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## Comparative Study of the Political Status of Susa during the Sasanian Period: Climax and Decline, Based on Written Sources and Archaeological Evidence

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**Abstract**

The city of Susa, as one of the oldest urban centers in Iran, faced significant political, economic, and social ups and downs during the Sasanian period. Although written documents mark Shapur II's attack on Susa as the end of the city's life, archaeological data present a more complex and dynamic picture of Susa's situation during this period. The present study aims to examine the factors that led to the rise and fall of the city of Susa during the Sasanian period based on the analysis of written sources and archaeological evidence. The main question of the study is what factors led to the climax and decline of the status of Susa during the Sasanian period and how material evidence reflects these developments. The research hypothesis is based on the fact that Susa experienced relative prosperity in the early Sasanian centuries, especially during the reign of Shapur I, following the transfer of artisans from Antioch and the urban reconstructions that occurred. Susa's ultimate decline was not the result of a sudden destruction, but rather the result of the centralization policy of the Sasanian state, the development of newly founded cities such as Gondeshapur and Ērān-Xwārrah-Šābuhr, demographic changes, and political-religious restrictions. The research methodology is descriptive-analytical and comparative, adopting a historical approach, and the data are analyzed based on written evidence from early Islam, such as travelogues and chronicles, Christian testimonies, and its combination with the finds from archaeological excavations at Susa, including architectural evidence, coins, seals, pottery, wall paintings, metal and glass works. The results show that although Susa faced a serious crisis in the fourth century, archaeological evidence indicates that the city continued to be inhabited, active, and urban in nature until the late Sasanian period and decline is a gradual, structural process, not a sudden collapse

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## 1. Introduction

As one of the oldest urban centers on the Iranian Plateau, Susa played a pivotal role in the region's political, economic, and cultural transformations throughout antiquity. Having served as a prominent metropolis during the Elamite, Achaemenid, Seleucid, and Parthian periods, the city entered a new developmental trajectory with the rise of the Sasanian Empire—a phase characterized by structural shifts in governance, centralizing policies, and the functional reconfiguration of ancient cities. In conventional scholarship, Sasanian-era Susa has frequently been framed through a narrative of urban decline or sudden catastrophe, particularly in the aftermath of Shapur II's campaign. However, such historiographical accounts have largely privileged textual sources and early archaeological interpretations over comprehensive analyses of material culture.

Archaeological investigations at Susa—most notably within the Ville Royale (Royal City)—demonstrate that the urban dynamics of the Sasanian period were far more nuanced than a simplistic model of abrupt collapse suggests. Diverse material assemblages, including architectural remains, emergency burials, wall paintings, clay bullae, ceramics, metalwork, glassware, and particularly numismatic hoards, paint a multifaceted picture of the city's urban trajectory. These data attest not only to episodes of crisis and destruction, but also to robust patterns of continuity in occupation and economic activity. Consequently, this material record invites a critical reassessment of whether Shapur II's intervention signaled the definitive demise of urban life at Susa, or merely represented an episodic crisis within a broader, gradual transformation.

Concurrently, the Sasanian administration's macro-urban strategies—specifically the foundation and expansion of new royal cities such as Gundeshapur, Ērān-Xwārrah-Šābuhr, and Īwān-e Karkheh—significantly reconFig. d political and economic networks across Khuzestan. Within this decentralized regional framework, although Susa relinquished its former primacy, it retained substantial regional, religious, and commercial significance. The documented coexistence of Zoroastrian and Christian communities, the endurance of administrative apparatuses, and ongoing integration into interregional trade networks all underscore the city's enduring socio-economic vitality under Sasanian rule.

Accordingly, this study critically interrogates the socio-spatial trajectory of Susa under the Sasanians through an integrated synthesis of textual evidence and archaeological data. By moving beyond monocausal determinism, it aims to offer a nuanced, evidence-based paradigm of Susa's role within the wider Sasanian imperial and urban landscape.

### 1-1. Research Questions

• To what extent does archaeological evidence—specifically architectural, spatial, and numismatic data—substantiate or challenge the hypothesis of Susa's abandonment following the military campaign of Shapur II?

• How did imperial Sasanian urban policies and centralizing strategies, particularly the foundation of royal cities such as Gundeshapur and Ērān-Xwārrah-Šābuhr, reshape or diminish Susa's regional and administrative prominence?

• In what ways did economic dynamics (trade and artisanal production), religious diversity (the coexistence of Zoroastrian and Christian communities), and strategic connectivity within regional communication networks mediate the continuity versus decline of Susa under Sasanian rule?

### 1-2. Research Methodology

The present study is historical-analytical in nature and has been conducted using a descriptive, analytical, and comparative approach.

### 1-3. Literature Review

Scholarship on Susa during the Sasanian era has predominantly developed along two interpretive strands: textual historiography and archaeological investigation. Within the realm of written accounts, early Islamic historians and geographers—notably al-Ṭabarī, Ibn al-Athīr, and al-Balādhurī—provide crucial data regarding Susa's administrative, military, and strategic standing, as well as its involvement in the late Sasanian socio-political landscape and the subsequent early Islamic conquests (Ṭabarī, 1983, Vol. 2: 582–585; Ibn al-Athīr, 2004: 460; Balādhurī, 1998: 367–371). While indispensable for reconstructing the overarching historical framework, these accounts warrant rigorous source-critical scrutiny and systematic cross-examination with the material record, given their chronological distance from the events and their inherent theological and narrative biases.

Among modern historians, Bartold highlighted the regional importance of Susa in later historical horizons while examining the urban landscape of Khuzestan (Bartold, 1979: 199). Pigulevskaja, analyzing Iranian cities in the Parthian and Sasanian epochs, characterized Susa as a settlement with an illustrious heritage that was nevertheless relegated to a subordinate role within the newly established Sasanian imperial apparatus (Pigulevskaja, 1993: 223–327). In their broader institutional histories, Christensen and Nöldeke addressed the territorial reorganization of Khuzestan and the repercussions of royal centralization on the region's urban networks (Christensen, 2011: 184; Nöldeke, 2009: 80–90). Furthermore, Frye accentuated imperial fiscal and strategic policies, identifying Khuzestan's commercial routes as a primary catalyst for the sustained continuity of Susa's urban life (Frye, 2009: 524–531). Daryaee has further refined this institutional perspective, arguing that the restructuring of Sasanian state power marginalized traditional urban centers in favor of newly founded royal foundations—a policy that fundamentally transformed Susa's regional standing (Daryaee, 2013: 14–38; 2018: 140).

In archaeological scholarship, the pioneer excavations directed by Loftus, Dieulafoy, de Morgan, and de Mecquenem yielded foundational empirical data; however, their methodological preoccupation with the Elamite and Achaemenid strata often resulted in the unstratified clearance or under-recording of late Sasanian contexts (De Morgan, 1900: 58, 1905: 1; De Mecquenem, 1943: 68–77). A pivotal methodological shift

occurred with Roman Ghirshman's excavations. Uncovering Level IV of the Ville Royale—characterized by widespread destruction layers and emergency intramural interments—Ghirshman

attributed these archaeological signatures directly to the punitive campaign of Shapur II, thereby positing an abrupt abandonment of the city (Ghirshman, 1950: 571–573, 1952: 7–9).

Subsequent field research and re-evaluations by scholars such as Boucharlat, Wenke, de Miroschedji, Gyselen, and Potts have substantially problematized this catastrophic model. Material evidence—specifically numismatic assemblages, administrative clay sealings (bullae), ceramic typologies, and intra-site spatial distributions—demonstrates substantial urban continuity at Susa well beyond the fourth century CE (Boucharlat, 1985: 78, 1987b: 358–363; Wenke, 1987: 220–256; de Miroschedji, 1987: 52; Gyselen, 1977: 61–74; Potts, 1999: 428–430). These findings necessitate a critical revision of the traditional narrative of rapid decline. Consequently, while existing literature addresses isolated facets of Susa's history and archaeology, a holistic, diachronic analysis that systematically synthesizes textual hermeneutics with stratigraphic and material data remains conspicuously absent. This study aims to fill this historiographical lacuna by providing an evidence-based reassessment of Susa's spatial, political, and socio-economic trajectories within the wider Sasanian imperial system.

**2. Ge** d in the western part of Khuzestan Province, between 47°40′ and 48°37′ east longitudes and 31°54′ and 32°31′ north latitudes. It borders the cities of Dehloran, Andimeshk, Dezful, Shushtar, Ahvaz, and Susangerd, and is bounded by Iraq to the west (Khuzestan Statistical Yearbook, 2021: 37) (Map. 1).

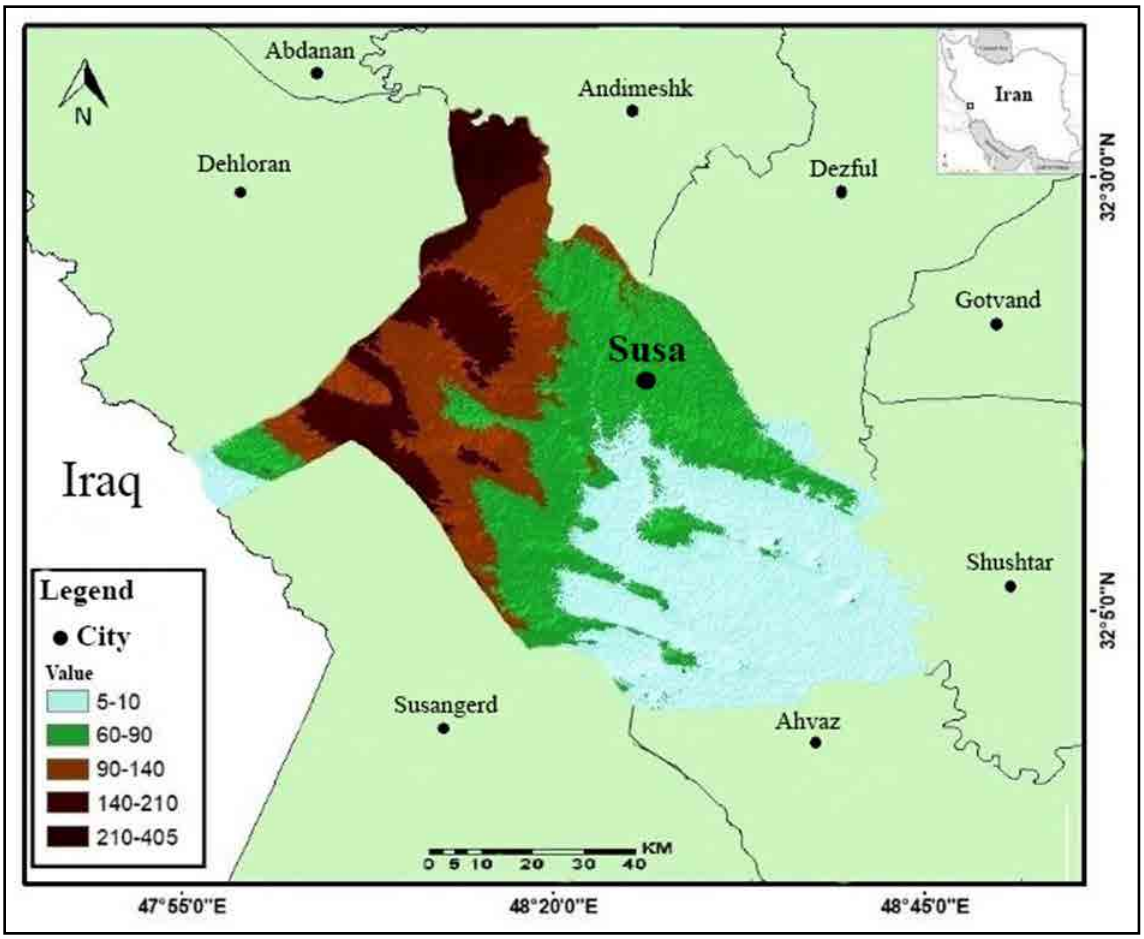
To systematically address these research questions, this article is structured around two analytical axes: textual traditions and archaeological datasets. Following a critical evaluation of both corpora, the final section provides an integrated synthesis that re-evaluates Susa's urban trajectory within the wider imperial framework.

### 2.1. Part One: Written Sources

As the cornerstone of historiographical inquiry, written sources furnish foundational data that delineate the chronological and thematic parameters of the study. Through rigorous source criticism—encompassing provenance authentication, textual transmission analysis, the identification of authorial biases, and systematic cross-referencing with independent datasets—scholars can disentangle empirical historical realities from later narrative accretions. Building upon these methodological imperatives, this section undertakes a critical evaluation of the relevant textual corpus to reassess Susa's administrative, political, and socio-economic standing during the Sasanian era.

#### 2-1-1. The City of Susa from the Reign of Ardashir I to Shapur II According to Written Sources

With the asce nt of Ardashir I (Ardashir-e Papakan) in Istakhr and the rapid expansion of his territorial ambitions, a direct military confrontation with Artabanus IV (or V), the last Arsacid King of Kings, became inevitable. According to al-Tabari, Artabanus designated the plain of Hormozgan as the battlefield in a letter to Ardashir in 224 CE (Tabari, 1983, Vol. 2: 583).




**Map. 1: The location of Shush County relative to other counties (Authors, 2025).**

Recognizing the decisive nature of this engagement for the survival of the Arsacid dynasty, Artabanus likely selected this site for two strategic reasons: its proximity to Susa, and the city's historical standing as a staunchly loyal Parthian stronghold that functioned as a final bastion of anti-Sasanian resistance in southwestern Iran (Ghirshman, 1991: 347).

Nevertheless, Dietrich Huff underscores the lingering ambiguity regarding the exact geography of the engagement, arguing that the plain identified by al-Tabari as "Hormozgan" was most likely situated between Isfahan and Nihavand. Similarly, Geo Widengren, drawing upon the Nihayat al-Arab fi Akhbar al-Furs wa-l-Arab, identifies the battlefield as Gurbadgan (modern Golpayegan) (Huff, 2008: 38; Jalilian, 2016: 31; Widengren, 1971: 738–740). In contrast, Arthur Christensen, relying on al-Tabari, notes that Artabanus ordered the local dynast (shahriyar) of Susa to advance against Ardashir, defeat him, and deliver him to Ctesiphon. Ardashir, having intercepted the plan, pre-emptively occupied the area, fortified his position with an entrenchment, secured local water supplies, and achieved a decisive tactical advantage. He subsequently vanquished the local ruler and annexed the province (Christensen, 2011: 59; Tabari, 1983, Vol. 2: 583–584). Following its capture in early 224 CE, Susa reportedly faced punitive measures from Ardashir for its unwavering Parthian allegiance (Gropp, 2005; Verstandig, 2007: 434).

Regarding the precise topography of the clash between Ardashir and Artabanus, Shahram Jalilian categorizes five proposed locations: (1) the vicinity of Rayy; (2) outside Nihavand; (3) along the Jarrahi River near Ramhormoz; (4) Susa; and (5) Golpayegan in northern Isfahan Province (Jalilian, 2016: 58).

The early Sasanian rulers frequently established new administrative foundations in close proximity to major Parthian centers to capitalize on preexisting economic networks and

local prestige (Pigulevskaja, 1993: 223). Within this strategic framework, Ardashir likely founded Hormozd-Ardashir—designated in early Islamic sources as Suq al-Ahwaz (Tabari, 1983, Vol. 2: 585)—near the ancient metropolis of Susa to stimulate regional urbanization and foster imperial integration (Frye, 2009: 293).

Following the accession of Shapur I and the conclusion of his major campaigns against Rome, the crown prioritized domestic stabilization and the reconstruction of urban infrastructure damaged during his predecessor's reign. Shapur I partially remediated the devastation inflicted upon Susa under Ardashir (Noldeke, 2009: 89–90). Following the defeat of Valerian and the sack of Antioch in 260 CE, Shapur deported skilled artisans, particularly textile workers and weavers, and settled them across Khuzestan, notably within Shushtar and Susa (Pigulevskaja, 1993: 327; Winter and Dignas, 2007: 254; Canepa, 2009: 54; Bonner, 2020: 53; Shapur Shahbazi, 2010: 378). The resettlement of Roman captives from Antioch in 260 CE is likewise corroborated by the Chronicle of Seert, a medieval Nestorian Arabic compilation produced after 1036 CE (Winter and Dignas, 2007: 255, citing Histoire nestorienne [Chronique de Seert], PO IV, 220 ff.).

During the reign of Bahram II, the Roman emperor Carus briefly captured Susa; however, Carus's unexpected death facilitated the prompt restoration of Sasanian authority (Noldeke, 2009: 80). Concurrently, during Bahram II's punitive expedition against his brother Hormoz, a local Zoroastrian priest (mowbed) in Susa instigated a regional uprising against royal authority and temporarily seized control of the city before the revolt was decisively suppressed by Bahram II (Daryaee, 2013: 14).

### 2-1-2. Susa During the Reign of Shapur II According to Written Sources

Following the official legitimization of Christianity in the Roman Empire via the Edict of Milan in 313 CE[1] (Winter and Dignas, 2007: 33; Schippmann, 2004: 40), Shapur II initiated systemic measures against domestic Christian populations, seeking to curb communities perceived as ideologically or politically aligned with Rome (Duchesne-Guillemin, 1983: 886; Jalilian, 2017: 206; Labaf-Khaniki, 2021: 172).

According to late antique historical and ecclesiastical accounts, Shapur II resolved to suppress Christian communities throughout the empire during this protracted conflict. Susa, as one of the major episcopal and urban centers of Khuzestan, became a direct target of imperial intervention following its participation in civic insurrections against central Sasanian authority. Syriac Christian sources record that the city was assaulted by an imperial contingent deploying war elephants, resulting in substantial physical destruction and depopulation (Fiey, 1979: 141–143).

In modern historiography, this punitive operation has generally been interpreted as an effort to enforce domestic political cohesion and neutralize regional enclaves susceptible to external instigation (Labaf-Khaniki, 2021: 173).

Nevertheless, hagiographical and martyrological narratives present a more nuanced picture of the underlying mechanisms of persecution. According to traditions associated with Simeon Bar Sabbae, Christians within the Sasanian realm were targeted or executed primarily for their refusal to remit a punitive double capitation tax (Wood, 2013: 20–21, 67). In a similar vein, the Martyrdom of Mar Aqebshma frames this augmented fiscal demand as a deliberate royal scheme engineered to systematically dismantle the Christian presence in the Sasanian state (The Martyrdom of Aqebshma, 1981: 361–362). In contrast, modern critical scholarship challenges these sectarian characterizations. Jackson Bonner argues that such narratives are chronologically problematic and ideologically amplified, noting that the supplementary levies were fundamentally instituted to finance imperial military campaigns against the Roman Empire. From this institutional perspective, co-opting local bishops into the tax-collection apparatus served as a pragmatic fiscal mechanism designed to integrate the Christian minority into the imperial administrative apparatus rather than an ideological policy aimed at systemic eradication, notwithstanding the documented episodes of state-sanctioned violence (Bonner, 2020: 72).

**2-1-2-1. Reflections on the Proposed Causes for the Destruction of Susa by Shapur II**

In evaluating the underlying catalysts for Shapur II's campaign against Susa, scholars such as Westphal, Brock, Hartranft, Dodgeon and Lieu argue that the royal administration targeted the city primarily due to suspicions regarding the civic population's pro-Roman sympathies and questionable imperial loyalty (Brock, 1982: V 14; Westphal, 1901: 9; Hartranft, 1989: 264; Dodgeon and Lieu, 1994: 90).

In contrast, Jean Maurice Fiey[2] contends that imperial persecution of the Christian community at Susa was comparatively restrained during this period, citing the hagiographical Life of Miles, bishop of Susa around 330 CE, as explicit confirmation (Fiey, 1979: 141). According to this tradition, Miles proselytized Susa for three years with minimal success before abandoning his see. Fiey further observes that several prominent notables accused of sedition against Shapur II were Zoroastrians rather than Christians, thereby challenging purely sectarian interpretations of the imperial suppression. Nevertheless, late antique Christian martyrologies consistently recount a catastrophic military operation involving 300 war elephants that allegedly razed the settlement, employing the classical literary topos of ploughing the razed city into arable fields (Fiey, 1979: 141–143).

Challenging these hyperbolic narratives, Jean-Baptiste Chabot rejects the notion of Susa's wholesale destruction under Shapur II as ungrounded, demonstrating substantial historical continuity in the post-fourth-century horizon. In his analysis, Susa's uninterrupted ecclesiastical status—manifested in the well-documented sequence of East Syriac (Nestorian) bishops participating in synods between 410 and 605 CE—attests to sustained urban vitality well after

the mid-fourth-century crises (Chabot, 1902: 683). In this context, the testimony of Libanius[3] concerning the return of the Roman envoy Spectatus from the court of Shapur II is particularly illuminating. Libanius records that high-level diplomatic deliberations regarding disputed borderlands and territorial concessions from the reign of Narseh took place directly in Susa. Spectatus's diplomatic exchange with the Sasanian monarch indicates that Susa continued to function as an operational venue for imperial diplomacy and courtly assemblies during this period (Dodgeon and Lieu, 2002: 195). The hosting of such high-level diplomatic assemblies provides unequivocal textual evidence of the city's enduring administrative infrastructure and political significance under Shapur II.

### 2-1-3. Susa from the Successors of Shapur II to the Islamic Conquest According to Written Sources

Under the successors of Shapur II, particularly during the reigns of Khosrow I and Khosrow II, imperial Sasanian strategies in urban geography and fiscal organization focused increasingly on the development of newly founded centers and the consolidation of centralized administrative and commercial corridors. Historical evidence indicates that while extensive building programs were executed across newly established foundations in Khuzestan, Susa was largely bypassed by direct royal patronage. Nevertheless, this institutional shift did not entail terminal stagnation or the collapse of urban life; rather, it marked Susa's transition from a primary imperial administrative center to a settlement of secondary, regional importance (Frye, 2009: 524–526).

During this period, the Sasanian crown placed renewed emphasis on the fiscal regulation of long-distance trade and the maintenance of economic infrastructure. Khosrow I (Anushirvan) fostered commercial activity and urban stability by repairing transportation infrastructure, bridges, caravanserai networks, and port facilities. Khuzestan, situated at the nexus of strategic commercial arteries—including regional segments of the former Royal Road and Silk Road networks—benefited directly from these imperial initiatives. Integrated into this regional trade matrix, Susa shared in the resulting economic vitality (Frye, 2009: 524–526).

During the reign of Khosrow II (Parviz), specifically during the civil conflict of 590–591 CE, the rebel general Bahram Chobin gained temporary control over southwestern and northeastern Iran, bringing Susa within his operational orbit. However, Khosrow II's restoration and his subsequent marriage to Shirin—who, according to the Armenian chronicle of Sebeos, originated from Khuzestan[4] (Sebeos, 1999: 104)—did not fundamentally disrupt the social or administrative status of the city (Daryaee, 2013: 38; Christensen, 2011: 340). This stability suggests that high-level dynastic turbulence had limited structural impact on Susa's entrenched regional position.

In the final phase of the Sasanian period, sustained imperial investment in newly founded urban hubs across Khuzestan and Fars prevented ancient centers such as Susa from reclaiming their past geopolitical primacy. As Theodor Noldeke observed, systematic patronage of newly founded cities led to the gradual administrative marginalization of older settlements (Noldeke, 2009: 89–90). Susa conformed to this broader developmental pattern, functioning primarily as a provincial hub (Mehrabi and Aghajani, 2016: 176). Nonetheless, the city retained strategic and

defensive importance until the final years of the empire. Under Yazdegerd III, Susa was governed by Hormuzan of Mehrgan-Kadhag, an influential military leader affiliated with the aristocratic magnate houses. The protracted resistance mounted by Hormuzan and his garrison against early Muslim forces underscores Susa's enduring function as a fortified citadel in Khuzestan (Baladhuri, 1998: 367–371). Although this defensive line ultimately fell, the protracted siege demonstrates the city's lingering military capacity and logistical infrastructure.

The fall of Susa occurred during the caliphate of Umar ibn al-Khattab, with Arabic historical sources describing the assault commanded by Abu Musa al-Ashari and Abu Sabrah ibn Abi Ruhm al-Qurashi. However, the precise nature of the settlement's capitulation—whether via active resistance or negotiated terms—remains ambiguous, as extant primary narratives preserve conflicting accounts (Tabari, 2004, Vol. 5: 1904–1911; Choksy, 2008: 29). In contrast, the seventh-century Syriac text known as the Khuzistan Chronicle explicitly confirms that Susa was both heavily populated and defensively intact during the Islamic expansion. In this account, Susa's fortifications are cited alongside those of Gundeshapur and Karkheh, demonstrating its parity with the foremost late Sasanian administrative strongholds in southwestern Iran (Khuzistan Chronicle, 2016: 98–100; Potts, 1999: 430). Synthesized collectively, these textual sources corroborate the continuous survival of Susa's urban fabric up to the threshold of the early Islamic period.

**2-1-4. Evaluation of the Written Sources**

A critical evaluation of the textual sources reveals that on the eve of the Sasanian consolidation of power, Susa was recognized as a formidable stronghold loyal to the Arsacid dynasty. Consequently, the civic center encountered profound political suspicion and endured punitive measures initiated by the nascent imperial apparatus. The accounts preserved by al-Tabari and Arthur Christensen regarding the Battle of Hormozdgan and Susa's broader engagement in the succession conflict—despite unresolved historiographical debates concerning the precise geographical setting of the engagement—clearly demonstrate the strategic indispensability of the city during the formative phase of the Sasanian Empire.

During the reign of Shapur I, Susa was progressively integrated into imperial recovery programs following its initial subjugation. The deportation and resettlement of Antiochene artisans in Khuzestan, especially within key urban settlements such as Susa and Shushtar—corroborated by classical historiographical traditions and East Syriac chronicles—reflect targeted administrative policies designed to invigorate the regional fiscal landscape through captive skilled labor. These records substantiate that Susa retained an active socioeconomic role within the broader urban networks of third-century southwestern Iran.

The preponderance of textual accounts, however, converges on the reign of Shapur II and the purported wholesale destruction of the city. Later chroniclers frequently ascribed this military punitive operation to local Christian sympathies toward Rome, civilian resistance to extraordinary wartime taxation, or municipal sectarian friction. Nevertheless, source-critical scrutiny indicates that these narratives were heavily colored by the confessional tendentiousness of Christian martyrologists, often producing exaggerated depictions of terminal obliteration. In particular, the

literary topos of ploughing the razed city into arable fields and the alleged cessation of urban life stand in sharp contrast to subsequent historical documentation.

Textual evidence from the post-Shapur II centuries confirms that despite forfeiting its former imperial primacy, Susa persevered as a viable urban center of considerable regional significance. Historical records documenting the continuous presence of East Syriac (Nestorian) bishops between the fifth and seventh centuries CE, coupled with Syriac references to Susa's fortified defenses on the eve of the Islamic expansion, furnish concrete proof of uninterrupted civic and religious occupation. Furthermore, Libanius's testimony regarding bilateral diplomatic negotiations convened directly at

Susa indicates that, even in times of systemic tension, the settlement preserved key courtly and administrative functions.

In early Islamic historiographical traditions, the protracted resistance mounted by Susa's garrison against the advancing Muslim forces, along with the settlement's frequent contextualization alongside late Sasanian strongholds such as Gundeshapur and Shushtar, reaffirms its enduring military and strategic vitality during the final decades of Sasanian authority. These combined notices demonstrate that Susa functioned as an active administrative node within Khuzestan up to the threshold of the Islamic conquest.

In sum, the documentary record corroborates that while Susa weathered severe sociopolitical crises and targeted military disruptions, literary claims alleging absolute devastation and post-fourth-century abandonment cannot be uncritically accepted. Consequently, historical interpretations derived from these texts achieve analytical validity only when systematically confronted with the archaeological record; a rigorous interdisciplinary synthesis of textual testimonies and material culture remains essential for reconstructing the dynamic urban trajectory of Sasanian Susa.

### 2-2. Section Two: Archaeological Evidence

The archaeological record of Susa constitutes an essential empirical foundation for reassessing Sasanian historiography, enabling a critical investigation into the site's urban trajectory independent of textual representations. Systematic investigations at Susa commenced in the mid-nineteenth century with preliminary soundings directed by William Kennett Loftus on the Apadana mound (Loftus, 1857: 349–434). Subsequently, Marcel-Auguste Dieulafoy and Jane Dieulafoy concentrated their field operations on Susa's principal mounds, conducting excavations at the Apadana that were primarily exploratory in orientation (Dieulafoy, 1887: 668). Later, Jacques de Morgan and Roland de Mecquenem carried out extensive clearance operations across the site, largely driven by museum-oriented recovery strategies focused on monumental Elamite artifacts. The resulting excavation reports reveal that Seleucid, Parthian, Sasanian, and early Islamic strata were frequently removed without systematic stratigraphic recording, receiving only cursory notices in the preliminary documentation (De Morgan, 1900: 58; 1905: 1; De Mecquenem, 1943: 68–77).

A decisive turning point in the stratigraphic study of Sasanian Susa emerged with the excavations directed by Roman Ghirshman. In 1949, Ghirshman exposed a distinct occupation horizon in the northern sector of the Royal City (Ville Royale)—subsequently designated as Level IV (Chantier IV)—which yielded conspicuous evidence of severe destruction, mudbrick domestic architecture, hasty or emergency intramural interments, and an apparent disruption in urban continuity (Ghirshman, 1952: 7–9). Ghirshman correlated this archaeological horizon directly with the punitive campaign of Shapur II, concluding that Sasanian Susa was permanently abandoned following this catastrophic event. Supported by the apparent association between the destruction debris and contemporaneous burials, this historical interpretation was broadly accepted across scholarly literature for several decades.

Nevertheless, closer scrutiny of the archaeological dataset indicates that Ghirshman's interpretive model requires substantial revision. While Level IV unquestionably exhibits the material correlates of an acute localized crisis and sudden structural collapse, it represents only a restricted spatial sector within the vast topography of Susa. Methodologically, extrapolating the occupational sequence of an isolated excavation sounding to the settlement as a whole is fundamentally problematic, particularly given the confined exposure of those early trenches. Furthermore, the absence of refined stratigraphic control in adjacent sectors of the site severely limits any macro-spatial assessment of residential continuity or intra-site spatial shifts following this destructive horizon.

Accordingly, Level IV of the Ville Royale should be contextualized not as the definitive terminus of Sasanian urbanism at Susa, but rather as the material signature of a severe, episodic rupture in the site's occupational history—a crisis visibly imprinted upon its architectural fabric and burial practices, yet methodologically insufficient to demonstrate wholesale desolation. A more accurate historical reconstruction can be achieved only through the systematic analysis of complementary archaeological datasets, including stratified numismatic sequences, administrative clay sealings (bullae), and broader ceramic distributions across the site.

The architectural remains uncovered in Level IV of the Ville Royale provide a coherent layout of the spatial organization and urban fabric of Susa during this phase of the Sasanian era (Fig. 1). Ghirshman's excavations revealed that the domestic architecture in this level consisted predominantly of mudbrick structures characterized by substantial, thick load-bearing walls, occasionally reinforced with baked bricks. These complexes were organized into contiguous residential blocks separated by open public spaces, internal courtyards, and narrow circulation corridors, reflecting a dense and systematically planned urban quarter (Ghirshman, 1952: 7–8). The incorporation of central courtyards within individual domestic units, alongside built-in ovens (tanurs) and hearth installations inside the rooms, demonstrates an established residential function accompanied by domestic-scale production. This evidence confirms that Level IV represents a stable, well-integrated urban neighborhood rather than a transient or strictly defensive encampment. Moreover, the structural continuity among the residential compounds and the absence of occupational

gaps across the sector confirm that this quarter maintained spatial and functional cohesion prior to the crisis.

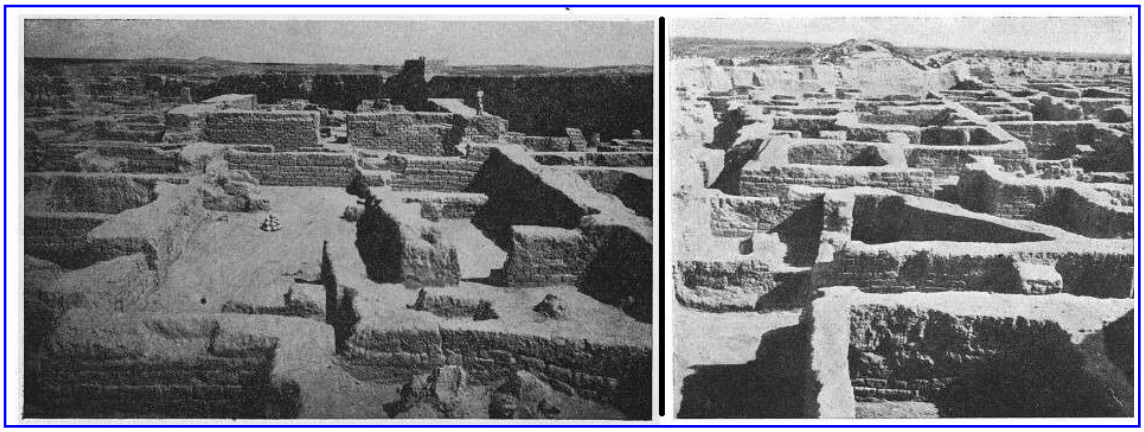


**Fig. 1: Residential fabric of Shush during the Sasanian period (Ghirshman, 1952: 8).**

Within Level IV (Fig. 2), located several hundred meters from the Achaemenid palace complex, Ghirshman uncovered a polychrome painted plaster mural (fresco on stucco) preserved on an interior room wall. The composition features a classic aristocratic hunting scene, depicting a mounted archer pursuing game animals, notably wild boars and stags, with several beasts rendered as pierced by arrows or slain. In addition to the zoomorphic figures, the iconographic program incorporates floral elements alongside a radiant solar disc. The mural was executed using an earth-toned and mineral pigment palette comprising yellow, dark red, pink, blue, and deep brown hues (De Waele, 2004: 353).



**Fig. 2: Painted stucco from the Sasanian period (replica in the Susa Museum), (Chevalier, 2001: 90).**

The chronological attribution of this wall painting, however, remains a subject of ongoing scholarly debate. Ghirshman dated the stucco painting to the first half of the fourth century CE (Ghirshman, 1991: 183 [1370: 183]), a chronological assessment later endorsed by Umberto Scerrato (Scerrato, 2004: 80 [1383: 80]). In contrast, Eric De Waele challenged this Sasanian

dating, arguing on stylistic and comparative grounds that the mural should instead be assigned to the late Parthian period (De Waele, 2004: 354).

One of the most distinctive architectural features of this stratum is a substantial edifice preserving the remains of decorative wall paintings (Boucharlat, 1987b: 358). Such elaborate ornamentation points to a specialized function extending beyond that of an ordinary domestic dwelling, likely representing an elite residence or an administrative-ceremonial complex. The presence of such prominent edifices integrated directly into the residential fabric underscores the functional heterogeneity of urban space in Sasanian Susa. Unfortunately, the intermediate Level III of the Ville Royale (fifth–sixth centuries CE), Level 5A of the Eastern Apadana (late Parthian to early Sasanian), and Levels 4B–C of the Eastern Apadana (late Sasanian) have yielded sparse material culture; consequently, these occupational phases have contributed only marginally to our broader understanding of long-term Sasanian urban dynamics at the site (Boucharlat, 1987a: 238, tab. 28).

Excavations conducted by Pierre de Miroschedji in Ville Royale II revealed a pronounced stratigraphic hiatus between the late Parthian sequence and the early Islamic horizon (De Miroschedji, 1987: 52). The apparent absence of an intervening Sasanian occupation layer in this sector raises significant spatial questions: does this lacuna imply that the Sasanian urban settlement contracted away from this area, or does it reflect localized spatial reorganization? Regrettably, owing to the coarse stratigraphic control characteristic of earlier soundings, this distributional hypothesis cannot be definitively substantiated.

Alongside the architectural evidence, anomalous human interments documented within domestic rooms, courtyards, and circulation corridors attest to an acute disruption of the urban spatial order following a cataclysmic event. Disposing of human remains directly within the inhabited civic perimeter—wholly bypassing standard regional funerary practices—points to emergency conditions and an acute inability to access formal extramural necropoleis. These bioarchaeological data correlate closely with indicators of sudden structural collapse, corroborating the occurrence of an intense crisis, most likely military or political in origin.

Nevertheless, contextual analysis of Level IV in the Ville Royale demonstrates that although anomalous intramural burials within residential compounds and thoroughfares signify severe sociopolitical breakdown under crisis conditions, the spatial layout of the stratum confirms that this catastrophe did not precipitate the absolute collapse of the city. The overarching structural coherence of the urban fabric, the architectural continuity, and the presence of elite domestic units confirm that this quarter was systematically organized prior to the disruptive horizon; thus, architectural and funerary trauma alone cannot substantiate the total abandonment of Susa. These hasty interments inside the settlement reflect an immediate inability to transport the deceased to extramural cemeteries, yet the crisis failed to permanently dismantle the fundamental urban armature. Consequently, the archaeological signature of Level IV should be interpreted as an acute, episodic transition within Susa's broader urban evolution rather than the terminal collapse of its civic life (Ghirshman, 1952: 7–8).

Several of these interments were uncovered directly beneath collapsed wall debris or embedded within destruction strata, confirming that mortality was roughly synchronous with the architectural destruction. This stratigraphic correspondence between structural collapse and mortuary deposits reinforces the hypothesis of a sudden and violent military assault. In this light, Ghirshman's interpretation of these remains as the physical manifestation of an urban massacre retains a degree of archaeological plausibility, even if the precise historical agency cannot be conclusively established without complementary data. Nonetheless, the spatial distribution of the burials demonstrates that they do not represent systemic demographic eradication or permanent civic abandonment. Emergency burials typically reflect episodic ruptures in institutional order, after which social reconstitution or spatial reorganization regularly occurs. At Susa, the spatial restriction of these interments to specific sectors of the Ville Royale and their absence in other explored sectors confirm that the crisis was localized or spatially circumscribed rather than universally obliterative (Ghirshman, 1952: 7–8).

In sum, the intramural burials of Level IV represent tangible manifestations of an acute anthropogenic catastrophe in the history of Sasanian Susa that temporarily destabilized its civic order. However, these funerary anomalies are insufficient on their own to substantiate total urban desolation, emphasizing the necessity of evaluating them in tandem with other material datasets. Significantly, the material culture recovered from Level IV includes definitive physical markers of an established Christian community, such as a silver

pectoral cross found associated with a skeleton and cross motifs incised or stamped onto ceramic vessels (Fig. 3) (Ghirshman, 1950: 571–573).

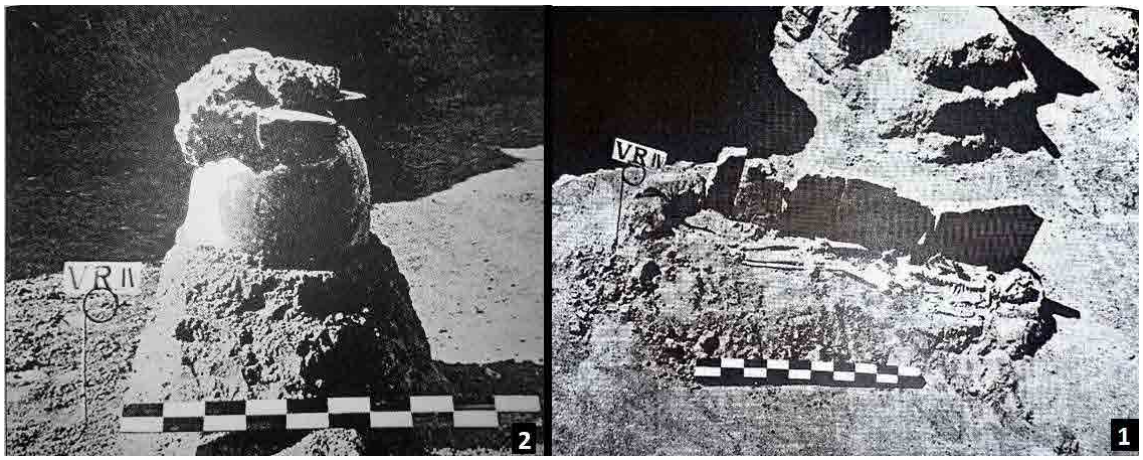



**Fig. 3: 1: Remains of a burial 2: A burial jar with a depiction of a Nestorian cross, from the city of Shush (Labaf Khaniki, 2021: 195-196, citing Ghirshman, 1950).**

Numismatic evidence from Susa constitutes one of the most critical categories of material data for evaluating urban continuity versus disruption across the Sasanian sequence. Contrary to Ghirshman's interpretive model—which postulated the permanent abandonment of Susa following the military campaign of Shapur II based on the destruction of Level IV—the coin hoards recovered from the site provide a far more complex and contradictory trajectory. In particular, two

major late Sasanian coin hoards discovered in 1932 and 1976 offer decisive chronological insights into monetary circulation.

In 1932, a ceramic vessel containing a hoard of 2,278 Sasanian silver drachms was uncovered near ground surface on the eastern slope of the Ville Royale mound. Because the latest coin in this assemblage dates to the third regnal year of Yazdegerd III, Roland de Mecquenem assigned a provisional deposition date of ca. 634–635 CE to the container. The composition of this hoard spans the reigns of Khosrow I through Yazdegerd III, with the overwhelming majority of the specimens—numbering 2,173 coins—issued under Khosrow II (De Mecquenem, 1943: 68).

The second assemblage, comprising 1,171 coins, was excavated in 1976 (Fig. 4). The earliest specimen in this hoard dates to the reign of Khosrow I Anushirvan (r. 531–579 CE), weighing approximately four grams, recovered from a sealed earthenware jar plugged with clay (Gyselen, 1977: 61–71). The coins in this second hoard represent a chronological range extending from 575 to 622 CE and were predominantly minted across active mint centers in southwestern Iran and Mesopotamia (Labaf-Khaniki, 2021: 172).



**Fig. 4: A hoard of 1,171 silver Drahms discovered in Shush (Chevalier, 2001: 89).**

The coins recovered during the 1931–1932 excavations originated from three distinct mints (Unvala, 1934: 239–244), whereas the 1,171 specimens unearthed in 1976 were struck across 31 different mints (Gyselen, 1977: 64; Kervran, 1985: 91–93). In marked contrast to the Seleucid and Parthian periods, there is no conclusive numismatic evidence confirming the active operation of an imperial Sasanian mint within Susa itself (Boucharlat, 1985: 78). The mint abbreviation “AI” or “AIRAN” appears prominently on many of these coins; Sellwood attributed this signature to Ērān-Xwarrah-Šābuhr, positing it as an honorific name for Susa, which he argued functioned as an active mint during the Sasanian period (Sellwood, 1985: 42). However, Potts, Gyselen, and Gasche have disputed this identification, contending that even if the monogram “AI” represents

Ērān-Xwarrah-Šābuhr, it cannot be conflated with Susa, as the site in question corresponds unequivocally to Eyvan-e Karkheh (Potts, 1999: 428; Gyselen & Gasche, 1994: 26–29).

Beyond numismatic assemblages, Sasanian clay sealings (bullae) recovered from excavations at Susa constitute indispensable sphragistic evidence for reconstructing the city's administrative apparatus and socioreligious dynamics. A corpus of 33 Sasanian bullae, discovered during soundings by Jacques de Morgan, Roland de Mecquenem, and Roman Ghirshman, is currently preserved in the Bibliothèque nationale de France (Gignoux, 1971: 535–542). Unlike the fragmentary architectural record from certain levels, this sphragistic repertoire provides critical insight into the institutional standing of Susa within the broader Sasanian imperial bureaucracy.

Epigraphic and iconographic analysis of these sealings confirms that Susa functioned as an active node within the imperial administrative network. The seal legends record not only Susa itself but also other regional centers with which it maintained direct administrative and economic exchanges, including Rēv-Ardašīr and Hāmān-Ardašīr—both foundation cities dating to the reign of Ardashir I (Gignoux, 1971: 540–541; Miri, 2016: 167). These administrative linkages demonstrate that Susa was fully integrated into the regional network of newly established Sasanian foundations rather than being marginalized from state infrastructure.

The analytical value of the Susa bullae extends beyond administrative toponymy; the official and clerical titles inscribed on them elucidate the city's institutional and religious landscape. Titles such as mlkly (accountant or archivist), mgw (magus), and mgwpty (mōbed or chief magus) directly attest to

the active presence of imperial bureaucratic offices and official Zoroastrian hierarchies in Susa (Potts, 1999: 428). The recurrence of these titles confirms that, despite the expansion of a sizable Christian community, Susa remained subject to the regulatory oversight and governance of formal Zoroastrian and administrative authorities.

When synthesized with the material markers of Christianity—including the silver pectoral cross and cross emblems stamped or incised on funerary vessels—the sphragistic data delineate a multi-confessional urban environment characterized by the coexistence of Zoroastrian and Christian populations. Such confessional diversity is consistent with a major urban center possessing a Hellenistic heritage and enduring regional trade connections. Nevertheless, the dominance of Zoroastrian administrative designations across the bullae confirms that institutional authority remained firmly vested in formal state institutions, leaving the Christian population, while demographically prominent, within a politically subordinate framework.

Ceramic assemblages and portable material culture (Fig. 5) provide further diagnostic markers for evaluating economic capacity, production technologies, and everyday living conditions during the Sasanian period. Analysis of the Sasanian ceramic corpus from Susa indicates that vessels were manufactured from refined clays employing specialized technological processes, including advanced wheel-throwing and mold-casting techniques. The morphological diversity—spanning utilitarian wares to fine ceremonial vessels—alongside floral, zoomorphic, and geometric decorative motifs demonstrate the unbroken continuity of craft traditions and the vitality of local

ceramic workshops (Chevalier, 2001: 125; Mohammadifar, 2015: 72). Consequently, this material record demonstrates that Susa did not merely consume regional finished goods but maintained a productive and active role in ceramic manufacturing and intra-regional distribution networks throughout the Sasanian era.




**Fig. 5: 1- Turquoise-glazed ceramic jug. 2- Brown-green glazed ceramic jar, dating to the Sasanian period (Chevalier, 2001: 125).**

Alongside the ceramic evidence, the recovery of luxury artifacts—including silver vessels, quartz bowls mounted on openwork gold bases, and a marble bust depicting a bearded male—points to the enduring presence of affluent elite strata within Susa (Overlaet, 1993: 227–228; Harper, 1978: 85; Carter, 1978: 171; Martinez-Sève, 1996: 171–180). Such prestige items typically characterize vibrant urban centers endowed with significant capital accumulation and integrated into interregional exchange networks; their presence at Susa is fundamentally irreconcilable with the hypothesis of terminal urban desolation in the fourth century CE. These material indicators demonstrate that even during intervals of acute political rupture and military crisis, socio-economic groups possessing substantial resources continued to sustain an elite habitus within the settlement.

Another diagnostic category of material culture comprises equestrian harness equipment, including bronze and iron bits, cheekpieces, and muzzles, recovered alongside equine skeletal remains from Level IV of the Ville Royale. Morphologically and stylistically, these equestrian fittings display close affinities with the harness equipment represented on Sasanian rock reliefs and toreutic silver vessels, objects conventionally associated with the upper aristocracy and the administrative or military echelon (Harper, 1978: 81). The recovery of such specialized paraphernalia confirms that Susa retained strategic and social significance as an active base for nobility and imperial functionaries during the Sasanian period.

Within this portable material horizon, the glassware assemblage (Figure 6) holds particular interpretive significance. The substantial volume of glass vessels unearthed at Susa has led numerous researchers to identify the city as a primary regional center for glass manufacture in the Sasanian period (Mohammadifar, 2015: 72). The technological sophistication, typological variety, and spatial prevalence of these vessels attest to the operation of specialized ateliers and the advanced pyrotechnological mastery of local artisans. High-temperature vitreous production—requiring steady access to specific raw materials, complex pyrotechnology, and an expansive commercial distribution network—provides compelling material evidence for the uninterrupted endurance of urban industrial infrastructure and market vibrancy at Susa across this sequence.




**Fig. 6: 1- Small translucent glass bottle. 2- Translucent glass tripod vessel from the Sasanian period (Chevalier, 2001: 90).**

In synthesis, the material corpus—encompassing ceramic assemblages, prestige artifacts, and evidence of industrial production—portrays Susa as an urban center that, despite recurrent political and military crises, maintained robust economic vitality, continued to support an affluent elite habitus, and sustained consistent productive output. When corroborated by numismatic and sphragistic data, these findings indicate that the city's Sasanian-era trajectory should not be misconstrued as a definitive urban collapse. Rather, this period reflects a gradual attenuation of Susa's regional primacy, directly correlated with the emergence of newly established imperial foundations and the implementation of overarching Sasanian state-building initiatives.

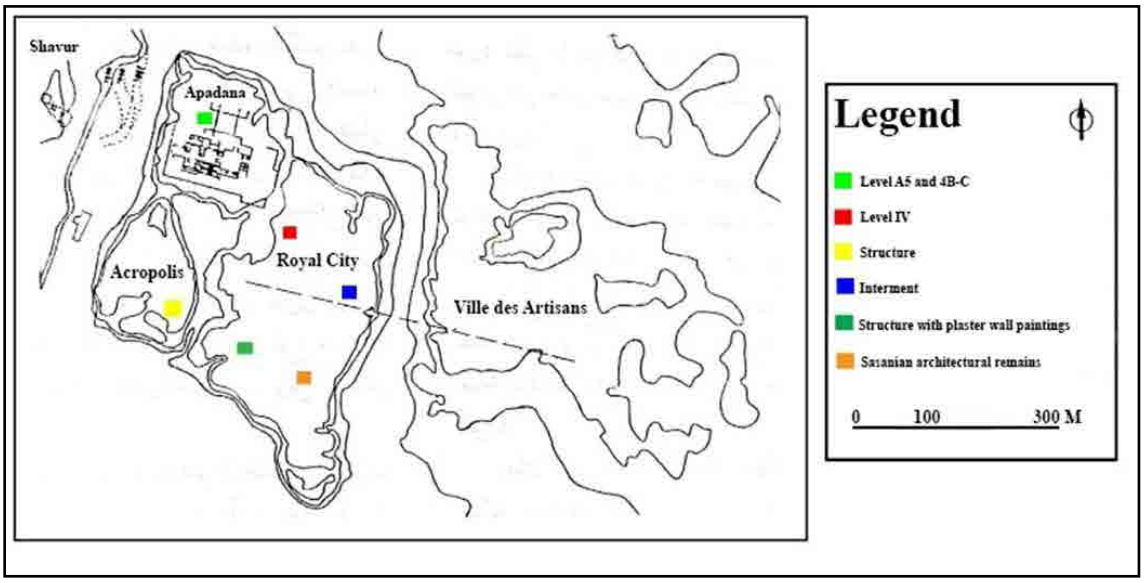
### 2-3. Evaluation of the Archaeological Evidence

Archaeological inquiry provides an empirical framework for the critical assessment of historiographical narratives, enabling a nuanced reconstruction of urban morphology and transformative processes. The distribution of Sasanian material remains across the Susa site—specifically the Ville Royale, the Acropolis, and the Eastern Apadana—is illustrated in Map 2, facilitating a stratigraphically grounded spatial analysis of the settlement's urban evolution.

The concentration of Sasanian Level IV deposits (indicated in red) within the Ville Royale perimeter confirms that this sector functioned as the primary locus of occupation during the Sasanian period, distinguishing it from the Acropolis or the Apadana. The presence of intramural burials (indicated in blue), embedded directly within the urban fabric of the Ville Royale and juxtaposed with architectural units, signifies an emergency reappropriation of civic space and underscores a profound disruption of the established urban order.

The prominent structure containing plaster wall paintings (indicated in dark green) is located in the southern sector of the Ville Royale, situated contiguously to the primary thoroughfare connecting the mounds. Given its spatially privileged and central location, this edifice likely fulfilled a function exceeding that of a standard residential unit.

The limited distribution of Levels 5A and 4B–C in the Eastern Apadana (indicated in light green), coupled with the relative paucity of Sasanian material culture in this sector, suggests a definitive spatial shift of the urban focus from the Apadana to the Ville Royale during the Sasanian era. Furthermore, Sasanian architectural remains (indicated in orange) documented along the southern fringes of the site indicate a restricted yet contiguous horizontal expansion in this direction. Conversely, the absence of dense Sasanian occupation within the Ville des Artisans (Artisans' City) suggests either a functional reconfiguration of this sector or a substantial decline in its prominence throughout the period.




**Map 2: Location of artifacts from the Sasanian period discovered during archaeological excavations, plotted on the map of Shush drawn by Keller Hardy Guilbert, with modifications made by the authors (Hardy Guilbert, 2013: 262).**

The material record from Level IV of the Ville Royale at Susa—most notably extensive structural destruction alongside emergency intramural burials within domestic units—attests to an acute rupture in civic life, an episode that Ghirshman attributed directly to the punitive campaign of Shapur II. Nevertheless, numismatic evidence substantially challenges this catastrophic model; the coin hoards recovered from Susa include issues dating to late Sasanian sovereigns, from Khosrow I and Khosrow II through Yazdegerd III, thereby confirming the

persistence of monetized transactions and economic vitality well into the twilight of the Sasanian state.

Furthermore, other archaeological datasets remain irreconcilable with the hypothesis of total urban abandonment in the fourth century CE. The assemblage of Sasanian clay sealings (bullae) preserving administrative and clerical titles—specifically identifying imperial bureaucrats and Zoroastrian priests (magi)—attests to an unbroken administrative apparatus and the enduring institutional footprint of the Sasanian state within Susa. In addition, the recovery of refined ceramic wares and prestige objects, such as silver plate, an openwork gold-mounted quartz bowl, and a marble bust of an elite individual, indicates that Susa continued to support affluent strata integrated into interregional socioeconomic networks. Diagnostic equestrian fittings and pyrotechnological evidence for specialized vitreous production further underscore both the maintenance of elite military culture and the continuity of regional manufacturing traditions. Concurrently, the juxtaposition of Christian symbols with Zoroastrian administrative sphragistics illustrates persistent confessional pluralism and civic complexity.

Synthesized as a whole, these convergent lines of evidence demonstrate that the destruction horizon documented in Level IV reflects an acute, localized crisis rather than the definitive terminus of Sasanian Susa. Multifaceted archaeological data, anchored particularly by numismatic hoards and administrative sealings, confirm the sustained continuation of settlement, bureaucratic governance, and socioeconomic vitality until the final decades of the Sasanian era.

**3. Discussion**

The integrated examination of textual sources and archaeological datasets demonstrates that the trajectory of Susa during the Sasanian era cannot be subsumed under a simplistic paradigm of abrupt cataclysm followed by terminal abandonment. Instead, the settlement traversed an intricate developmental arc marked by institutional resilience, structural recalibration, and phases of localized crisis. Historiographical and hagiographical narratives—especially those focused on the reign of Shapur II—heavily accent widespread ruin and religious repression, framing the monarch's intervention in terms of punitive annihilation. However, these accounts reflect distinct confessional agendas, martyrological topoi, and rhetorical conventions that inherently exaggerate the finality of imperial retribution. This historiographical tendency underscores the methodological imperative of systematic source criticism (Quellenkritik) and the sustained corroboration of literary testimony against independent material evidence.

While the stratigraphic record of Level IV in the Ville Royale unambiguously attests to an acute fourth-century CE disturbance horizon, projecting this spatially circumscribed phenomenon across the entirety of Susa constitutes an unwarranted interpretive leap, particularly given that early excavation campaigns frequently stripped upper layers without adequate stratigraphic controls. In sharp contrast to assumptions of total depopulation, the numismatic record provides compelling evidence of systemic continuity. The coin hoards recovered in 1931–1932 and 1976, spanning from the reign of Khosrow I through Yazdegerd III, establish that Susa remained firmly

embedded within the imperial monetary economy until the very close of the Sasanian period. Even setting aside the debate over an active mint at Susa itself, the high density of currency and the wide spectrum of represented mint marks reflect sustained commercial integration and liquidity, demonstrating robust economic function long after the fourth-century crisis.

At a macro-historical scale, the gradual recalibration of Susa's regional standing must be contextualized within the broader spatial planning of the Sasanian court and the administrative reordering of Khuzistan. The establishment of planned imperial centers such as Weh-Andiyōk-Šābuhr (Gundeshapur), Ērān-Xwarrah-Šābuhr, and Ērān-šahr-Šābuhr (Eyvān-e Karkheh) progressively decentralized administrative and fiscal authority away from older regional nodes. Through this spatial restructuring, Susa relinquished its ancient regional hegemony; nonetheless, this functional shift represented an institutional reconfiguration within the imperial hierarchy rather than the complete extinction of its urban and socioeconomic life.

**4. Conclusion**

At the dawn of the Sasanian period, Susa functioned as an entrenched stronghold aligned with the Arsacid dynasty. Consequently, in the wake of Ardashir I's decisive victory over Artabanus IV, the city incurred deep imperial suspicion and severe retribution from the nascent Sasanian state. Under Shapur I, however, Susa underwent partial restoration to mitigate the consequences of its initial subjugation. The deportation and resettlement of Antiochene artisans across Khuzistan—specifically documented in centers such as Susa and Shushtar by both classical and Syriac chronicles—reflect deliberate royal measures to harness specialized labor and stimulate regional productivity. These initiatives demonstrate that Susa retained an active, functional role within the administrative and economic infrastructure of the third-century Sasanian Empire.

Although the settlement experienced a profound rupture during the fourth century CE—stratigraphically attested in Level IV of the Ville Royale by pervasive structural collapse and emergency intramural interments typically associated with the punitive campaign of Shapur II—numismatic datasets firmly substantiate the preservation of urban life, commercial circulation, and administrative oversight well into the late Sasanian era. A critical reassessment of the historiographical corpus reveals that narratives proclaiming the total annihilation of the city were shaped by rhetorical topoi and confessional framing, diverging markedly from documented material realities. Accordingly, the recalibration of Susa's status is best understood as a protracted structural transformation impelled by imperial centralization, the development of newly founded royal foundations, and the geographic redistribution of regional administrative nodes. While Susa forfeited its ancient political preeminence, it nonetheless persevered as an active civic, ecclesiastical, and economic center until the eve of the Islamic conquest.

In conclusion, this inquiry demonstrates the imperative for a rigorous, critical reinterpretation of Susa's archaeological record and warns against broad generalizations derived from localized excavation trenches. The methodological shortcomings of early field campaigns and the widespread loss of late stratigraphic horizons make fresh, modern stratigraphic excavations indispensable for

achieving a comprehensive understanding of Susa's urban trajectory and functional significance within the Sasanian imperial system.

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**Authors' Contributions**

The authors confirm adherence to standard ethical guidelines for academic publishing. This article is derived from the master's thesis of the first author, who served as the primary researcher and drafted the manuscript. The research design, data analysis, and manuscript preparation were carried out under the supervision of the second author (thesis supervisor) and the co-direction of the third author (thesis advisor), both of whom contributed substantially to the execution of the study and the critical revision of the final paper.

**Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the authorship and publication of this article.

**Endnotes**

1. In 313 CE, Roman Emperors Constantine and Licinius issued the Edict of Milan, which granted religious tolerance and restored confiscated property to Christians throughout the empire. Constantine's subsequent patronage of Christianity and personal identification as a protector of Christians established an ideological tension with the Sasanian state regarding the loyalties of Persian Christian subjects.
2. Jean-Maurice Fiey (1914–1995) was a French priest and ecclesiastical historian.
3. Libanius, Epistulae 331 (To Aristaenetus). This correspondence confirms that negotiations between the Roman envoy Spectatus and Shapur II were convened directly at Susa.
4. For more details, see Ghasemipour 2021: 97–122.

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# مـطالعات باسـتان‌شـنـاسی

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# بررسی تطبیقی جایگاه سیاسی شهر شوش در دورهٔ ساسانی (اوج و افول) براساس منابع مکتوب و شواهد باستان‌شناسی


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**چکیده**

شهر شوش به‌عنوان یکی از کهن‌ترین مراکز شهری ایران، در دورهٔ ساسانی با فراز و فرودهای سیاسی، اقتصادی و اجتماعی قابل‌توجهی روبه‌رو بوده است. اگرچه در پژوهش‌های تاریخی، حملهٔ شاپور دوم به شوش اغلب به‌عنوان نقطهٔ پایان حیات این شهر تلقی شده، داده‌های باستان‌شناسی تصویر پیچیده‌تر و پویاتری از وضعیت شوش در این دوره ارائه می‌دهند. پژوهش حاضر باهدف بررسی عوامل اوج و افول شهر شوش در دورهٔ ساسانی و تحلیل منابع نوشتاری و مدارک باستان‌شناسی انجام شده است. پرسش اصلی این پژوهش آن است که، چه عواملی موجب رونق و سپس کاهش جایگاه شوش در دورهٔ ساسانی شده‌اند و شواهد مادی چگونه این تحولات را بازتاب می‌دهند. فرضیهٔ پژوهش بر این استوار است که، رونق نسبی شوش در سده‌های نخست ساسانی، به‌ویژه در دورهٔ شاپور اول، در پی انتقال صنعتگران انطاکیه و بازسازی‌های شهری رخ‌داده است و افول تدریجی آن نَه نتیجهٔ یک تخریب ناگهانی، بلکه حاصل سیاست تمرکزگرایانهٔ دولت ساسانی، توسعهٔ شهرهای تازه‌تأسیس نظیر گندی‌شاپور و ایران‌خورهٔ شاپور، تغییرات جمعیتی و محدودیت‌های سیاسی-مذهبی بوده است. روش پژوهش توصیفی-تحلیلی و مقایسه‌ای با رویکرد تاریخی است. داده‌ها برپایهٔ مدارک اسنادی صدر اسلام و تلفیق آن با بررسی یافته‌های حاصل از کاوش‌های باستان‌شناسی شوش، شامل شواهد معماری، گنجینه‌های سکه، گل‌مهرها، سفال‌ها، نقاشی‌های دیواری، آثار فلزی و شیشه‌ای تحلیل شده‌اند. نتایج پژوهش نشان می‌دهد که هرچند شوش در قرن چهارم میلادی با بحرانی جدی مواجه شد، شواهد باستان‌شناسی از تداوم سکونت، فعالیت اقتصادی و حیات شهری این شهر تا اواخر دورهٔ ساسانی حکایت دارند و افول شوش را باید فرآیندی تدریجی و ساختاری نَه فروپاشی ناگهانی دانست.



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