
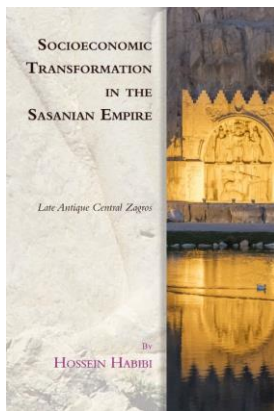


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**Hossein Habibi, Socioeconomic Transformation
in the Sasanian Empire. Late Antique Central Zagros.
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The book by Hossein H(abibi), is a result of the project “The Central Zagros during Late Antiquity: Socio-economic Transition” executed in the frames of the postdoctoral fellowship (September 2018 – June 2019) at the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities at the University of Edinburgh.

The Author focuses his research on highlighting the Sasanian settlement patterns in the Central Zagros region of the Late Antique. H. set himself the ambitious task of challenging the “false generalisations and dichotomies, both in ancient foreign Mesopotamian and Greco-Roman literary traditions and modern literature” (XIV).

Although his study regards the history, especially the social and economic history, H. himself highlights that the historical research is present in the work only marginally (XV). The source foundation of ten analyses carried out are the archaeological materials and it is in their context the political and administrative geography is researched.

The first part of the monograph (ch. 1, 1–26), is an introduction, outlines the geographical-climatic environment and contemporary “Human Geography” of the studied region (ch. 1.1, 1–5). In this section H. defines the main objectives and explains the methodological framework emphasising the interdisciplinary nature of his research. H. also provides a definition of the term “landscape archaeology” (ch. 1.2,

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5–12), provides a brief description of the economy of the Sasanian state, limited only to aspects relevant in his assessment to the research carried out (ch. 1.3, 12–20) and lists the archaeological sites of the studied region (ch. 1.4, 20–22). The introduction closes with a section entitled “Structure of the book” (ch. 1.5, 22–23), however, H. does not present the structure of the monograph there, but discusses anew the methodology of his research.

The main part of the monograph was divided into 4 chapters (each chapter of the work begins with a very short introduction and ends with a conclusion). The chapter “The Historical Geography of the Central Zagros” (ch. 2, 27–86), being an introduction of sorts, consists of 3 sections, in the division of which H. adopted a chronological factor: the 3rd and 2nd millennium BCE (ch. 2.2, 28–39), the 1st millennium BCE (ch. 2.3, 39–64) and period of the Sasanian Empire (ch. 2.4, 64–68).

The first two sections, which are encyclopaedic, one might even say more “bibliographical”, descriptions of the history of the Central Zagros, add nothing to the research, although the excellent knowledge of the literature by the Author must be appreciated.

The surprising disproportion in the volume of the different sections of this chapter should be highlighted. The description of the “pre-Sasanian” period takes up 36 pages (28–64), while the historical context of the region during the Sasanian period is included by H. in 5(!) pages (64–68).

It would benefit the reader if the third section, entitled by H. “Integration into the Sasanian Empire”, was expanded, especially since the monograph, as its title indicates, deals with the Central Zagros during Late Antiquity, i.e. the Sasanian period.

Admittedly H. wrote: “In terms of administrative and political geography, the Sasanian era may be divided into two main sub-periods: early Sasanian (from the foundation of the state in 224 CE up until the second enthronement of Kawād I in 499 CE) and late Sasanian (from the sixth to the first half of the seventh century)” (64), but H. did not introduce a clear distinction of these two sub-periods in this section.

Moreover, with regard to the first of the sub-periods, H. only mentions the monumental inscriptions of the 3rd century CE (ŠKZ, KKZ and NPi), he also enigmatically mentions “along with some official seals and seal impressions”(64).

The foundation for the description of the second of the sub-periods are the groundbreaking studies by Rika Gyselen (1989, 2019) regarding the administrative seals of the 6th-first half of the 7th century CE. Although the Author mentioned the literary sources the *Šahrestānīhā-ī Ērānšahr* and the *Ašxarhac‘oyc‘* (Armenian Geography), the key discussion of the geographical quadripartition of *Ērānšahr*, was missing, and he summed up the problem in one sentence “However, these documents

bear different opinions regarding territorial divisions, and hence they place some of the same areas of the Central Zagros in different kust”.

One gets the impression that this section, is only a presentation of a fragment of R. Gyselen’s research. H. did not refer to the reflections contained in the work of Michael Richard Jackson Bonner (2011, see especially 81–84), which H. includes in the bibliography. Surprisingly, H. also omitted the monograph by Eduard Khurshudian, which was published in both German (1998), and Russian (2015). Further, surprising is just remote mention of the seminal work of Parvaneh Pourshariati (2008), which H. cites only one time in note 63 on the page 83: “Pourshariati 2008, who rejected the Christesenian [maybe better: of Christensen? – K.M.] opinion ... in favour of an unconcentrated dynastic confederacy system – an idea, however, that has its own deficiencies”, without an explanation of what H., in the context of his research, considers to be these alleged “deficiencies”.

Especially interesting are the chapters “A System at the Edge of Chaos: Abdanan in the Sasanian Period” (ch. 3, 87–145), and “Pastoral Nomadism in the Iranian Highlands during Late Antiquity: The Case of Farsan” (ch. 4, 146–182). They are the core of the research presented. The structure of both chapters is similar, covering, in addition to the introduction and conclusion (which was mentioned above): “Geography of the region”, “Earlier research”, “Categories of the sites” / “Settlement systems”, “Sasanian settlement pattern” (A section being a very precise and detailed grouping of archaeological sites in both regions), and “Evaluation”.

H. presented two case studies analysing settlements in Abdanan County (106 Sasanian sites) and Farsan County (29 Sasanian sites). Two plain located in the Zagros, but in its discrete parts.

The archaeological survey is supplemented by chapter “Sasanian Pottery from the Central Zagros: Interactive Local Traditions” (ch. 4, 183–210) discussing pottery wares found in Abdanan and the Bakhtiyari Highlands in considered by way of comparison with ceramics from other regions of the Sasanian state.

The final conclusions were included in the chapter “Conclusion. The Multifaceted Landscape of the Central Zagros during the Sasanian Period and its Socioeconomic Transformation” (ch. 6, 211–218). H. convincingly justifies in it that Abdanan and Farsan were not geographically isolated areas. One must agree with the statement that “The strategic location of both of the sample areas, their inter-regional roads, and nomadic populations, along with the central Sasanian geographical and political administration, were all factors incorporating this phenomenon.” (213)

The book ends with three appendices, each being a supplement of the main chapters. Two of them are the lists of archaeological sites respectfully of Abdanan County (App. 1, 219–224) and Farsan County (App. 2, 225–228), the third is the catalogues of the pottery discussed in the chapter 5 (App. 3, 228–292), extensive bibliography (293–366) and general index (367–382).

The above remarks do not, however, undermine the great value of this monograph. The great merit of Habibi is that he has offered a novel perspective on the reconstruction of sociopolitical transitions in the Late Antiquity. It is important to emphasize here the enormous amount of work done by H. in gathering the source base. The monograph contains abundant illustrative material in the form of both photographs, maps and graphs made by the Author.

The Edinburgh University Press must also be acknowledged for their extremely careful editing of this book, which will undoubtedly become a reference for further research.

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