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Evolution of Spatial Organization in Historic Shushtar (From the Advent of Islam to the Pre-Safavid Era)*

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Abstract

Problem statement: The historic city of Shushtar was shaped by water before the Islamic era, with the river serving as a natural foundation that supported the formation of religious, economic, political, and ecological values alongside human needs and activities. With the advent of Islam and the influence of religious traditions, however, the city transformed its urban spatial organization. This study explores how the natural element of water and the river, in combination with built structures and human activities such as agriculture and water-related practices, together with historical processes, influenced the Spatial Organization of the city.

Research objective: This study aims to investigate the factors and components that defined the Spatial Organization of the city from the advent of Islam to the pre-Safavid era, to achieve a clearer understanding of its structure and internal order.

Research method: This study applies a historical–interpretive approach, using documents, records, and historical evidence to trace the events and conditions that shaped Shushtar from the Islamic era to the pre-Safavid period. Through the narration and interpretation of history, it reconstructs the Spatial Organization of the city during this phase. To reinforce this analysis, the research also draws on interviews with heritage custodians, field observations, and validation measures.

Conclusion: The study demonstrates that water continued to act as a limiting, shaping, and reinforcing factor in the city's urban spatial organization. In contrast to the pre-Islamic period, when religious values and beliefs contributed to fragmentation in the residential quarters, the Islamic era saw the congregational mosque, although initially separated from the residential area, gradually foster integration. Over time, not only the residential quarter but also the city's economic center aligned with the religious core. Owing to the city's governability, the political–administrative order, and the primacy of religious values, Shushtar, shaped by its natural setting, developed needs and ecological practices distinct from those of the pre-Islamic era.

Keywords: *Shushtar, Historic city, Islamic period, Spatial organization, Transformation process.*

Introduction

A city represents an appropriated domain of space where the elements of human life, both material and spiritual, take shape. At first, the city did not exist; gradually, as human living needs were defined, elements emerged that, through interaction, settled within the environment and established

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a domain linked to "mind" and "activity," which came to be known as the city (Mansouri, 2007, 50). The concept of Spatial Organization corresponds to "general systems theory" and, with relatively similar identifiers, provides a framework for understanding the city as a meaningful "whole" (Sarfraz & Teimoury, 2013, 12). According to travelers' observations, the historic city of Shushtar derived its coherence from the spatial organization of its elements and components, which were interconnected through interaction with the river. This coherence was shaped by governmental policies, the regional economy inherited from the pre-Islamic era, and the integration of religious and ritual values during the Islamic period, all of which influenced the city's development.

The present paper builds upon the earlier study entitled "An exploration of the pre-Islamic spatial organization evolution within the historic city of Shushtar" (Afsharbagheri et al., 2025). It adopts the same framework and maintains consistency in title and research components. Its main contribution lies in emphasizing urban spatial organization, analyzed through the interpretation of historical texts, comparison of historical representations, and examination of urban grain. The study also responds to the critique of Shushtar's Spatial Organization advanced by Rahimiyeh & Rabubi (1977). The central inquiry of this research concerns the evolution of the Spatial Organization of the historic city of Shushtar, from the advent of Islam to the pre-Safavid era. It also examines how cohesion among urban elements and components, through a rational process of urban development, secured their functions and contributed to a systematic framework for the city, free from disorder and disarray. In this framework, the factors investigated are: water and the river as natural elements; urban human components as man-made elements; agriculture and water-related practices as human activities; and history as the temporal dimension.

Research MethodologyThis study adopts a historical-interpretive approach to elucidate the fundamental principles of the spatial organization of the historic city of Shushtar. The methodology involves the systematic classification and analysis of data derived from written historical documents, travelogues, and archival images. Given the extensive and scattered nature of historical accounts, the research scope is delimited to the period spanning from the 2nd century AH (8th century CE) to the pre-Safavid era. This timeframe allows for a focused categorization of data based on their significance and impact across different epochs. Furthermore, all spatial visualizations and maps presented in this study were generated and processed using ArcGIS Pro software.[1]

Research Background

Relevant studies that examined the city from a systematic perspective include the work of Abarghouei Fard, Mansouri (2021). Their research investigated the components of the Spatial Organization of the Iranian city after Islam. In this study, spatial organization is defined as an intellectual and immaterial construct that represents the governing system over the city's urban form and physical fabric. Together, these components constitute a purposeful whole, within which each element assumes a distinct role in shaping and sustaining social life in the urban context. Al-Salim (2021) examined the formation of the Spatial Organization of religious cities based on the sacred center. His work explains how patterns of behavioral and residential activities evolved around the city's holy core. The book "The spatial system of Iranian City in the Islamic Period" (Mansouri et al., 2020) reviews multiple perspectives on Iranian cities. It identifies the spatial organization of cities such as Qazvin, Tabriz, Bushehr, Gorgan, and Yazd, framing it around four fundamental elements: territory, structure, constituent units, and center. Mansouri & Hemmati (2021) analyzed interpretations by Persian-language scholars regarding the concept of urban spatial organization. Mansouri & Mohammadzadeh (2018), in his study "The changes of Tabriz spatial organization from early Islamic era to Gajar era", emphasized how geological constraints in northwestern Iran acted as formative forces in the city's development, while

earthquakes and invasions from neighboring states served as destructive factors throughout its history. Mansouri & Dizani (2016), in the book "Evolution of the spatial system in the city of Qazvin (4th-19th A.D.)", studied the historical transformations of Qazvin's urban landscape and its shifts across different historical periods, interpreting them through the categories of center, structure, neighborhoods, and territorial domain. The article "Spatial Organization in Urban Design" by Zekavat (2012) discusses the concepts of structure and organization. It argues that cities manifest their own spatial order and distinctive arrangements, derived from natural conditions and socio-economic dynamics.

Definitions and Theoretical Framework

The city is understood as a spatial construct and the outcome of human sedentarization, shaped by the evolution of lifestyles and cognitive frameworks. Conceptualizing community as a holistic entity of interacting individuals directly influences its spatial expression, the city. From this perspective, the city emerges as an integrated whole, composed of purposeful components whose interplay defines collective life (Pourahmad & Pourahmad, 2014). To grasp this view, the city must be regarded as an autonomous entity, functioning as a conceptual order established among its diverse elements. The collective mindset of inhabitants, expressed through consensus on the arrangement of the city's components, plays a crucial role in shaping its spatial organization (Mansouri et al., 2020, 49).

During the Islamic period, the Spatial Organization consisted of four components: territory, centrality, structure, and sub-wholes (Mansouri, 2007, 2013, 2020). These components evolved under the combined influence of natural elements, human constructions, surviving artificial features, human agency expressed through activities, and the passage of time.

The Spatial Organization of Shushtar before the Islamic Era

The Spatial Organization of Iranian cities before and after Islam displayed two distinct characteristics. Unlike Islamic-period architecture in Iran, which reflected both continuity and refinement of pre-Islamic practices, the urban form of Iranian cities before and after Islam followed entirely separate trajectories. The basis of this divergence lies in their differing spatial organizations (Mansouri, 2007, 51). Accordingly, the spatial organization of the historic city of Shushtar, based on four fundamental pillars of territory, centrality, structure, and sub-wholes, is examined. This organization has been shaped under the influence of natural elements, human constructions, the characteristics of artificial components, human activities, and the passage of time.

The Karun River, upon reaching the northern edge of historic Shushtar, divides into two branches: Gargar and Mahparian. The eastern branch is known as the Gargar Canal, while the western branch is called the Mahparian (Shotiet branch). These two channels converge again at Qir Dam (Enayatollah et al., 1971, 191). Prior to the construction of the Gargar Canal, the Raghat Canal had been excavated on the western side of the city; together with its southern extension, it gave Shushtar the character of an island settlement (Rawlinson, 1836/1983, 97). The moat along the defensive wall on the western edge further reinforced this insular condition. In this way, water and the river system defined and delimited the city's territory (Afsharbagheri et al., 2025, 39).

Through the construction of the water-conveyance canals of the Kahandezh (Salasal Castle), laid out along the Shoteit branch to ensure urban security and regulate the hydraulic network, the city's spatial structure began to take shape. The residential area was developed at a distance from the governmental citadel, positioned near the Gargar Canal. In this way, Salasal Castle (Kahandezh), together with parts of the Abdullah Banu, Maqam Abbas, Sadat, and Dokan Shams neighborhoods, formed the nucleus of the city.

The city was divided into two main sections: the governmental citadel and the residential

area, separated by defensive walls that clearly distinguished the governmental citadel[2] from the inhabited sector (ibid., 40). Over time, neighborhoods expanded into the areas between the river and the Raghat canals, stretching from the northern Shotiet branch to near the Raghat Canal, and from the western section of the Gargar Canal to the eastern section of the Dariun Canal. Both the governmental core and the residential quarter were strongly shaped by the presence of the river.

With urban expansion during the Sasanian period, numerous bridges, dams, canals, and water-supply systems were constructed (Moghaddam, 2014, 37). Moreover, with the construction of the Shadorvan bridge-dam on the Shotiet branch, the Lashkar bridge-dam on the Raghat Canal, the city gates during this period, and the extension of internal access routes toward these gates, together with the water supply network, the urban structure was formed (Afsharbagheri et al., 2025).The spatial organization of Shushtar before the Islamic era consisted of two distinct zones: the governmental area and the residential sector. Each was positioned according to the relative importance of its inhabitants and custodians. Within the city's internal order, their roles were clearly defined in the collective consciousness of society and preserved in the collective spirit of the city (Fig. 1).

The Advent of Islam and Transformations in the Spatial Organization of Historic Shushtar in the 2nd c. A.H. (~8th c. CE)

The disintegration of the Sassanian Empire, accompanied by notable alterations in social structures and the gradual transition of religious practices, engendered profound transformations within the Iranian social system. Logically, one might anticipate that such shifts would manifest in the structural and morphological configuration of Iranian cities. However, according to various sources, the components in question remained within the urban form of Iranian cities in the Islamic period, a fact that indicates a different state of affairs (Yousefi Far, 2007, 22). Although scholars such as Stern argue that the morphology of urban life in the Islamic era largely continued pre-Islamic structures, they contend that Islam and the Muslim conquests did not dismantle the underlying framework of civic life. Instead, the conquered cities experienced modifications primarily in their outward form and appearance (Khaledian et al., 2017, 39). On this basis, the 2nd century A.H. is identified as the transitional period from the Sasanian to the Islamic era, during which the Spatial Organization of Shushtar is analyzed through the framework of its four structural pillars.

- **Territory**

During the Arab Muslim incursions, unlike many other Iranian cities that offered little resistance and quickly surrendered, the conquest of Shushtar lasted for two years. This resilience was largely due to the city's geographical and strategic position, reinforced by the valor of Hormozan in resisting Muslim advances (Bal'ami, 1974, 491). Historical sources highlight the restoration of the defensive walls, undertaken before the arrival of the Muslims in Shushtar.

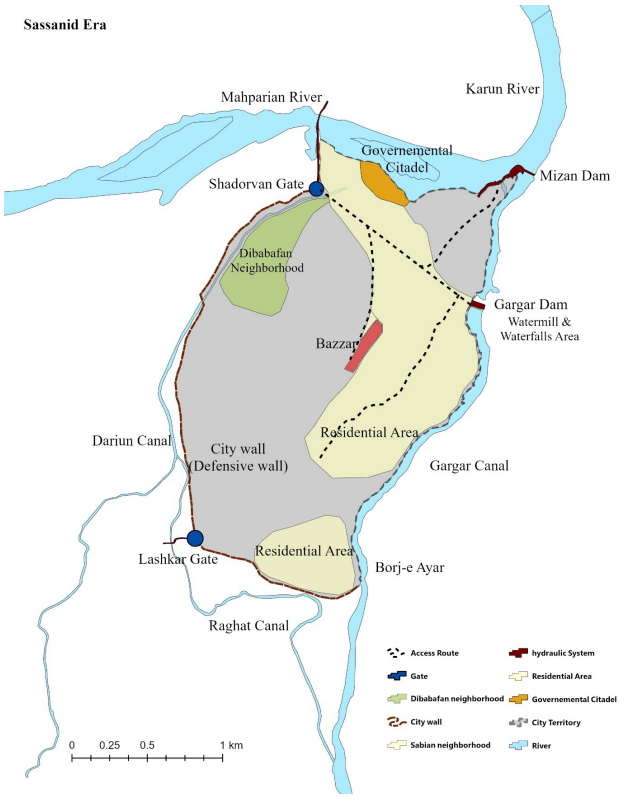

Fig. 1. The Spatial Organization of Shushtar during the Sasanian period. Source: Afsharibaqeri et al., 2025, 40.

Abu Hanifa al-Dinawari (2004, 164), in "al-Akhbar al-Tiwal"[3], recounts: "Hormozan reached the city of Shushtar, encamped there, repaired its fortifications, and, to avoid hardship in the event of a siege, stockpiled provisions…". Baladhuri (1985, 339) referring to Hormozan, describes the city and its citadel: "Hormozan took refuge in Shushtar, which was the principal city and the royal center, and possessed a formidable fortification." Hormozan established himself near the Shadorvan Bridge, within a citadel that seemed impregnable, protected on one side by the river and on the other by a moat.

Layard, discussing the natural and artificial fortifications of the city, writes: "The city is enclosed on the west by the river and on the other side by a stone wall, which in some places has collapsed". He further notes: "The city was encircled by the waters of the Gargar and the Karun River, while a narrow canal joined these two branches, thereby fashioning a natural line of defense around Shushtar. The ancient city wall, however, stood in decay" (Layard, 1887/1997, 71).

The two-year siege of Shushtar came to an end when one of the city's inhabitants[4] revealed a secret passage that allowed the Muslim forces to enter[5]. The fortifications were breached, and at the city gate (Sharafuddin, 2023, 196), during fierce clashes, al-Bara' ibn Malik was slain. In 20 A.H., he was buried on the battlefield before the governmental citadel. Although the exact date of the first structure erected over his tomb is uncertain, the writings of Ibn al-Athir and Ibn Khallikan[6] suggest that by their time, the site had already assumed the form of a domed shrine and place of visitation.

With the erection of city fortifications during the Sasanian period, later restored by Hormozan, the western and southwestern boundaries of Shushtar were defined by the defensive wall, while to the north and east, the city was bounded by the Karun River (Mahparian branch) and the Gargar Canal. This territorial edge marked the limit of Shushtar's urban space, where the interplay of natural and man-made fortifications functioned both as a connective corridor and as a threshold between the inner fabric of the city and the surrounding landscape.

- **Centrality**

The governmental sector, represented by Salasal Castle, functioned as the principal urban landmark, established to regulate and supervise the distribution of water and the operation of hydraulic structures. At the same time, it served as a socio-political complex that played a decisive role in shaping the city's form and spatial organization. During the Sasanian period, the residential nucleus developed along the Gargar Canal, while the governmental area was located beside the Mahparian branch. With the advent of the Islamic era in the 3rd century A.H., however, urban centrality shifted, reflecting new conceptions of civic identity, a transformation that will be elaborated in the following discussion.

- **Constituent units**

sub-wholes In the Umayyad era, political dealings between Al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf[7] and his local opponents in Shushtar culminated in the dismantling of the Shadorvan bridge-dam, which had long served as the city's principal point of entry. As recorded in Tazkerat-e Shushtar: "Hajjaj accepted their plea for pardon and forgave their fault8, yet ordered the bridge to be destroyed so that the inhabitants would revert to crossing by boat, and that no outsider might suddenly gain access to the province" (Jazayeri Shushtari, 2009, 85). From that moment, the Shadorvan bridge ceased to function as an urban threshold and was deliberately erased from the city's spatial order.

With Shushtar's ascendancy in the Sasanian era, the neighboring town of Dastva appears to have gradually declined, prompting its inhabitants to resettle in Shushtar. Early Islamic geographers such as Ibn Khordadbeh (211–300 A.H.) and Qudama ibn Ja'far (275–337 A.H.) make no reference to Dastva after the Muslim conquest, suggesting its disappearance from the urban record. Located beside the Gargar and along a flood-prone river corridor, the town was likely exposed to recurring natural hazards, most notably floods that forced its population to abandon the lower-lying terrain

and relocate to the more elevated and secure fabric of Shushtar. Another possibility is that the town sustained extensive damage during the Muslim campaigns, which accelerated the process of relocation and reinforced Shushtar's dominance as the primary urban center of the region.

An examination of the city's quarters reveals Dastva as a neighborhood within Shushtar, which may corroborate this claim[9]. In "History of Shushtar", Sharaf al-Din (Sharafuddin, 2023, 151) refers to the Dasht-e Khoruj quarter[10], noting that a cemetery was located there and dating it to the early 2nd century A.H. He writes: "Dasht-e Khoruj has been the burial place of many of Shushtar's notables and dignitaries. Today, 17 Shahrivar Square in Shushtar has been built over this cemetery" (Figs. 2 & 3).

Kashaf Dezfuli (Kashef Dezfuli, 2020, 108-111), in "Qasim al-Jabbarin", mentions a tomb attributed to Muḥammad Ibn-Siwār[11], noting that it stood near the present-day Hossein Mosque.burial place of Muḥammad Ibn-Siwār can be dated to the early 2nd century A.H. The killing of al-Bara' ibn Malik, the demolition of the Shadorvan bridge-dam by order of Hajjaj ibn Yusuf, the migration of Dastva's inhabitants to Shushtar and their settlement in the Dastva neighborhood, the Dasht-e Khoruj cemetery, and the burial of Muḥammad Ibn-Siwār are among the events and transformations that occurred in Shushtar in the 2nd century A.H. and reshaped the city's urban structure.

- **Structure**

The urban structure of Shushtar was defined by its gateways, tXhe residential quarters (constituent units), and the governmental sector (centrality). Acting as a connective framework, this structure was organized along east–west and north–south axes, creating a network of internal passages and communication routes that integrated the city's diverse functions (Figs. 2 & 3).

Transformations in the Spatial Organization of Historic Shushtar in the 3rd–4th c. A.H. (~9th–10th c. CE)

The advent of Islam in Iran introduced the mosque as a new architectural type within the urban landscape, an institution that extended beyond its

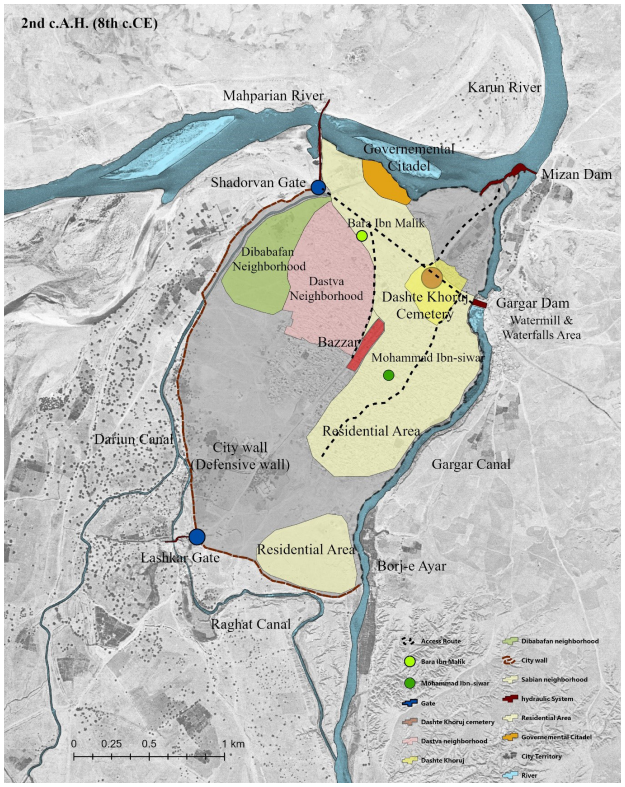

Fig. 2. The spatial organization of Shushtar in the 2nd century A.H., based on historical and archaeological studies. Source: Authors

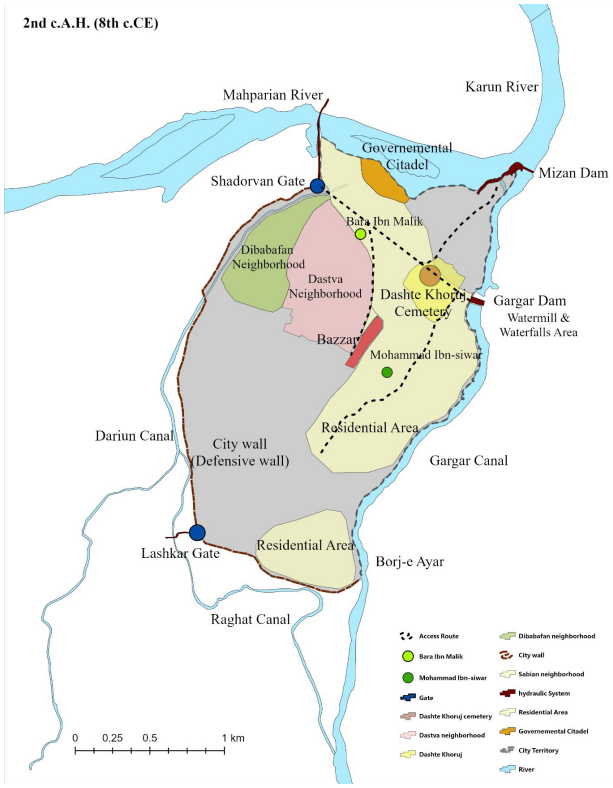

Fig. 3. The spatial organization of Shushtar in the 2nd century A.H. Source: Authors.

religious role to become a focal point of civic life. Over time, the Grand Mosque evolved into the religious–ritual nucleus of the city, around which spatial order and social interaction converged. Its integration with the surrounding fabric, however, was neither fixed nor uniform. The positioning and design of the mosque reflected shifting architectural traditions, principles of urban morphology, security concerns, and aesthetic ideals tied to the city's visual character. These dynamics produced varied and layered relationships between the mosque and the broader urban form of Shushtar (Soltanzadeh, 2016, 368). Among the earliest Islamic examples in Iran is the Grand Mosque of Shushtar. Muqaddasi (1877/1982, 611) (375–391 A.H.) records in "Ahsan al-Taqasim [Descriptio imperii moslemici]": "The Grand Mosque [is located in the Bazzazan Bazzar at the heart of the city], and near the gate there is also another market". Masoudi Nejad (2022, 91) considers the mosque's location in the southwestern sector of the urban fabric noteworthy, observing that "the Grand Mosque is situated within the overarching structure of the city; the site resembles more a musalla (open-air prayer ground) than a true congregational mosque".

Ahmadi Siahpoush et al. (2020, 144) interprets the urban expansion of this period as occurring in the southern sector, at some distance from the city's original core, and identifies the linkage of the Bazzar and the Grand Mosque to the Shadorvan Gate as the organizing factor behind the formation of a cluster of urban spaces around this ensemble.

The descriptions of Muqaddasi (1877/1982, 611), the interpretation of Masudi-Nejad, and the analysis of Ahmadi Siahpush warrant careful consideration. Based on the city's developmental trajectory up to the 3rd century A.H. (Figs. 4 & 5) and the likelihood that the Dastva precinct extended southward, it appears that the Grand Mosque was constructed near, but slightly apart from, this area. Accordingly, the Grand Mosque of Shushtar may be classified among mosques detached from the surrounding fabric yet positioned at a short remove from it, around which the residential sector and the bazaar developed in proximity.

The Grand Mosque, as the religious center, established the link between the residential sector and the external urban domain. According to al-Maqdisi, the city's bazaar expanded around it (ibid.). Alongside the two sectors of the governmental citadel and the residential quarter, a religious–devotional sector also took shape. The number of sanctuaries, sacred sites, and mosques in Shushtar increased significantly, to the point that several chroniclers attributed to the city the epithet Dar al-Muminin. Qazi Nurullah Shustari (1975), in his "Majalis al-muminin", and Jazayeri Shushtari (2009, 71), in his Tazkerat-e Shushtar, both attest to this transformation. One account praises it as "Dar al-Muminin Shushtar, a delightful and flourishing town", while another records that "within Dar al-Muminin Shushtar, mosques and charitable sanctuaries abound" (ibid., 89).

Al-Maqdisi describes Shushtar in rich detail: "Nowhere in this entire land is there a city more delightful, more steadfast, or of greater importance. A river encircles it, while palm groves and gardens embrace its boundaries. Within it dwell skilled weavers of cotton and silk in abundance. The city surpasses all others, gathering diverse guilds within itself and earning renown among the peoples of the world. It is said of this city: its orchards are laden with fine dates, pomegranates, grapes, and exquisite flowers. It is the paradise of Khuzestan. Its silks are carried to Egypt and Syria; its people live in contentment. From its fruits and other bounties that reached us, we were well pleased and delighted. Its markets are broad and level, and other qualities distinguish it still. Travelers come to it from the east and west. In the heat of summer, cool waters flow underground through Qantas, refreshing the inhabitants. Yet though its climate is harsh, its people possess refinement; only, knowledge there is somewhat scarce."

He further notes: "The canal encircled the city like a moat; a long bridge had been fashioned with boats extending from the side of "Gundeshapur"

(Jundishapur), and no other access was possible save by this way. On the opposite bank stood but a few structures. The Grand Mosque rose within the Bazzazan Bazzar at the heart of the town, while yet another marketplace unfolded at the city gate. At the head of the bridge lay a promenade where the Gazeran[12] gathered. Whoever desired to sail toward Askar was compelled to walk a farsang on foot before reaching the river crossing. Around the city lay prosperous villages, though they yielded little benefit."

Al-Maqdisi's account confirms both the preservation of Shushtar's original urban fabric and its subsequent expansion. The city's prosperity was sustained by its orchards and the export of fine silks, while the Shadorvan bridge-dam functioned as a principal gateway. The Grand Mosque, located in the Bazzazan Bazzar, further anchored the civic core. Subterranean qanats secured a steady water supply, and the river provided access to downstream towns such as Askar Mokram[13]. These elements can be drawn from his description.

In "Faeq al-Bayan"[14], a forgotten quarter within the Dastva district called Mahe-Nu[15] is mentioned, and Sharaf al-Din places this quarter near the Grand Mosque and the shrine of Seyyed Saleh (Sharafuddin, 2023, 92). This appears to confirm al-Maqdisi's statement that the mosque stood at the center of the city (Figs. 4 & 5).

Intra-Urban Development and the Spatial Organization of Historic Shushtar (11th–13th centuries CE)

Ibn al-Athir (1992) (1166–1233 CE) and Ibn Chaldūn (1964) (1332–1406 CE) record that in 1194 CE, Khuzestan, with Shushtar as its administrative center, was incorporated into the Abbasid domains under the caliph al-Nasir li-Din Allah. From that date until 1258 CE, when Shushtar fell to the Ilkhanids, its governors were appointed directly by the Abbasid caliphs. During this period, the caliphs al-Nasir li-Din Allah (r. 1180–1225 CE) and al-Mustansir bi-Allah (r. 1226–1242 CE) sought to revive Abbasid political prestige and restore the waning authority of the caliphate (Khal'atbari & Sharafi, 2010, 62).

After the collapse of the Abbasid Caliphate in the

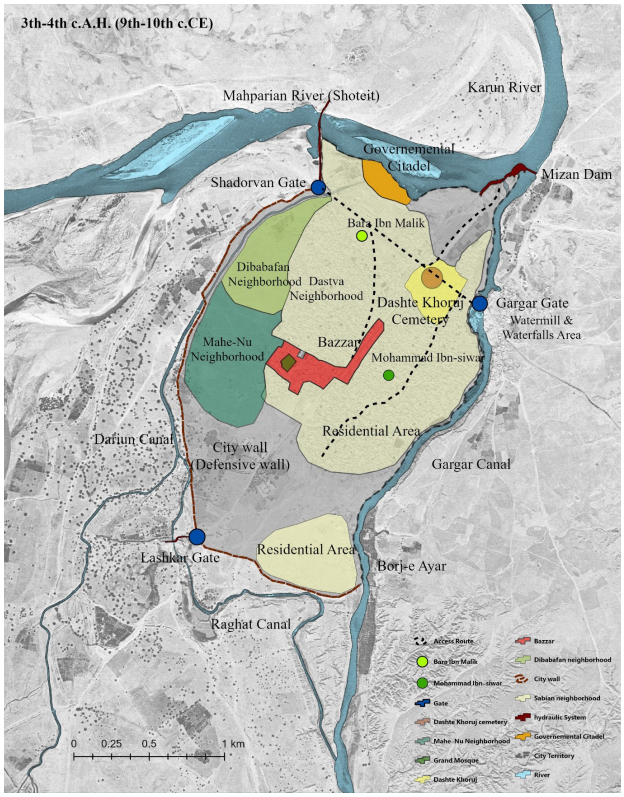

Fig. 4. Spatial Organization of Shushtar in the 3rd–4th c. A.H. (~9th–10th c. CE), based on historical and archaeological studies. Source: Authors.

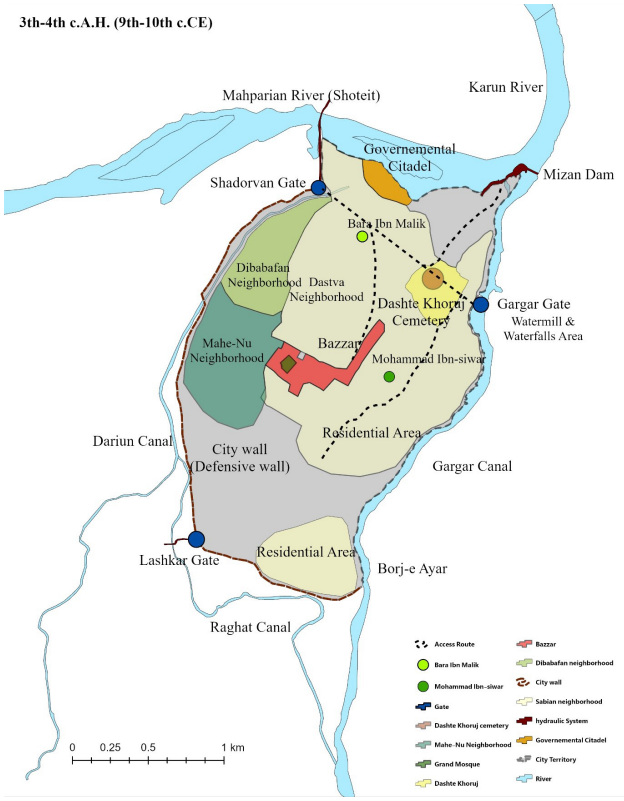

Fig. 5. Spatial Organization of Shushtar in the 3rd–4th c. A.H. (~9th–10th c. CE). Source: Authors.

7th century A.H. (13th century CE), and with it the dissolution of its religious and political centrality, the region experienced growing political instability and social unrest. Within this climate of uncertainty, currents influenced by Shi'ism and Sufism gained fertile ground, fostering the flourishing and dissemination of these doctrines. The Ilkhanids, upon embracing Islam and extending patronage to Twelver Shi'ism, further reinforced this shift; most notably, the conversion of Oljeitu[16] to Shi'ism played a decisive role in entrenching its presence and accelerating its spread across the region (Razpoush, 2021, 721).

The influence of Iranians at the Ilkhanid court led to the restoration of ruined cities. With Ghazan Khan's entry into the royal court and assumption of vizierial responsibilities, and later under the rule of Sultan Muhammad Khudabandeh (Oljeitu), both of whom had embraced Shi'ism, Shi'a influence grew in relation to the Sunnis. This development laid the groundwork for the formal recognition of Twelver Shi'ism during the reign of Shah Isma'il I of the Safavid dynasty and brought about transformations in Iran's cities, particularly those with a religious orientation (Mohammadmoradi & Jafarpour Naser, 2014, 92). During this era, Iranian cities experienced considerable prosperity (Razavi, 2009, 15). Cities such as Neyshabur, Rayy, Isfahan, and Shiraz were regarded as first-rank centers, while others, including Kerman, Hamadan, Amol, Gorgan, Qom, Ahvaz, Shushtar, Arjan, Panjhir, Fasa, and Hormoz, were considered second-rank in importance (Hamawi, 2001, 62, 261, 364, 641, 705-706, 731).

As part of the urban reconstruction initiatives undertaken during the Ilkhanid period, special attention was devoted to the boundaries and extents of cities, a principle from which Shushtar was not exempt (Noghrekar et al., 2022, 58–60). During this epoch, the city's spatial configuration was articulated by axes culminating at the perimeter gates. The Bazaar, served as the dominant linear spine, around which diverse neighborhoods and public amenities, most notably caravanserais, coalesced (Lashkari et al., 2014, 16).

It was also in this era that the shrine of Imamzadeh Abdollah was constructed. The dedicatory inscription on its portal[17] indicates that the building was erected during the reign of the Abbasid caliph al-Mustansir, under the patronage of an individual named Behnam.[18] Additionally, the establishment of the Station of al-Khidr (Maqam-e Khizr) dates back to this era, as cited by Qazi Nurullah Shustari in Majalis-ul-Mo'mineen: Greetings from us to the Station of Khizr and the three Saints (Shushtari, 1975, 211). The structure is distinguished by a portal bearing an eight-line[19] inscription in high-relief Thuluth script. Historical evidence suggests that the monument stood beyond the urban boundaries of the city[20] (Figs. 6 & 7).

The inscription bears the name of Almighty God, Allah, at its center, with the names of Abu Bakr, Uthman, and Ali inscribed at the upper and lower corners. At the beginning of the lines, a couplet is engraved that reads: "The world is but a relic, and we are transient; in this universe, nothing endures except humanity" (Sharafuddin, 2023, 97).

Urban Development and Spatial Organization of the Historic City of Shushtar in the 14th and 15th Centuries CE

During the 14th and 15th centuries CE, coinciding with the decline of the Ilkhanid dynasty and the subsequent rule of the Muzaffarids, the Jalayirids, and later the Timurids in Iran, Shushtar preserved much of its earlier urban fabric while also experiencing repeated political upheavals.

Evidence indicates the presence of educational institutions in Shushtar during the 14th century. Ibn Battuta (1997, Vol. 2, 238), in his travel account of 1328 CE, describes one such institution during his stay in the city: "In Tustar, I stayed at the madrasa of Imam Sharaf al-Din Musa…, a descendant of Sahl ibn Abd Allah... He had founded a madrasa and a Sufi lodge[21], where four attendants were engaged in service". No traces of this school remain today (Sharafuddin, 2023, 50).

Another institution from this period was the Madrasa of Shaykh Ismail Qasri. According to historical accounts, it was founded by Muhammad b. Ismail

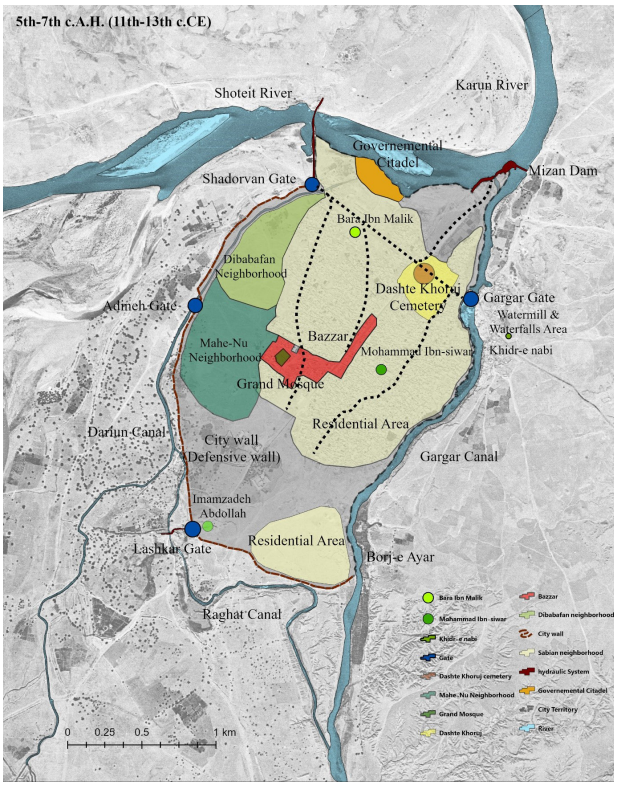

Fig. 6. The spatial organization of Shushtar from the 11th to the 13th century CE, based on historical and archaeological studies. Source: Authors.

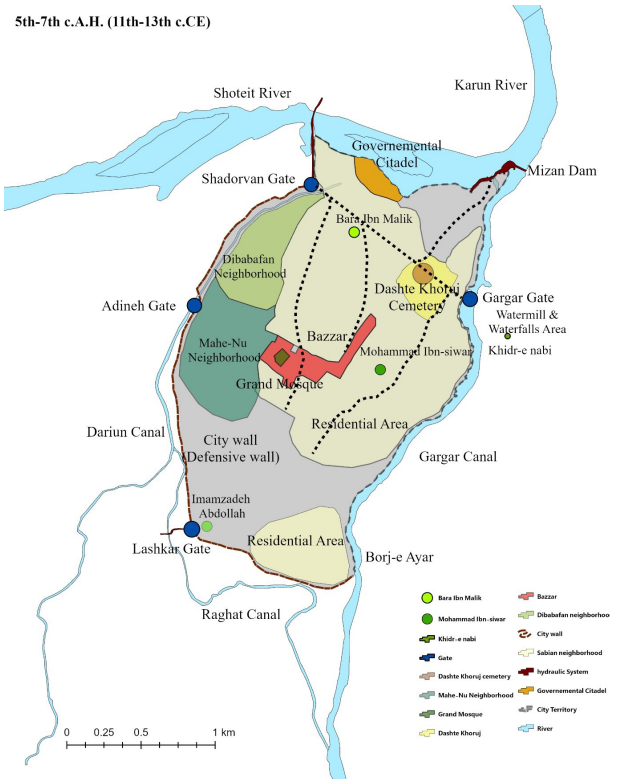

Fig. 7. The spatial organization of Shushtar from the 11th to the 13th century CE. Source: Authors.

al-Qasri[22] in 1363 CE (765 A.H.) in the Juhayna quarter of Shushtar, and comprised a madrasa, a Sufi lodge, and a mosque (Jazayeri Shushtari, 2009, 179). While no physical remains of this madrasa survive, the mausoleum attached to the Hajj Shaykh Shushtari Mosque, known as the Mausoleum of Shaykh Ismail Qasri, still stands. Another madrasa, located opposite the Mausoleum of Jabir, was known as the Madrasa-yi Mashayikh. Sharafuddin (2023, 54) records: "It was constructed around 1398 CE (800 A.H.). Its last instructor, Shaykh Ali, continued teaching until approximately 1883 CE (1300 A.H.), when the institution was still active. Following his death, the scholarly functions of the madrasa came to an end, and the building eventually fell into ruin".

Based on spatial analysis of the historical locations of these schools, supported by field surveys and interpretation of a 1956 CE (1335 A.H.) aerial photograph, their dispersed distribution within the urban fabric of Shushtar is evident.

In many of Iran's earliest mosques, minarets were constructed simultaneously with the main mosque structure. However, certain mosques, such as the Jami Mosque of Fahraj and the Tarikhaneh Mosque of Damghan, both modeled after the Prophet's Mosque in Medina, were originally built without minarets. From the Seljuq period (1037–1194 CE) onward, the minaret emerged as a defining architectural feature, and freestanding minarets were subsequently added to earlier mosques (Mirahmadi, 2022, 35). On this basis, the minaret of the Jami Mosque of Shushtar was erected. Historical accounts state: "This minaret was not constructed together with the original mosque. Its founder was Sultan Uways b. Shaykh Hasan of the Ilkhanid line, and his name is inscribed in bold Kufic script on a stone slab located beneath the gallery of the minaret. The inscription bears the date of Dhu al-Hijja 822 A.H. (December 1419 CE). This minaret is considered among the remarkable structures of its time, as few others were built to such a height" (Jazayeri Shushtari, 2009, 90) (Figs. 8 & 9).

Discussion on the Spatial Organization of Historic Shushtar from the 8th to the 15th Century CE

Shushtar, enclosed by natural routes and water channels, some forming natural barriers and others functioning as moats and defensive walls,

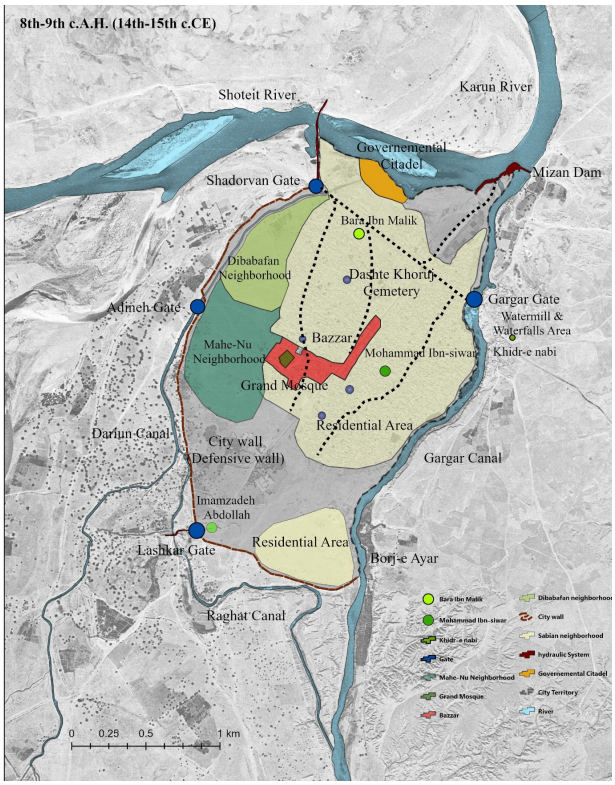

Fig. 8. The spatial organization of Shushtar in the 14th and 15th centuries CE, based on historical and archaeological studies. Source: Authors.

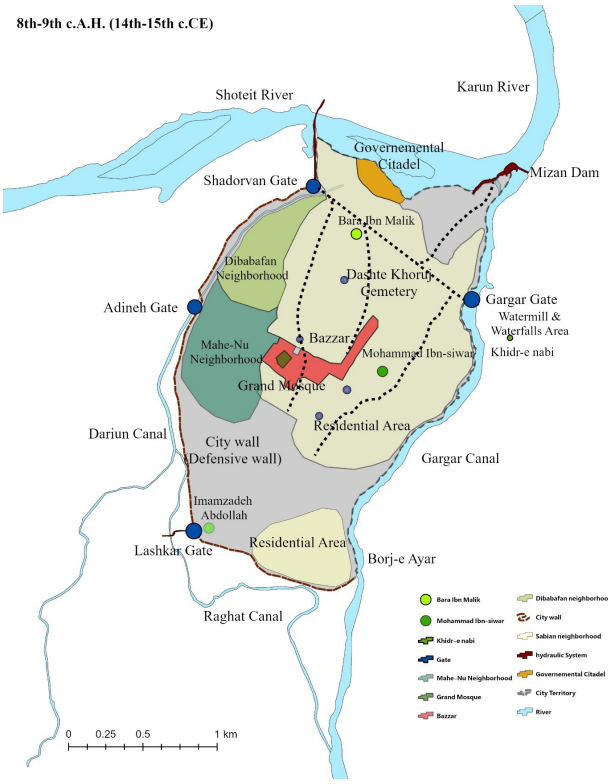

Fig. 9. The spatial organization of Shushtar in the 14th and 15th centuries CE. Source: Authors.

consistently demonstrates its reliance on the river throughout history. The city's expansion never extended beyond the river's limits. Perhaps the most distinctive feature of Shushtar, compared with other historic cities, lies in its unconditional dependence on the river and its consequent spatial orientation. With the advent of Islam, the city preserved its pre-Islamic urban framework while extending southward along the river. However, during the 9th and 10th centuries CE, the construction of the Jami Mosque altered this pattern. Instead of continuing along a north–south axis, as in earlier centuries, urban growth shifted to a south–north direction. The governmental core remained intact, the residential nucleus persisted, and an additional residential quarter gradually formed around the Grand Mosque. Owing to the religious and ritual significance of this sacred nucleus, a bazaar also developed in its vicinity. Between the 11th and 13th centuries CE, the city's urban grain underwent notable transformations, as several shrine-tombs (boq'eh) were gradually erected adjacent to the urban fabric. During the 14th and 15th centuries CE, in addition to these shrines, madrasas assumed a prominent role and were often sited at the heart of residential quarters. The overall spatial organization of Shushtar was consolidated with the construction of the Grand Mosque. Thereafter, new urban elements and finer spatial subdivisions emerged within the neighborhoods, stimulating intra-urban development. The placement of the city gates followed the natural terrain and the course of the river, while the principal routes traversed the residential neighborhoods and the citadel before terminating at the urban fringes (Fig. 10).

Conclusion

An examination of the spatial organization of historic Shushtar during the early Islamic period (8th–15th centuries CE) shows that the city's spatial structure largely represented a continuation of its pre-Islamic development. Throughout this period, the river remained the defining element, limiting, shaping, and reinforcing the city's organization. By sustaining its own continuity, the river guaranteed the persistence and expansion of the settlement, guided the formation of urban elements, and structured

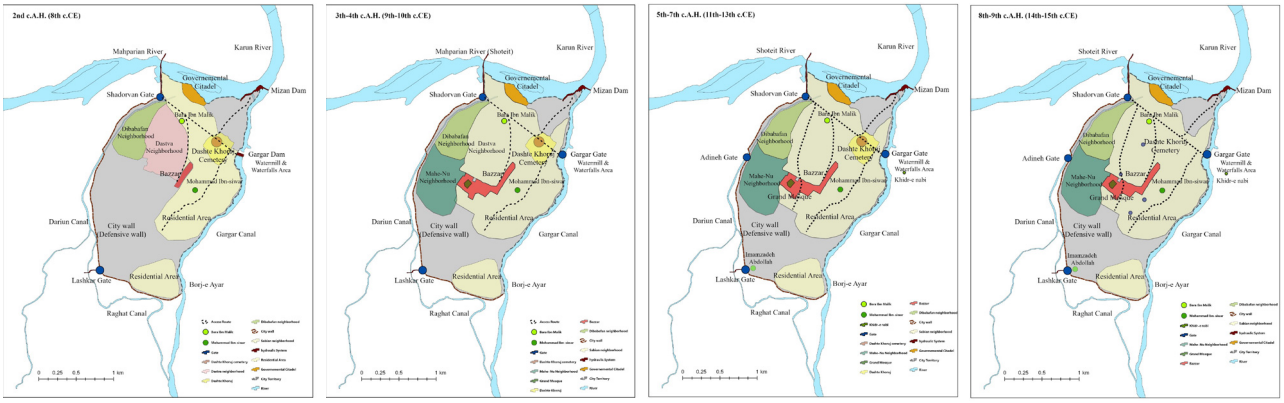

Fig. 10. Spatial organization of the city of Shushtar (from the advent of Islam to the eve of the Safavid period). From left to right: spatial organization of Shushtar in the 8th century CE, in the 9th–10th centuries CE, in the 11th–13th centuries CE, and in the 14th–15th centuries CE. Source: Authors.

human activities that supported Shushtar's economic prosperity. During this era, the governmental core endured, while the residential neighborhoods expanded. Growth occurred both adjacent to the Sasanian nucleus and, with the establishment of the Grand Mosque in the southern sector, extended northward around this new religious center. Alongside the sustained importance of the political-administrative core, the religious–ritual nucleus of the city flourished, reinforcing Shushtar's vitality. The spatial organization of Shushtar in the Islamic period, marked by the establishment of cemeteries, the emergence of shrines, and the construction of the Grand Mosque, underscored the primacy of religious values over economic systems and capital. The territorial extent of the city remained largely consistent with its pre-Islamic boundaries, and urban growth unfolded within these limits. From its earliest stages, the urban structure functioned as an inseparable framework for comprehending the city as a whole, evolving in tandem with its expansion. This structure played a crucial connective role, linking the private sphere (residential neighborhoods) with the public sphere (the mosque, Bazaar, and governmental center), and extending outward to the gates and external routes. The configuration of access routes, organized around the Bazzar and hierarchically connected to the city gates, facilitated mobility, enabled the recognition of different urban sectors, and reinforced the perception of Shushtar as a coherent whole. Unlike the pre-Islamic city, where religious values and beliefs often fragmented the residential quarters, during the Islamic period, the Grand Mosque, though initially located at some distance from the residential core, gradually fostered spatial integration. Over time, not only the residential fabric but also the economic center of the city aligned with the religious–ritual nucleus. As the seat of governance, Shushtar reflected the priorities of a politico-religious order in which religious values gained precedence, producing distinctive patterns of urban life and socio-spatial practices that set the Islamic city apart from its pre-Islamic predecessor.

Declaration of No Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest in conducting this research.

Endnotes

1. This research builds upon the earlier article "An exploration of the pre-Islamic spatial organization evolution within the historic city of Shushtar," (Afsharbagheri et al., 2025) in which the components of the city's spatial structure were analyzed. Accordingly, for the present study, the conceptual framework of the city's spatial organization and its components is referenced from that work.

2. The Salasal Fortress was an extensive stronghold, containing spacious and multiple courtyards, barracks, stables, bathhouses, audience halls, towers, gardens, armories, music pavilions, harems, kitchens, numerous boats, large pools, as well as defensive walls and a surrounding moat. At present, most of these structures lie in ruins, their buildings collapsed upon one another (Imam Shushtari, 1952, 127; Mir Fattah, 1966, 77–79).

3. Kitab "al-Akhbar al-Tiwal" (ad-Dinawari, 2001), authored by Abu Hanifa Dinawari (born 815 CE), an Iranian historian and mathematician of the Samanid era, records the social, military, and

political events of Iran, particularly during the early decades of the 9th century CE.

4. Jazayeri Shushtari (2009, 93), in Tadhkira-ye Shushtar, recounts: "When the army of Khal al-Dhihn approached the vicinity, the reeds clung to the legs of their horses, causing them great astonishment and forcing them to remain there for some time. Eventually, a man from among the local inhabitants of Khafiya emerged, secured amnesty from the Muslim troops, and guided them along another route until they reached the bridge. It is said that this very man is the revered elder whose shrine in Shushtar remains renowned to this day".

5. Baladhuri (1985, 247), in his account of the Muslim Arabs' entry into the city and the death of al-Bara' ibn Malik, records: "The people of Shushtar fought with utmost severity. The troops of Kufa suddenly launched an assault, reaching the city gates, where al-Bara' ibn Malik was martyred, may God have mercy upon him. Ultimately, Hormuzan and his companions, overwhelmed by despair, retreated into the city. After some time, one of the Persians sought amnesty and resolved to reveal to the Muslims a passage unknown to the infidels, and he himself converted to Islam. This man was guided by Ashras ibn Awf through a fissure in the rock leading to the River Dijil, the principal branch of the Karun, known at the city's entry as Shoteit. He then ascended to the heights of the city and pointed out Hormuzan to them…".

6. Abu al-Abbas Ahmad ibn Muhammad Barmaki al-Arbili, known by the honorific title Shams al-Din and more widely recognized as Ibn Khallikan, was a Kurdish qadi (judge), historian, jurist, man of letters, and chronicler of the 13th century CE (7th century AH).

7. Abu Muhammad al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf al-Thaqafi (661–714 CE / 40–95 AH) was among the most renowned governors of the Umayyad Caliphate.

8. The reference pertains to the entry of shabib with his army into the city of Shushtar via the Shadorvan bridge. Upon learning of this event, Hajjaj reproached the local population for allowing shabib's passage, after which the citizens expressed their apology to him (Jazayeri Shushtari, 2009, 85).

9. Shushtari (1984, 590), in "The Masterpiece of the World and the Appendix of the Masterpiece", notes: "It is possible that in earlier times, Dastva was originally a village adjacent to the city, which was later incorporated within the urban fabric, while retaining its original name".

10. Asadipour & Vali Arab (2022, 127) describe Dasht-e Khoruj as follows: "The plain of Khuruj extended approximately to the present-day Falakeh junction near the Band-e Mizan, reaching down toward the Seyyed Naser al-Din Mosque. This cemetery was originally located at the city center. During the construction of modern streets, numerous graves were uncovered, many hewn from stone, with large gravestones, some inscribed in prominent thuluth script. Another cemetery above these burials revealed itself, indicating a two-tiered necropolis. The Khuruj Cemetery thus lay at the very heart of the city, corresponding today to the location of 17 Shahrivar Square. The plain of Khuruj was strongly associated with the uprisings of the Khawarij, and it is highly probable that the bodies of insurgents who rebelled against the caliphs were interred within this burial ground".

11. The Shahristan al-Tasawwuf introduces Muḥammad Ibn-Siwār, known as Da'i, as the maternal uncle of Sahl ibn Abdullah al-Tustari, one of the foremost figures of Islamic mysticism and Sufism. Sahl himself studied under Da'i (Jalali Azizian, 1995, 25–34). Considering that the date of Sahl ibn Abdullah's death is recorded as either 896 CE (283 AH) or, in some sources, 886 CE (273 AH), the burial place of Muḥammad Ibn-Siwār can reasonably be attributed to the early 9th century CE.

12. A person whose occupation is laundry work is referred to as qassar (washer, launderer).

13. Shushtari (1984, 61) notes: "To the east of Shushtar, at a short distance, there once existed a settlement known as Askar Mukram, whose principal product was sugarcane. At present, it too lies in ruins, with nothing remaining except high mounds and a few canals".

14. In the book "Faeq al-Bayan" (Mousavi Shushtari, in press), a detailed description is provided of the construction of the Gargar weir-dam (Polband-e Gargar) and the transfer of water through three major channels into the precinct of mills and waterfalls. This work has been edited and republished by Chaharmahali and is currently in press.

15. "…Through the flow of waterworks in the plain of Askar, signs of prosperity emerged across the region. Summer crops were cultivated, trees and orchards were planted, and fruits became so abundant that they were exported even to distant lands. The plain flourished to such an extent that it came to be called Mahe-Nu (Paradise), a name by which it is still known. One of the principal districts of the city, adjacent to the plain of Askar and extending toward the area of Dastva, continues to bear the name Mahe-Nu. The word Mahe-Nu signifies 'paradise,' and even today both common people and the learned refer to it colloquially as Mamnu" (Musavi Shushtari, 1952, 290).

16. Ghiyath al-Din Muhammad Khudabandeh, known as Oljeitu (1281–1316 CE / 680–716 AH), was one of the rulers of the Ilkhanid dynasty in Iran.

17. The inscription reads: "In the name of God, the Most Gracious, and the Most Merciful. This is the command for the construction by the sinful servant … under the mercy of God Almighty … during the reign of our master and lord, the Imam whose obedience is incumbent upon all creation, Abdullah, His caliph, the heir of His Prophet, and the devotee of His law, Abu Ja'far al-Mansur al-Mustansir bi-Allah, Commander of the Faithful" (Salehi et al., 2021, 81).

18. The figure referred to as Bahnam in this inscription is most likely Bahnam al-Rumi, governor of Shushtar, who, according to historical accounts, was dismissed from office in 631 A.H. by order of al-Mustansir (Imam Shushtari, 1952, 62).

19. "The completion of the construction of this dome coincided with the interment of our master, the late and forgiven, the pride of

the Imams and the dignitaries, the pilgrim to the Two Sanctuaries, our lord Nizam al-Milla wa al-Din Muhammad ibn the late Khwaja Taj al-Din Abdullah, may God sanctify his resting place. Its builder and patron was his weaker and most needy servant in God's mercy and forgiveness, his brother Khwaja Sadr al-Din Mahmud, may God pardon him . This occurred in the month of Jumada al-Akhira of the year 1299 CE (700 A.H.)."

20. This elegant portal was demolished in 1376 (1997–98) by the Board of Trustees of the Khizr Nabi shrine. Large portions of the portal and its valuable inscription are currently preserved at the Shushtar Department of Cultural Heritage; however, during the course of the demolition, the final section of the inscription, which contained the date chronogram, was unfortunately lost (Mousavi Shushtari, in press, 117).

21. In relation to the term zāwiya, it can denote concepts such as an independent room in a place, a chamber within a building complex, or be synonymous with institutions like the khānqāh (Sufi lodge), ribāṭ, madrasa, and mausoleum. However, considering the expansion of Sufism in Iran under the Ilkhanid rule, the building was most likely transformed into a composite complex of khānqāh and mausoleum, with its subsidiary domed chamber constituting one of the principal components of the khānqāh (Ahmadi & Ahmadi Siahpoush, 2021, 182)".

22. Muhammad ibn Ismail ibn Abd al-Latif ibn Ghiyath al-Din Muhammad ibn Shaykh al-Wara Kahf al-Din Ismail al-Qasri.

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