

## **Iranian Cities after the Collapse of Sasanian Kingdom: A Case Study of Darabgird**

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### **Abstract**

Darabgird is one of the ancient cities in Fars province. According to Iranian mythology, Darab Shah (Dariush, the Great) found the city in the Achaemenid period. But, due to the fact that 1.21% of total ceramics gathered from the city belongs to the Parthian era, we can accept that the city remained in use since Parthian period to the Islamic era.

Data analysis shows that the city had a strong and intensive settlement during Sasanians, After the Arab conquest and the collapse of Pars province, some changes occurred in the function of urban spaces. Accordingly, the main settlement shifted to the north of the city. Apparently, the southern half of the city was abandoned in Islamic era.

Finally, according to some other early Islamic cities, apparently in this period, the main settlement of the city shifted to outside of Sasanian city (in this case, north of the Sasanian fortifications) and we should survey this area to discover available evidences of this period. Unfortunately, this area is presently being used for agricultural purposes.

**Keywords:** Darabgird; Form; Space; Function; Sasanian Period; Islamic Era

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## **Introduction**

*Darabgird* is a circular city which according to many archaeologists, historians and geographers such as Van Den Bergh (2000: 48), Bartold (1998: 212), Lestrangle (1958: 6), was one of the large and flourishing cities of *Sasanian* era of Iran. It is such that perhaps *Darabgird* can be considered as the first capital of Sasanian dynasty<sup>1</sup> (Chegini, 1995: 746). This city is located in the south of Iran; east of *Fars* province and amid alluvium bed and fertile plain of *Darab*, 9 km south-west of modern *Darab* with geographical coordinates of N: 28°41', E: 54°28'.

Based on written sources as well as archaeological evidences, *Darabgird* was in a thriving state up to the 11<sup>th</sup> Century AD, but at that time, following the rebels of *Shabankareh Kurds*, it was demolished by *Seljuk* (Ibn Balkhi, 1995: 26 – 27). The historical texts indicate that after destruction of *Darabgird*, its habitants were shifted to a newly constructed city named “*Shahr-i Jannat*” (Azma, 1991: H). Since no considerable sign of the above-mentioned city was observed in the archaeological investigation of the authors, it can therefore, be accepted that the habitation in the new city could not last longer and those people possibly migrated to the present “*Darab*” and so far they have been dwelling there (Taheri, 2002: 306 -307).

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1. Based on historical texts, *Ardashir-i Papakan* - the founder of Sasanian dynasty - was the ruler of this city in the time span of 220-224 AD and before rebellion against *Artabanus V*. (Azma, 1991: H)

The time authors took up the field study, *Darabgird* lacked detailed research hence; various questions were raised regarding the process of formation, development, destruction as well as form and performance of the urban spaces in the transit period, from Sasanian to the Islamic era. The current paper tries to respond to these questions.

## **Research Background**

For the first time, in 1933, Sir Aurel Stein started an excavation in *Darabgird*. However, he did not present a report of the new findings. P. De Miroschedji during 1971-1972 reviewed *Darab* plain from the viewpoint of prehistoric settlements (Rafeai, 2007: 107). In 2003, Peter Morgan began to study *Darabgird*, of which a summary of report is available in the Iranian Cultural Heritage Organization<sup>2</sup> (Morgan, 2003: 2). The studies conducted by the authors are the first systematic researches whose results are used in the present paper.

## **General Perspective of Darabgird**

According to the latest mapping, the area of *Darabgird* is estimated approximately 235 hectares. The main structure of the city consists of following elements:

**1. Defensive Fortifications Comprising Rampart, Ditch etc:** Around the city of

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2. I.C.H.O.

Darabgird, there is a huge and voluminous rampart, made of mud and stone, in an approximate length of 5.44 kilometers. At present, the heights of all parts of the defensive wall are almost the same. This rampart is surrounded by a ditch with an average 98.5m wide (ditch + berms) and 6m deep. The bridges which had been constructed opposite to the main gates, acted as a link between the city and its surrounding areas.

**2. Communicational Systems:** There were four main entrances, four main streets and other linking elements. The openings which at present are parts of the circular rampart of Darabgird could be observed in line with the four geographical divisions. In fact, the city's main gates had been in its last flourishing stage. The difference in their dimensions indicates their variant importance.

**3. Residential Zones:** The distances between the city's main streets created fourfold district used as residential areas. Today, only a few structures are observed, which according to their vastness, most probably had a public utility function. The lack of architectural monuments in the city can be in connection with the type of materials used. Because, based on the historical texts, the constructional units of Darabgird were built mainly by mud and sun-dried bricks (Ibn Hawqal, 1987: 48; Istakhri, 1961: 110; Jayhani, 1989: 115; Ibn Balkhi, 1995: 309).

**4. Citadel:** It is comprised of a rocky hill peak

and two low height hill peaks in the city centre<sup>1</sup>. The architectural remains over the peaks indicate that the city's administrative bloc was located at a place from where all movements of citizens could be controlled. *Ibn Hawqal* has mentioned the existence of a mountain citadel at the top (Ibn Hawqal, 1987: 34). *Muqaddasi* has indicated that the mosque the city was generally located on the top of the western peak (Muqaddasi, 1982: 638), which has also been confirmed by Huff (Huff, 1995: 413). However, there are no architectural signs on the top of this peak.

**5. Irrigation Network:** It is seen in the form of canals made of rubble, which is in line with the main northern and western streets of the city.

### Research Methodology

During field studies, all premises of the city were initially networked. Consequently, each block formed of 27.16 m × 30.79 m (totally 836.46 m<sup>2</sup>), exactly in geographical longitude and latitude dimensions. Meanwhile, in order to facilitate the study and sampling, the city's premise was divided into nine districts. Each district was then studied and sampled individually and data were recorded. At the end of the survey, surfaces of 41 blocks of the

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1. The highest mountain peak is on east of the city with 1179 meter A.S.L. The western and eastern peaks are 1156 and 1126m respectively.

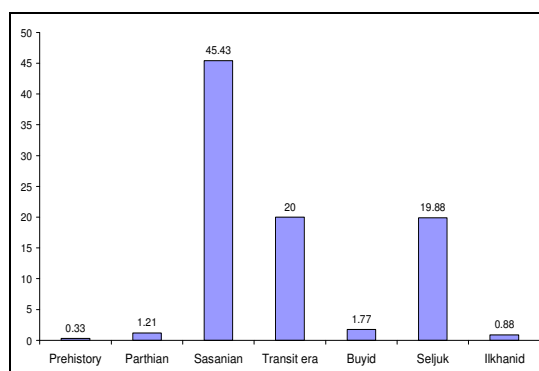
mentioned network were closely studied and sampled.

The data were classified and registered into two categories of moveable and immovable (Architectural remains) samples. In this study, totally 994 pieces of cultural materials were obtained, in most cases these are ceramic fragments (906 pieces equal to 91.14%). The ceramic and glass pieces, stone tools and utensils of prehistoric and historical period, bones, slag of industrial kilns of metal melting and baking ceramic and also decorative objects, were among the movable sampled items.

#### Data Analysis: Chronology, Determining Performance of Districts

Other than the data collected during a systematic surface survey, the ceramic pieces have allocated in the largest quantity to themselves. In classifying and dating these objects, it was found that they belonged to the seven periods of prehistory, Parthian, Sasanian, early-Islamic periods of *Buyid*, Seljuk and *Ilkhanid*.

As seen in Chart1, the most quantity of the acquired ceramics belongs to the Sasanian period.



**Chart 1** Frequency of Ceramic Data and Settlement Periods of Darabgird

Of other indicative objects, relatively there were numerous industrial slags allocating 2.51% of the total sampled surface data. Here, the highest rate (92%) was related to metal melting kilns and only a few (8%) belonged to ceramic baking kilns.

Using the analysis of the sampled data from the proposed area of study, following can be classified and presented:

**1. Governmental Citadel:** The time distribution of the sampled data indicates that the strongest settlement in this region belongs to the Sasanian era. According to *Mostowfi Qazvini*, the citadel was deserted in eight century AH (Huff, 1995: 420), but it is being doubted while taking into account the time distribution of the data. This also because the latest objects found there belonged to Seljuk's (ruled 1037–1157 AD).

A few quantity of early-Islamic (transit period) ceramic proves that the citadel were not used by Islamic governors. This idea is compatible with the objectives of the Islamic

rulers which could fully disrupt the social organization of the inhabitants of the cities remaining from the Sasanian era. The data also indicate that most possibly; the citadel was in use once again for the last time during Seljuk's. This finding is more in harmony with the writings of *Ibn Balkhi* that indicates that a main part of Darabgird was deserted in the beginning of the sixth century AH/12<sup>th</sup> AD (Ibn Balkhi, 1995: 450).

Finding two slag pieces of metal melting from the highest area of the eastern part of the citadel can be used in supporting the idea that the administrative area of the city had not been used so much in the early-Islamic centuries. The other highly possible supplementary reason is that the center of the early-Islamic rulers in Darabgird city was located outside its ramparts and within the limits of the western gate. So, the Sasanian citadel could have been used as a storeroom, industrial working place or a prison<sup>1</sup>.

The other noticeable point is the ceramics of Parthian era found at the governmental citadel of Darabgird (Block S15<sup>2</sup>). Though a very few quantity of the Parthian ceramics have been found, but it is much possible that the citadel was in use from the Parthian period and reinforce the theory of the construction of the city in that period.

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1. As *Forsat* has written, the central peak of the city had deep caves one of them in the south western corner of the governmental citadel was used for prison. (1998: 154)

2. See parts related to the main passages of the city

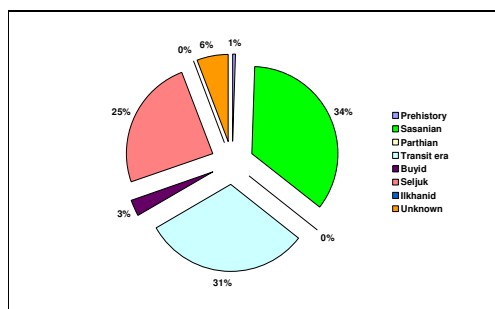
**2.Four-fold Residential Zones:** As discussed, the Darabgird residential zones were divided by four main streets into four separate districts. Possibly each of these districts was allocated to a group of people with different ethnicity, belief, livelihood or social ranking, their data were, therefore, sampled and analyzed independently. A summary of the results are presented below:

**a. Northwest District:** In the surface survey, it became clear that most of the architectural remains are concentrated in this district. Since the signs of the Seljuk were built over some layers of the previous periods, perhaps, the remaining architectural evidences related to that period. One of the unique features of this district is that despite structures being made of sun-dried bricks and mud, a considerable number of stone pieces related to architecture are observed. As it can be seen in the Chart 2, the district was settled full-fledged during Sasanian, Seljuk and the early-Islamic centuries. The very few percentage of data related to Buyid dynasty indicate a shorter settlement time. This chart also indicates that settlement in the northwestern part of the city has been continuing since the age of Sasanian to the end of Seljuk's. This also indicates the strategic importance of this district. The discovery of the cultural evidences related to the early-Islamic centuries from the northwest of suburban zone of Darabgird<sup>3</sup>, can be a strong

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3. ICHO office in Darab discovered two columns base and also other components of architectural pieces (such as the pivot of a door) in the region (Morgan, 2003: 337).

reason explaining the importance of this district in the proposed periods. It is highly possible that the markets which had been mentioned by Muqaddasi outside the ramparts of Darabgird (Muqaddasi, 1982: 638) were also located at this place along-with the western street. These findings can be used to reinforce the idea that the first Islamic ruler of Darabgird established his governing place outside the defensive rampart of the city and near the *Dahye Kalbi*<sup>1</sup> mausoleum, in order to disrupt the social and structural system of this city remaining from the Sasanian era.

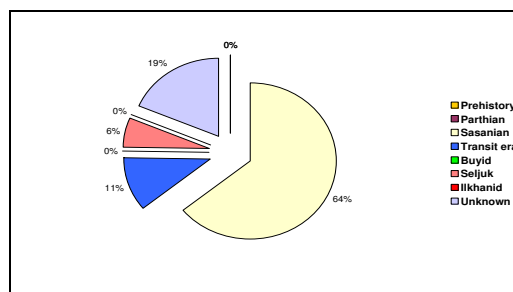


**Chart 2** Percentage of ceramics of six periods of settlement at northwest district

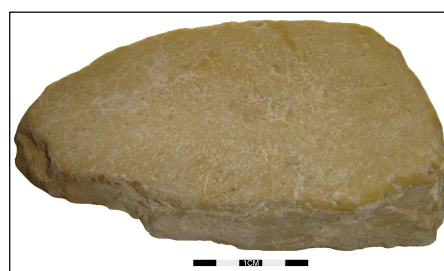
**b. Southwest District:** This can possibly be considered as the working and industrial region of Darabgird. The reason is that with the exception of two blocks (S26, S28), from all the sampled blocks, the signs of industrial slag and baking ceramic have been found. The discovery

1. He was born in 665 AD, and was one of the companions of the prophet of Islam (Husaini Fasai, 1988: 1311). He was also the representative of *Imam Hassan* in Darabgird but a short period after arrival to the city; he was poisoned and died (Taheri, 2002: 306 - 307; Forsat-i Shirazi, 1998: 154).

of stone instruments with a working place function (blocks S24, S25) from this district also reinforces the hypothesis of its industrial-working place function<sup>2</sup> (Fig 1). The considerable point in the Chart 3 is the numerousness of the ceramic data related to Sasanian in this district. The very few ceramic fragments of the early-Islamic centuries and Seljuk's period as compared to Sasanian, clearly indicates the reduction of the importance of this district after the fall of Sasanians.



**Chart 3** Percentage of ceramics of four periods of settlement at southwest district



**Fig1** A Stone instrument with workshop nature (Seyedein, 2009)

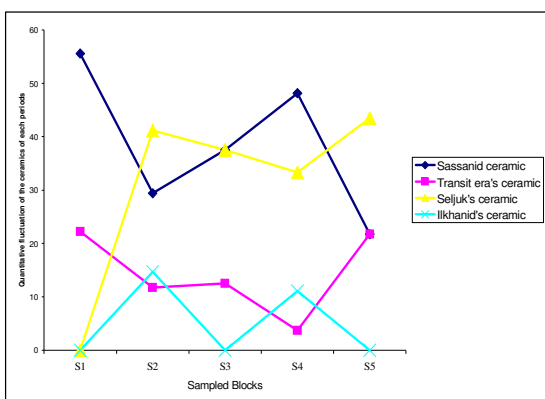
2. In some of the historical sources, it is mentioned that in Darabgird, industrial commodities like table cloth, bowl, utensils, cup and decorative vases were manufactured which used to be exported to other regions as souvenirs (Schwarz, 1993: 132). It is very possible that the working places to produce these kinds of objects were located in this district of the city.

**c. Northeastern District:** In sampled blocks of this district, some evidences of industrial slag with a density much less than the southwest district were found. It can therefore be accepted that in this part of the city, there had been industrial activities as well. With regard to the relatively low quantity of these remains and the closeness of their position with the main street in the east of the city, it is highly possible that smiths were much active on the eastern street. Some ceramics from Parthian era has been found in this district (Block S37). 52% of the acquired ceramic belong to Sasanian era. This rate as compared with the data of the Islamic primary centuries and Seljuk's is considerable and at a higher rank. However, the data from this district confirms the continuation of settlement from Parthian to Seljuk's.

**d. Southeastern District:** This district has the lowest rates of evidences. The northern parts of this district located near the eastern street have some evidences of metal melting kilns. As mentioned earlier, perhaps districts close the main street in the eastern part had an industrial nature. 67% of the sampled ceramics from this district belonged to Sasanian era. There are very few number of ceramic from the early-Islamic centuries and Seljuk's era hence; indicates the weakness of settlement in this district at the Islamic ages. At present, with regard to the evidences obtained, it is difficult to determine the function of this district at Sasanian era.

**3. Four Main City Streets:** As mentioned in the "general perspective of the city", Darabgird had four main gates located almost along the four sub-directions. With regard to difference in dimensions of openings, it seems the northern one had been the main entrance during Sasanians. It is also due to the fact that it is not only wider than the other gates, but also the street branching out from it is exactly perpendicular to the main entrance of the administrative area. The mild slope of the citadel towards the north was also facilitating access from this street to the main entrance of governmental compound.

Using the Chart 4, which shows the quantitative fluctuations of the sampled ceramics from Sasanian to Seljuk along the main street in the north of the city, it can be said that this route had been constantly in use after the fall of the Sasanian up to the end of Seljuk's. It seems that it will be possible to establish a meaningful relation between the growth of the activities of this street and the life of citadel. That is to say with regard to the key role of citadel in Sasanian era, all main passages in particular this street, it was the main center of moving and business. But in the early-Islamic centuries, due to obsolete condition of citadel, its significance reduced. The results from the analysis of the data confirms that with reuse of the citadel during Seljuk's, this street once again became active.



**Chart 4** Quantitative fluctuations of ceramics of four main settlement eras along the main street of the north of the city (from the gate towards the city center)

It also seems that with the fall of Sasanian kingdom and the beginning of the Islamic caliphate, the rate of the importance of the northern gate diminished and the western gate became more prominent. The remains of the settlement from the early-Islamic centuries outside the western gate and location of the Dahyeh tomb close to it is the most important reason to prove this hypothesis. It shows the rate of its importance in the Islamic period. This important issue is reflected in the texts remaining from the early-Islamic centuries where the *Estakhr* gate (western gate) is mentioned as the main entrance of Darabgird<sup>1</sup> and the market of the city as the continuation of it towards outside.

The route of the main street of the south of the city had not been used with the exception of Sasanian era and to some extent at the transit

period. After the Sasanian era, the southern half of the city had not been used considerably. The very negative slope of the Sasanian ceramic opposite to the very positive slope of Seljuk's ceramic is due to the fact that the data of the block S15<sup>2</sup> do not belong to its present location but they belonged to the top of the citadel and as a result of washing, they had been transferred to this place. Since in other parts of this street, no other signs of Seljuk were found, it can be assumed that this street had been deserted at Seljuk's era.

The main eastern street was used after Sasanian only in the early-Islamic centuries and after that, it remained intact. To sum up, it seems that a little bit after the fall of the city by the Arabs, the route of the two main streets related to the southern<sup>3</sup> half of the city was deserted and movement was carried out mainly through the main streets of the northern<sup>4</sup> half part.

The density of slag of metal melting kilns along this street proves the existence of metal industries on its southern part. Since the Sasanian ceramic has a high density in districts near the eastern street, it can be assumed that at Sasanian era, the small ceramic working places and metal melting units located near the south of

1. <http://darab.farsp.ir/portal/show.aspx?Page=1350>

2. Located at the end of the route of the main street of the south of city

3. South and East streets

4. North and West streets



the main street and they used to sell their industrial products in its northern parts.

### Conclusion

The results of the sampled data clarify that the foundation of the governmental citadel of Darabgird was laid down during Parthians and at the same time; a limited settlement was prevailing in the northeastern district of the city. These results also confirm that the proposed city was at its peak during Sasanians and its inhabitants occupied all of its residential areas and were actively engaged in developing the city.

The data also confirm that the city has been inhabited during Seljuk's, though after Seljuk and in particular during Ilkhanid's, some evidences of settlement could be registered. However, with regard to the limitation of the domain of distribution and the minimal data related to this age, it should be noted that Darabgird after Seljuk did not find its previous thriving state and only its northwest district could be used up to the age of Ilkhanids (ruled 1256-1353 AD)<sup>1</sup>.

These data show that with the passage of time and in particular, after the fall of the Sasanians, certain changes occurred. One of the most outstanding of these changes noted at the beginning of the Arabs dominancy i.e. the

governmental citadel was deserted and the city expanded outside its northwest defensive wall. The views of Muqaddasi about stretching of markets outside of one of the main gates, also indicates its expansion in the countryside and emergence of a type of change in the social structure at Darabgird in the early-Islamic centuries (6-10 AD). This act, which was inspired from the behavior of the prophet of Islam in creating a governmental district and a *bazaar* independent from the traditional texture of the city of *Medina*, had an ideological base, and at the same time, it made possible the change of social organization of the inhabitants of Darabgird (An objective which is achieved with the establishment of *Dar al-Hokoumah* and a mosque outside the defense ramparts and along the western gate of the city). In other words, crating a new district outside the defense walls of Darabgird, the Islamic rulers made efforts to disrupt pre-Islamic (Sasanian) social organization, and as a result, they laid down social structure based on new foundations. This measure has been proved in the results of the archeological studies of other transformed cities from the Sasanian era such as *Bishopour* (Sarfaraz, 1995: 49; Mehryar, 1999: 11-70; Karimian, 2004b: 60), *Nishapour* (Mousavi, 1991: 124), *Bukhara* (Soltanzadeh, 1983: 124), *Bam* (Karimian, 2004a: 81), etc.

Despite considerable multiplicity of data of the Sasanian in all areas of Darabgird, shortage

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1. See also: Morgan, 2003: 333

of data of Islamic periods from the southern half of the city confirms the falling importance of this section after the disintegration of Sasanians and indicates that the southern districts had been desolated after the fall of the dynasty. In turn, the northern half of the city encompassed greater works of the Islamic periods and this density was more sensible in the northwest district and the continuation of the settlement there up to Ilkhanid's era was confirmed. Undoubtedly, this district was considered as one of the most important section of Darabgird after transfer of the city from Sasanian to Islamic rulers and in accordance with archaeological evidences, it was considered the high class luxurious settlement in the city.

In sum, it seems that from the functional point of view, there had been certain differences between the four residential districts of Darabgird, because northwest district was the place of aristocrats and nobles and southwest district was allocated to the working and industrial activities. Though at present it is difficult to determine the function of northeast and southeast districts, but with regard to the existence of the signs of metal melting kilns near the main eastern street, at least, it can be accepted that industrial activities have been in the stream in these districts and this indicates the functional inhomogeneous of different regions of the city. The lack of enough architectural evidences from the city confirms the writings of

geographers of the early-Islamic centuries such as *Istakhri*, Ibn Hawqal, *Jayhani* and Ibn Balkhi were based on the sun dried bricks and mud construction of Darabgird.

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## شهرهای ایرانی بعد از فروپاشی حکومت ساسانی: مطالعه موردی دارابگرد

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تاریخ پذیرش: ۸۹/۶/۲۱

دارابگرد یکی از شهرهای باستانی استان فارس بوده که تاریخ ساخت آن بر طبق اساطیر ایران، به زمان داراب شاه (داریوش اول هخامنشی) باز می‌گردد. با توجه به اینکه ۱,۲۱٪ از کل سفال‌های نمونه برداری شده از سطح محوطه به دوره اشکانی تعلق دارد، می‌توان پذیرفت که شهر از دوره اشکانی مسکون بوده و تا دوره اسلامی هم وضع به همین منوال بوده است.

نتایج حاصل از تجزیه و تحلیل داده‌های نمونه برداری شده از سطح محوطه، بیان‌کننده این نکته است که شهر دارابگرد در دوره ساسانی، استقراری متمرکز و پر قدرت داشته است؛ بعد از حاکمیت دوره اسلامی و شکست ارتش ایران و به دنبال آن تسخیر ایالت فارس و شهر دارابگرد، تغییراتی در عملکرد و کاربری فضاهاى شهر به وجود آمد. به این صورت که عمده استقرار به سمت نیمه شمالی شهر گرایش یافت و به احتمال زیاد از نیمه جنوبی شهر در دوره اسلامی، استفاده چندانی نشده است. در مجموع به نظر می‌آید که در دوره اسلامی، همان‌طور که در برخی دیگر از شهرهای اوایل دوره اسلامی نیز مشاهده شده است، شهر به سمت شمال (خارج از باروهای شهر دوره ساسانی) گسترش یافته و باید شواهد این گسترش را در اراضی شمالی باروی شهر جستجو نمود؛ جایی که متأسفانه امروزه اکثر مناطق آن به مزارع کشاورزی مبدل گشته است.

واژگان کلیدی: دارابگرد، فرم، فضا، عملکرد، ساسانی، اسلامی

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