the people of Fārs alone had need of, now passed by the road of Sīrāf and thus the town tell to complete ruin. There is still here, however, a mosque for the Friday prayer, and there are many dependencies and outlying lands. The climate is excessively hot and there is no water, except for one or two springs, wherefore they have always to depend on collecting the rainwater [in tanks] for drinking purposes. (Le Strange 1912: 322–323).

The downfall of the ancient site of Sīrāf, located in the modern village of Bandar Taheri contributed to the decline of the city of Fīrūzābād; indeed, the maritime cluster gradually moved, and the route from Shīrāz through the narrow gorge has no longer reason to exist.

In 1660, the monk Raphael du Mans, reported the existence of three different Persian harbors: Bender Kommeron, now Bender Abass, Bender Congo, now Bander-e Kong, and Bender Rig (Du Mans 1890: 5–9); (Fig.12) while at the end of the eighteenth century, the British East India Company established a trading station in the harbor of Bushire, making it become their headquarters (Beck 1986: 87).



Figure 12. Three harbors; image modified from Google Earth©. Credits: Google, DigitalGlobe©.

The main trading route, which passed through Kazerun from Bushire to Shīrāz, was called ‘Royal Road’ and it connected the Persian Gulf to the inner part of Iran;

it was often used instead of the longer, southern route through Farrashband and Fīrūzābād which did not offer any service and was also controlled from above by the Qashqaii, from their winter pastures (Beck 1986: 89).

Therefore, the Mountain of Jam, the final station on the caravan route from Shīrāz through Fīrūzābād to Sīrāf, no longer smells of roses.

On the trail of the Qashqaii

Among the Turkish nomadic tribes of Persia, one of the best known are the Qashqaii. ‘Nomadism’ is the term used to describe a ‘mobile’ lifestyle that does not contemplate living in the same place. There are three forms of nomadism: nomadic hunters and gatherers, non-sedentary people whose economic activities focus on tinkering and trading and pastoralism nomads (Ehlers 2011: *sub nomine*). The last one is a kind of nomadism difficult to embrace with a definition but recognizable by these characteristics (Ehlers 2011: *sub nomine*):

- 1- Dependence on domesticated animal husbandry
- 2- Migration along established routes between focal grazing areas
- 3- Mobility of herds, people and their habitats
- 4- Predominant economic dependence on the herds and their products.

In the Iranian plateau the migration movements of nomads are often presented with the form of pastoral nomadism: indeed, many people depend on animal husbandry rather than agriculture, because of the climate and the territory. Therefore, the geological and climatic features impacted on the lifestyle of Iranian people causing their constantly moving. In fact, the Zagros, the Alborz and the mountain massifs of central Iran are characterized by long winters when snow covers grasslands until springs. The search of snow-free lands during winters and of temperate grazings in summer have been practiced for millennia (Ehlers 2011: *sub nomine*). Nowadays, there are nomadic confederations of Iranian origins, such as Bakhtiārī and Mamasani and also Turks or Arabs nomads.

Substantial research has been done concerning the movements that have taken place in the last years, in light of an ethnographical approach, because:

(...) the locations of summer/winter pastures of the tribes of Qashqai, Bakhtiari, Khamseh, Mamasani and Boyr-Ahmadi confederacies correspond to the pattern of geographical of the Bakun painted pottery. However, since geographical and ecological features of this region impose certain migration patterns related to summer and winter pastures, particularly in the case of vertical nomadism, it is reasonable to assume that these routes and pastures were more and less the same from the beginning of nomadic pastoral life in the highlands. This assumption is also based on archeological data. (Alizadeh 1988: 27).

Furthermore, also Boucharlat notices that “*It seems that the nomadic way of live was*

conventional from the II millennium 'till the Achaemenid era'. (Boucharlat 2003: 4).

As said, one of the major branches of the Turkish tribes is that of Qashqaii, made up of several hordes allied together in a confederacy. They live in Fārs and Luristan maintaining nomadic elements, changing their pastures according to the season (Curzon 1966: 271). One of the more fascinating theories concerning the etymology of the term Qashqaii relates the meaning 'Fugitives' or 'Those Who Fled', to the Turkish verb *ka mak* 'to flee'; actually, nowadays there are some different theories about the roots and the obscure origin of the Qashqaii (Beck 1986: 42–43).

The first certain historical mention of Qashqaii place them in Fārs already in the fifteenth century, precisely in 1415 – see ibn Šahāb Yazdi; however, it is not still clear if we can detect them in Fārs even before. Despite this, it seems that the Qashqaii were part of the great tribal migrations of the eleventh century (Oberling 2003: *sub nomine*).

It is possible to understand the importance of the narrow gorge as a point of access and, above all, for communication, by retracing the steps of the nomadic Qashqaii, who still travel yearly on the caravan route that was used in the first centuries of the Islamic era.

During their annual migration, the Qashqaii cover more than 700 kilometers, starting from the area southwest of Isfahan and reaching southern Fārs and the plain of Fīrūzābād. This area is chosen by many nomadic tribes, such as theirs, for its richness and multitude of natural resources (Alizadeh 1988: 27). Specifically, in winter they stay in their *kishlaks* – literally 'winter quarters' –, located in the *garmsir*, the warm region of the coastal area known as Dashtistan – literally 'the Land of Plains' – and in Luristan; when spring is approaching, they move northwards with "*their immense flocks of sheep and goats*" (Curzon 1966: 112) to their *yeilaks* – i.e. summer haunts located in the highlands. When the autumn brings the cold, they "*again strike their black goats'-hair tents*" (Curzon 1966: 112), and follow the sun southwards.

Several western travelers who roamed about during their 'tour of Perse', during the nineteenth century, reported their experience; one of them is George N. Curzon who went to Persia in the autumn of 1889 (Curzon 1966: vii). During his travel, the Government of the Shah pursued a diplomatic and strategical policy in order to control the nomad element, keeping their chieftains as hostages in the provincial capitals, or in Teheran. In the first half of the nineteenth century, before these measures were taken, the Qashqaii were a consistent and powerful community of over 60,000 families (Curzon 1966: 113); a century later, A. Stein (1936: 115) estimates about 40,000 families. There were two 'governing offices' (Curzon 1966: 113), the Ilkhani and the Ilbegi, which were considered as First and Second in Command, respectively; therefore, since Fīrūzābād is the main town of

the tribe, the former held an *ex officio* position of Governor of Fīrūzābād and Ferashband.

In the organization of the Qashqaii the Ilkhani is the title used since the first year of nineteenth century to identify the paramount chiefs (Oberling 2003: *sub nomine*). The last Ilkhani, Nāser Khan, died in 1984 when he was in exile in Kurdistan, where he escaped after the Qashqaii rebellion against the central government. Their constantly moving all together on the same paths year after year influences the cohesion of the tribesmen: we can notice this relationship when, during the first years of the second half of the 20th century, many Qashqaii left grazelands to the factories in the cities, losing their tribal cultural identity (Oberling 2003: *sub nomine*).

The fate of most of the Qashqaii was to stop fleeing:

Because of far-reaching disruptions brought about by scarcity of pastures, government restrictions, undermined tribal institutions, and capitalist expansion, most Qashqaii found it exceedingly difficult to continue nomadic pastoralism. (Beck 1986: 251).

Despite the Qashqaii have been the main characters of several historical events, such as the rebellion against the central governments during the last two centuries, Fīrūzābād have played a role in all this.

In fact, Fīrūzābād has been not only an economic centre as a marketplace, but also an ideological centre of their domains, a fixed point in their wondering life (Alizadeh 1988: 33). Indeed, nowadays Fīrūzābād is the place where the last Qashqaii still live (Fig. 13-14).



Figure 13. Qashqaii woman preparing naan bread, D. Rossi.



Figure 14. Qashqaii's tent near the palace of Ardašīr located in the plain, D. Rossi.

Conclusions

The path that runs across the narrow gorge, carved by the Tang-āb river throughout thousands of years, can be considered as a paradigm of the routes that have crossed the Fārs region from the third century, when the city of Ardašīr-Xwarrah was founded by Ardašīr, to the twentieth century. It is possible to delineate the historical and political changes which modified the aspect of the Fārs region by observing both anthropic alterations and archaeological evidence in the narrow gorge of Firūzābād.

In the nineteenth century the river was still described as “*impétueux*” by Madame Dieulafoy, who also describes the wonder of venturing into a gorge with clinging plants of *gynerium* and oleander (Dieulafoy 1887: 476). Unfortunately, even the gorge’s luxuriant landscape, described over the last two centuries by European travelers, has now turned into a dry and barren one; furthermore, the impetuous Tang-āb has become a weak stream. The modern dryness of this river, described in 1934 as ‘in flood’ (Stein 1936: 115), serves as an example for the desertification process which has affected the whole district.

The passage through the gorge on a donkey or on horseback, guarded by the cautious Qal'a-ye Dokhtar, was particularly evocative if you had to face a “*steady stream of nomadic humanity pressing up the gorge in the face of a bitterly cold wind*” (Stein 1936: 115), as happened to Stein:

As I passed amidst the closely packed flocks of sheep, the tall well-built men directing the movement from horseback, and the hardy women toiling up with their babies on their backs and yet actively driving pack-donkeys and ponies before them, it was easy to realize what a hardy stock such ways of nomadic life were bound to raise since ancient times in these arid hills of Fārs. (Stein 1936: 115–116).

The routes have varied through the centuries due to political and economic causes, such as the decline of a port and the rise of another; this was the case of Sīrāf, whose rich trades determined a period of prosperity for Fīrūzābād. We can picture the slow, multicolored, scented caravans with their camels, men, horses and wagons venturing into the narrow gorge, eager to arrive to the nearby Shīrāz. They crossed the river, traveled on the partly carved road which climbed the cliff wall, while the fortress followed them from the top of its rocky nest. During the centuries, the awareness of Ardašīr's great battle has survived in the two rock reliefs, while Qal'a-ye Dokhtar has lost its original purpose, becoming the location of legends or, sometimes, last refuge for 'lost causes'. For example, we remember the story of the *ispahbad* of Tabaristan, Farrukān, who saved himself from the Buyid dynasty escaping to the fortress of Fīrūzābād (Huart 1991: 809). Maybe the legend of the young lady who loosened her hair in order to allow her lover to climb up, which was described by J. Dieulafoy (1887: 409), was so thoroughly absorbed into the local folklore that it led to a new denomination of the fortress.

The provocation of the little King of Fārs, Ardašīr, against the central power, embodied in the foundation of a new city, was successful despite the difficulty of the journey through the narrow gorge, defended by an imposing fortress. The reasons that led the future King of the Kings, founder of a dynasty, to choose to place his first city in this valley instead of another are unclear, and can only be speculated upon.

The area that was cradle of a new Persian dynasty, that continued to spread its influence through the entire *dār al-Islam* even after its downfall, can clearly prove the importance of a diachronic approach. Given this point of view, it is easier to understand the changes caused by the anthropic intervention and, last but not least, all the historical, political and economic reasons behind the intervention.

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