

IRANIAN ART & ARCHAEOLOGY: SASANIAN DYNASTY THE CAVE OF EMPEROR SHÂPUR IN VILLAGE OF SÂSÂN



Abstract: *The cave of Shapur is located at Sasan village on the right side of the road by Shapur river which is 6 kms from the city of Bishapur in Zagros Mountains in western Iran. The statue of Shapur I, the Great is set up inside the cave which belongs to about 1,800 years ago. The opening to the cave is one of the largest in Iran.*

About 1400 years ago, after the invasion of Iran by Arabs and collapse of the Sasanid dynasty, this grand statue was pulled down and a part of one of its legs was broken. About 70 years ago, again, parts of his arms were also broken. The statue had been lying on the ground for about 14 centuries when about 30 years ago a group of relics raised it again on its feet and fixed his foot with iron and cement.

To get to the cave, one should enter Tang Chogân through a road exactly off the northern Bishapur and east of the Shapur river.

Shapur river originates off Arzhan mountains and runs into the Persian Gulf. Some 25 kms to Shiraz-Kazerun road, the river passes through a narrow passage called Tang Choogan and continues towards south by the city of Bishapur.



After 6 kms on the road by the eastern bank of the river which leads to the Sasan village, there is the cave. A bridge is constructed on the river at Sasan village and the cave is west to the village by the foot of Shapur mountain (1,560m high). From the road, alongside the river near the divide of the mountain, two caves close to each other can be seen. The triangle shape of one of them is a little bigger than the other one and the bigger opening is the Cave of Shapur. The statue of Emperor [Shapur I](#), the Great (CE 241-272), made 1800 years ago, is set up inside the cave. The visitors who have no mountaineering experiences, judging from the opening might think the cave is only a small split on the mountain wall while the cave has one of the biggest openings in Iran.

Having passed through the narrow lanes in the village, you could reach the cave after an hour and a half's walk. The route to the cave is rocky and sharply steep. However, the higher parts of the mountain are covered with trees exclusively

belonging to forests at the Zagros Mountain. The trees reduce the difficulty of climbing.

Near the end of the ascend, a staircase has been built by responsible organizations which is equipped with iron fences to prevent visitors from falling. The staircase eases the closing parts of ascent to a very great extent. At the end of the stairs the opening to the cave discloses itself all of sudden.

At the opening you find a flat area 50 by 100 meters. It is in fact a vast hall nearly 12 meters high. The area is a little steep towards the end of the cave and the huge white stony statue of Emperor Shapur I is erected in the middle of it. The statue has suffered many damages in the past 1800 years.

About 1,400 years ago, after the collapse of the Sasanid dynasty, the statue was pulled down and lost its feet. About 70 years ago, parts of its hands were damaged as well. This unique statue had been lying on the ground for about 14 centuries when nearly 30 years ago a number of lovers of historical monuments erected it to its feet again and, fixing the damaged part of the leg with iron and cement, they set it up.

Having passed through a vast area in which the statue is situated the cave extends towards the end with a fast steep. From this spot on there are many corridors and canals to enter which requires one to have a torch or a lantern. This is because in all caves, except for the opening which is lighted, the remaining parts are in grave darkness. It is only possible to see the inside parts using a light.

Lands by Shapur river are used as the summer resort of the great family of Darrehshouri belonging to the Qashqaie tribe. About 70 years ago, one of the young men from the tribe fell in love with a girl. The girl's father asked the young man to prove his bravery. The young man asked what the father required him to do to show his courage. The man wanted him to go to the cave at night and leave a trace there in order to prove he had been there.

The young man proceeded towards the cave immediately. There were no torches or lights at that time. The candles and torches, if any, could be found only in cities but not among Qashqaie tribe who lacked the most basic living facilities even up to four decades ago.

The young man, braving wolves, bears and leopards, covered the distance to the cave in the dark night. He was not thinking of the danger of wild animals attacking him nor fearing the snakes which would leave their nest at the darkness. Only one picture kept coming to his mind and that was the picture of his beloved one with her wavy, flowery skirt and the beautiful scarf she fastened under her chin with a pin.



Surpassing many hardships, the young man reached the cave. In that grave darkness he found the fallen statue. He sat up beside the statue to nail a stick he had brought with him to prove he had been there. The traditional costume Qashqaie men wear has a very long tail reaching down to their ankles. When the young man sat by the statue the tail of his costume stretched on the ground. Not recognizing anything in the darkness, he nailed the cloth to the ground together with his stick. The deeper the nail went, the picture of his beloved grew brighter before his eyes and he felt closer to her every moment. After making sure that the nail had been fixed, he decided to rise up and return to his village. The moment he moved, he realized he had been fastened

The naive young man, thinking the statue was holding him, got a heart failure and died by the side of statue. The people waited for him until morning, and then getting disappointed, they rushed towards the cave. The young man's ignorant brother, facing the dead body of his brother by the statue, thought he had caused his death and threw big stones at it until one of its arms was broken!



http://www.cais-soas.com/CAIS/Archaeology/Sasanian/cave_of_shapur.htm