

IRANIAN WORLD
History & Archaeology of Estakhr

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Estakhr is situated in the narrow valley of the Polvâr River, between the north flank of the Kûh-e Rahmat and the cliffs of Naqš-e Rostam. It stands near the point where the valley opens into the broad plain of Marvdašt (q.v.), extending before the Persepolis platform. In origin, Estakhr was presumably a suburb of the urban settlement once surrounding the Achaemenid royal residences, but of which few traces now survive. After the death of Seleucus I (280 B.C.), when the province began to re-assert its independence, its center seems to have developed at Estakhr, better protected than the old capital by the surrounding hills, and astride the critical "winter road" from Fârs to Isfahan via Pasargadae and Âbâda. The name, Pahl. *stxl* (e.g., Markwart, *Provincial Capitals*, p. 19), believed to mean "strong(hold)", was presumably transferred to the new site from the Persepolis platform, according to Ernst Herzfeld in the OP form **Parsastaxra* "stronghold of Pârs." He interprets certain Aramaic characters, PR BR, appearing on coins of the so-called "Fratadara" Kings of Persis (q.v.), as an abbreviation of Aram. *prs`byrt`* "the Fortress of Pârsa." This could be the Aramaic equivalent of the preceding Old Persian words, denoting Estakhr as the mint of such issues.



Plate I. Aerial View of Estakhr
(Click to enlarge)

The nucleus of the subsequent city thus lay on the south and east side of the Polvâr River, within city walls traceable in air photographs and on the ground (PLATE I). Masonry remains and columns at the point where the Isfahan road from Persepolis rounds the end of the Kûh-e Rahmat and enters the Polvâr valley apparently represent an Achaemenian gate and check-point controlling travel on this route. On the rising city-mound east of this point stands a nineteenth-century mud-brick enclosure known as Takht-e Tâwûs, and a number of Achaemenid columns, re-used in a medieval mosque. Excavations by Erich Schmidt in 1932 and 1934 included several sondages in this area, and also near the center, and towards the western edge of the urban site, but failed to locate Achaemenid deposits. No doubt the town flourished from 265 B.C.E. to 200 C.E., under the Persis kings, whose capital is believed to have been here; and, from A.D. 208, under the Sasanians, when it was the principal city and religious center of the province, but not normally a royal residence.

Closely associated with Estakhr was the religious precinct of Naqš-e Rostam (q.v.) on the far side of the valley (PLATE II). This was the location of the Achaemenid royal tombs, of important Sasanian rock-sculptures, and of funeral installations (*dakhmas*). Beyond this spot, on the open Marvdašt Plain, stand three prominent bluffs known as Seh Gonbadân "The Three Domes." That nearest to Estakhr was heavily fortified, and in Islamic times as no doubt earlier regularly served as the inviolable treasury of the rulers of Estakhr, designated Qal'a-ye Estakhr, "The Castle of Estakhr," or Estakhr-Yâr, "The Friend of Estakhr." The cold climate at its crest produced accumulations of snow, which melted into a cistern contained by a powerful dam, built by 'Azod-al-Dawla to retain water for the garrison. According to Ebn al-Zobayr (pp. 78-79), the Buyid Abû Kâljâr (see below) ascended the castle accompanied by his son and a valuer, finding a tank eighty cubits long, wide and deep, piled high with silver, and chambers full of priceless gems. The last appearance of Estakhr in numismatics was upon the unique dinar issued in 455/1063 by an obscure Saljuq prince of Fârs, Rasûlteġin, where it indicates the castle rather than the city. It seems likely that the treasures of Qal'a-ye

Estakhr included the legacies of earlier dynasties, to judge by the statement of Ebn al-Athîr (X, 36), that when Alp Arslân (q.v.) captured the castle in 459/1066-67, its governor handed over to him a turquoise cup inscribed with the name of the mythical king Jamšîd. The two further bluffs were those of Qal' a-ye Šekasta, used as the textile store, and Qal' a-ye Oškônân, for the armory. These fortresses, now seemingly distant from the urban area, were in medieval times and earlier regarded as within the greater city of Estakhr. The city reached its heyday in the Sasanian period, and its mint-abbreviation, ST, for Staxr (Stahr), is frequent throughout the Sasanian coinage from the reign of Bahrâm V (A.D. 420-438), until the end of the dynasty. These mint operations were of course evidence of substantial economic activity.

With the Arab conquest of Fârs, the invaders at first made their headquarters at Bayzâ on the Marvdašt plain. In 28/648-49 under 'Abd-Allâh b. 'Âmer (q.v.), Estakhr was taken by capitulation. After a further rising it had to be retaken by force in the following year, with heavy loss of life to the population. The city long remained a stronghold of Zoroastrianism. As a mint it is well represented in the Arab-Sasanian and Reformed Umayyad coinage, apparently without further involvement in major events: Arab-Sassanian: 31 H; for Zîâd b. Abî Sofyân, 51 H, 54 H; for 'Obayd-Allâh b. Zîâd 52 (?), 59 (AE), 60 61; for 'Abd-Allâh b. al-Zobayr 63 or 66; for 'Omar b. 'Obayd-Allâh 69-71(?); for Mohallab 78, 79 (or 69?). Reformed coinage: 79-102; 'Abbasids 135-67. During the 'Abbasid period, the economic and political center of Fârs gradually shifted to Shiraz, but Estakhr still figures in accounts of the wars between the Saffarids and the caliphal governors in Fârs. Here 'Amr b. Layth defeated the forces of Musâ Moflehî on 16 Dhu'l-hejja 276/11 April 890 (*Târikh-e Sîstân*, p. 247; tr. Gold p. 196). The last coin attributed to Estakhr (cf. von Zambaur, p. 49) is a supposedly Dolafid issue of 282/895-96. There is, however, uncertainty about the coin-issues with the mint-name Fârs, continuous between 202 and 299 and attributed by Eduard von Zambaur to Shiraz, yet overlapping issues of Shiraz in the years 272, 273, 277, 279, 280, 283, 291, 292, 299, 312, 331, and 384. Some or all of these may, in fact, represent unrecognized issues of Estakhr. According to his inscriptions in the Tachara, the Buyid 'Azod-al-Dawla visited Persepolis in 344/955-56. The celebrated, if disputed, gold medal, dated Fârs 359/969-70, and illustrating this amir in a Sasanian type crown, could also represent an issue of Estakhr, whether from the city or the castle. According to Ebn al-Balkhî (p. 127), breaches of their covenant (including that of 28/648-49 noticed above) had led to several massacres of the population at Estakhr. Finally, in the closing years of Abû Kâlfjâr (i.e. 'Emâd-al-Dîn Marzobân, 415-40/1024-48; not, as sometimes said, Samsâm-al-Dawla) the enmity of a vizier towards a landowner caused him to send against the town troops under the amir Qotlomeš, who demolished and pillaged the remaining buildings, leaving the city a mere village with no more than a hundred inhabitants, and bringing its history to an end.



Plate II. Aerial View of Naqsh-e Sostam
(Click to enlarge)

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