

Water, rest, and production in Kashan: small infrastructures of territorial fitting

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Kashan, a historic city on the edge of Iran's central desert, is often approached through its merchant houses, bazaar, and Fin Garden. This paper proposes a different reading. It examines Kashan through a set of small and medium-scale infrastructures that regulated water, movement, rest, and production in a hot-arid environment: ab-anbars, caravanserais, and peri-urban watermills. Rather than treating these elements as isolated building types, the paper reads them as a dispersed architecture of territorial fitting, through which the city negotiated water scarcity, seasonal heat, agrarian production, and regional mobility.

The paper develops this argument through an architectural and urban-historical reading of Kashan and its surrounding territory. Ab-anbars are considered as infrastructures of storage and collective access to water, linking underground construction, thermal moderation, and shared practices of use and maintenance. Caravanserais are examined as architectures of rest, exchange, and movement, connecting the urban fabric to regional routes and to the practical needs of travellers, animals, goods, and water supply. Watermills, particularly those associated with water routes around Fin, Qohrud, Barzok, Ravand, and the agricultural edges of Kashan, extend this logic from storage and mobility to production.

Seen in this light, Kashan appears not only as a city of houses and monuments, but also as a multi-scalar system of modest architectures that sustained life between the city, its routes, and its agrarian hinterland. By foregrounding these less visible infrastructures, the paper brings a historical Iranian case into the conference discussion on scale, resource limits, and place-based architectural knowledge. It argues that fitting can be understood not as a fixed formal property, but as an architectural capacity to mediate between environment, use, and territory.