
Jarmqāsān and Sardqāsān: Kashan in Ancient Sources

Hosein Imanian Bidgoli

Associate Professor, Department of Languages and Literature, University of Kashan, Kashan, Iran. Email: imanian@kashanu.ac.ir

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

Because of its position along the routes of the Iranian central plateau and its composition of desert and mountainous terrains, Kashan has been for long a strategic place in the political geography of Iran. In the early Islamic era, this area, particularly in Arabic writings, was described either as the rustaqs of Jarm-qasān or as Šard-qasān. It is plausible that these terms were already in circulation in pre-Islamic Iran. Down to the fourth and fifth centuries AH, references to the Kashan region employed these two designations. The term rustaq, roughly corresponds to “district,” typically comprising a number of villages (qaryāh). From the fourth century AH onwards, the two compound toponyms were gradually replaced with the single name, “Kashan.” A review of the sources from Islamic middle centuries shows that Kashan is no longer merely a rustaq subordinate to Isfahan or Qom but a town or madīna encompassing several villages.

Method and Materials

Drawing on a descriptive–analytical method and a close reading of Arabic and Persian texts from the second to the sixth centuries AH, this study seeks to determine both the chronology and the causes of the onomastic shift from Jarm-qasān and Šard-qasān to the unified name “Kashan.” After examining the etymology of jarm and šard in Persian and Arabic languages and referring to several regions in Iran that are divided into warm and cold sectors, this article turns to historical and geographical works in order to address three interrelated questions: from what period onward were the compound names Jarm-qasān and Šard-qasān—which referred to the warm and cold zones of Kashan—supplanted by “Kashan”? What factors underlay this change? And which villages were included under each of these two administrative units? Most of the sources consulted are in Arabic. Ibn al-Muqaffa’ appeared to be the first writer who employed these terms. Although his original text is not existing, the writer of Tārīkh Qom preserved his report. To establish the period during which the two names Jarm-qasān and Šard-qasān were replaced by “Kashan,” this study examined relevant written sources in chronological order.

Research Findings

The early Arabic and Persian sources indicated that in the second and third centuries AH, two rustaqs of Isfahan are designated as Jarm-qasān and Šard-qasān. From the mid-fourth century AH, however, these terms gradually diminished in prominence

and were replaced by references to “the rustaq/town of Kashan.” The hypothesis was that this onomastic shift reflected a change in the geographical and administrative status of the warm-zone part of Kashan; that is, over time, the locality known as “Kashan” acquired greater prestige and expanded in territory; thus, its specified name was applied to refer to both warm and cold divisions of the region. It was also likely that the elevation of the village of Kashan—originally one of the villages within either Jarm-qasān or Šard-qasān—to the rank of madīna was connected with the spread of Shi’ism and the patronage extended by Buyid rulers to this area.

During the first three centuries AH, the terms Jarm-qasān and Šard-qasān were used far more frequently, and these two rustaqs seemed to include all the villages of the wider Kashan region. Consequently, the individual constituent villages were rarely named in the sources of this period. It was inferred that the division of the greater Kashan region into warm and cold sectors, both before and after Islam, served primarily to facilitate tax collection. From the time when Kashan was introduced in sources as a rustaq or ʾasūj of Qom—approximately from the mid-fourth century AH—writers began to mention all or some of its villages and subordinate sections. As a result, the designations Jarm-qasān and Šard-qasān fell out of use, and the name “Kashan” was applied to both of the former large rural districts. It further appeared that, owing to the superior importance and status of the village of Kashan in the Sasanid period and after Islam, its name was extended to apply to entire warm and cold regions. Given the geographic position and the warm climate of present-day Kashan, the village of Kashan in the Sasanid and early Islamic periods could reasonably be regarded as belonging to the Jarm-qasān sector.

Despite later political subdivisions of the former Jarm-qasān and Šard-qasān—especially in the recent decades when the area has been divided into several counties—the region as a whole continued to exhibit largely homogeneous religious, ritual, and linguistic characteristics. In this sense, the current label of “the cultural region of Kashan” is well founded.

Conclusion

It may be argued that the incorporation of several surrounding villages into Kashan, the expansion of Shi’ism—particularly in central Kashan—and the economic prosperity of the area collectively contributed to the abandonment of the dual rustaqs of warm and cold Kashan in favor of the single name of “Kashan,” signifying a town comprising multiple villages. Ibn al-Muqaffa’ appears to have been the first to employ the terms Jarm-qasān and Šard-qasān. Since he translated Pahlavi works, it is plausible that these names were already current in the pre-Islamic period, perhaps as part of an administrative system aimed at facilitating tax collection. It is also likely that the spread of Shi’ism in central Kashan, in contrast to the surrounding villages, enhanced its prosperity and standing in the eye of the Shi’i regime of the Buyid, thereby turning Kashan into a madīna that overshadowed its rural hinterland. This development seemed to have coincided with Kashan’s economic flourishing and the expansion of its textile production and trade, a concurrence that played a decisive role in its transformation from two rustaqs into a relatively large madīna.

Keywords: Qāsān, Kāshān, Garmsir (warm region), Sardsir (cold region), Rustāq (district), Madīna (city)