The Formation of Seleucid Empire and its Effects on Parthian Urbanism

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ABSTRACT

Perhaps the most important heritage of Seleucid Empire in Iran is development of urbanism and architecture which took place as result of notions: Firstly, serving as places for the accommodation of Greek and Macedonian emigrants in the form of colonies and poleis and also for the formation of self-governed cities and, secondly, architecture, which was at the service of religion until that time, covered a range of areas including politics, religion, and economics. Generally, it can be proposed that urbanism in Iran saw a more serious phase of itself after Alexander’s attack to this country. At this time, since Alexander had plundered enormous treasures from Archaemenid Empire, his successors developed urbanism. Definitely, such big economic and social changes, followed by a trade development, led Iranian cities to go from a totally agricultural and military position to an agricultural and commercial one, which continued until Sasanian era. Evidences remained from Parthian Empire and even Sasanian Empire all include texts written by Greeks and Romans, except for few short inscriptions written on leather and pottery posts found in Nisa which go back to Parthians. Many scientists have so far announced many of these texts to be contradictory and invalid. Things have been so exaggerated that, say, such vast culture and urbanization as that of Parthian was never capable of creation. This was never noted that cultural bases of Iran and Greece were different from each other in a number of aspects and Iranian deemed Greeks as predators. A glance at the history of this era shows that most parts of Iran, especially eastern and north-eastern parts, were constantly in struggle with Alexander and his successors. How could Iranians, who conceived of Alexander and the Greeks as extinguishers of their religious scripts and who could not forget Alexander’s massacre, accept a dominant culture? How could they forget their own culture? Texts documented by many western scientists indicate that many Greeks who were residents of Iran lived in their own special cities and colonies, departed from natives. This has been true, even, in large and main cities where the two communities lived in separate places.

INTRODUCTION

With collapse of Archaemenid Empire by Alexander the Great and occupancy of its territory, a changing phase was begun in system and shape of Urbanism in Iran. Seleucid chose fertile lands with a capacity for military purposes in order to create new cities. Seleucid Empire was a period of a great historical experience and creation of self-governed cities, like those in Greece, and quick development of urbanism. These self-governed cities were categorized into different ways:
1. Newly established cities by Greeks
2. Transformed Iranian cities
3. Cities shaped from villages and towns
4. Military colonies which, if promoted, received the title “Persepolis”

In this era, city got form and discipline and urban design. In this way, city had squares and flat streets. Here, people became familiar with the concept of “street”. Ninety-degree intersections (indicators of discipline) were prevalent in this era. City had a hierarchical position and new elements such as parliaments, schools, squares, stadiums, and bathrooms were evident; but, this new way of thought never gained its acceptability in Iran and
this was due to the fact that Iranian culture was dissimilar with that of Greece and its infrastructures were different in terms of culture, society, etc.

Parthian understood Hellenization through Greco-Bactrian culture and Greek cities. Among all, they preferred Feudalism which was a Greek invention and, also, similar to Arian’s dynastic buildings. Parthian community were dependent on nobles, head masters, and power of dynasties’ heads in terms of owing inherited lands. This structure was developed and expanded all over the state. Parthian has been known to be the initiator of urbanism development based on political and social matters. In the present study, attempts have been made to investigate the relationship between Iranian and Greek cultures and how the latter affected Parthian urbanism. This will be done through a historical pass from Seleucid Empire to Parthian Empire, out of which following research questions can be formulated:

Main Research Question: (Research Problem):
To what extent has Parthian art of urbanism been under the influence of Greek (Seleucid) urbanism?

Peripheral Research Question:
1. What hierarchies were involved in Parthian Style?
2. What were the influential factors of Greek (Seleucid) urbanism on Parthian art of urbanism?

For a better comprehension of the problem, answers need to be put to peripheral questions:
1. Parthians tried their best to eradicate those concepts imported from Greece by merging Persian-Hellenized city-states with inhibited area around them, through removal of socio-cultural and economic inequalities between the city and the village, and finally by revocation of city-states. In this way, they could more easily shift to native Persian concepts of all aspects, including living, production, and updating them. This retrospective shift led to a method of inhabiting and living that can be named “Parthian Style”.
2. Regarding history of constant clashed between Greek and Iranian governments, premises for such changes were provided. Here, role of culture and social relations, religion, and commerce must not be overlooked.

Taking a survey into the history of city formation, we would come to the conclusion that human being had found its ways from nomadic life into inhabiting in certain lands, only after he has known agriculture and land ascendency. Urbanism might not be investigated and considered in a definite period of time, since formation of a structure regularly happens through a constant process and therefore looking into Old Iranian urbanism in a definite period of time is not fair enough. This is because such approach is one that is frozen in a particular time period, just like investigating a piece of movie separated from other parts. Therefore, in the present study, attempts have been made to pay more attention to urbanism in a particular period of time, while noting its constant development. Historical, cultural, economic, social, and environment factors are very influential in formation of architectural and urbanism works.

Iranian Urban Society before Parthian Empire:
Ancient Time and its Stages:
Process of urbanism can be investigated in five historical stages, which are simultaneous with governments. Ancient time started from about 900 BC and lasted until 700 AC. Median Empire started with the advent of urban civilization in Iran which was from 900 BC until 700 BC. Archaemenid Empire covers 700 BC to 400 BC which was replaced by Seleucid in 300 BC. Parthian Empire rule the country from 300 BC to 300 AC. After that, up to 700 AC which is simultaneous with Muslim’s attacks to Iran, Islamic urbanism started in Iran. Sasanian gain power in ancient era. [14]

Four stages of ancient time, i.e. from Medes to Parthians, was followed by three important urbanism styles: Pars Urbanism Style, Persian-Hellenized middle Style, and Parthian Style.

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<th>Style</th>
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<td>Pars Urbanism Style</td>
<td>Started from 900 BC and maintained up to 400 BC, with the establishment of Ecbatana and reached its pinnacle with formation of Shush, Estakhr, and Pasargadae. Creation of “city-temple” and “city-power” of Persepolis is an elevated indication of a shift in concepts and meanings which were received from Mesopotamia civilization. This method made a great step in global civilization in merging and matching of three main issues of worldview, economy, and environment. Alexander’s attack to Iran (in 300 BC) points the end of this way of inhabitation.</td>
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<td>Persian-Hellenized Middle Style</td>
<td>This is a period of merging and compounding of two Iranian and Greek Urbanism and establishment of self-governed cities. This period was begun in 300 BC and is simultaneous with Seleucid Empire in Iran. “Persian-Hellenized city” like “Persian Shar” and Greek state-city became a center for the inhabitation of elite classes of...</td>
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the society. In this city, Greek nobles and local people around them are inhibited, plus those who are followers of Seleucid Government. Others inhibit not in the city but in areas around it.

| Parthian Style | After the relief of Archaemenids from Alexander’s domination, this method of urbanism begun, reached its peak in Sasanian Era, and started to fail with Arabs’ attack to Iran. Great attention has been paid to Bazaar in this era. Standing against materialistic and spiritual concepts of city-states established by Greek commanders and struggling for revival of native production led to another method of architecture and urbanism which took all building under its influence. |

Three above mentioned historical stages (different governing systems) include three different stages in urbanism of ancient time:

First – A stage of formation and development of the notion of city, whose growth was in Medes era and proud in Archaemenid era (ultimate finalization of Persian Style): in this stage, a total pass was seen from production and living method and also from socio-economic tribal structure. The consequence of this pass was government formation and its placement above all socio-economic organizations. The state announced its spatial-skeletal blossoming through creation of the city. “city-temple” was a salient result of this spatial blossoming.

Second – a stage of the creation of “new cities” and an experience of urban network organization in spatial management of the country: this stage is accompanied by “urbanism” thought imposed by Greek commanders in order to create a secure support for their conquests. In this way, Greece-like “city-states” are established. Seleucid government, having a violent, centralized, and superior to Medes and Archaemenid, played a significant historical role in spatial organization of the country. This was a novel experience in foundation of new cities having both concepts of Greek “city-state” and Persian “city-power”.

Third – a stage of the formation of strategic new-cities and generalization of the concept of city to a region above its skeletal boundaries: in this stage, also, a new attitude was put toward spatial organization of the country. Defending country was on the part of cities and regions near boundaries and internal cities adopt a new definition. Formation of violent centralized empire of Parthian distinguishes between concepts of “city-state” and “city-power” popular in Seleucid era and put more focus on “city-power”. Formation of a violent empire superior to Sasanian removes final signs of Greek “state-city” and, focusing on social organization of production, talks of city as a regional concept. [5]

History of City and Urbanism in Seleucid Era:

Seleucid Empire was a hierarchy formed in Anatolia Eyalet with a Macedonia-Greece element and named after its founder Seleucus. In 312 BC, this empire was initiated. After conquering all regions of Anatolia Eyalet by Seleucus, this empire was announced as successor to Macedonian Empire which was ruled by Alexander. Seleucid is an empire in which administrative, religious, and political system were totally transformed. Seleucid people were completely familiar with Greek culture and attempted to Hellenize eastern world.

Seleucus, the first, granted political unity to his empire. In his period, country boundaries expanded, but after his death Seleucid was divided into parts due to unsophisticated rulers. Constant struggle with Romans, Egyptians, and Parthians, in one hand, and dictatorship of rulers and oppression imposed on people in some area, on the other hand, led to the collapse of this empire after 145 years of ruling. Seleucid Empire which included Iranian, ancient Babel, Phoenicia, and cities of Anatolia Eyalet – like Archaemenid Empire – was a compound empire. [16]
Economic Structure of Seleucid Era:

Alexander’s Empire was a real revolution in terms of economy. For the first time, farthest parts of the world could be connected to each other. Invention of coins was very effective in this era. Treasures gained as a result of conquest were so significant that gold and golden were 50 times devalued, which was unbelievable in world history. An unpredictable balance was created between salary and price and this caused promotion of people’s welfare. [16]

Appropriate premises were created for trade of goods and active commerce between people living in Seleucid era. This preliminarily help foundation of economy. In Seleucid Empire, this beneficial and active economy, development in industry, and far-fetched commercial exchanges had put great responsibility on shoulders of Greek poleis. Seleucid is famous for great development of all kinds of plants. They made infertile lands fertile by plowing and drainage of new lands. [16]

All country lands were divided into two basic categories: the king’s land and urban land. King’s lands were enormously vast since government had made large proportion of lands for itself by a right to capture and seizure lands using guns. [9] In some resources, mention has been made of a third category which was owned by Greek temples. A religious construction was made to manage land affairs of Seleucid temples. The spiritual emir had servitors with different religious-spiritual degrees. [7]

Organizational Structure of Seleucid Era:

Seleucid political organization was an amalgamation of Greek and Archaemenid elements. In this system, like any system in eastern world, king was the absolute power and divine. [1] At the head of the state, there was a Satrap who was a mediator between God and people in that area. King did not interfere in affairs inside a city and they were managed and acted by city council. [2] Management of Seleucid cities, which also owned polis right, was known to be fulfilled by senates. Three hundred people were chosen based on wealth and logic. These people were representatives of people’s power and its safeguard. This mass were those nobles who had a very responsibility of managing cities. [3] Seleucid cities followed the King and Satraps could directly refer to the king in case of a problem. Often, king’s letters were deemed as important documents which written on a piece of silver stone installed in central square of Agora.[6]

Culture and Art in Seleucid Era:

Art, in a period between Archaemenid Empire and seizure of Iran by Parthians about two centuries ago, has not yet been known well. Objects related to that period are rare beside very few buildings that exist from that time. [16] Artworks lack consistency and installment and represent a deep revolution in Iranian civilization. They can be divided into three category:
- Part of artworks has merely an Iranian color, for example “Nour-Abad” whose architecture had followed Archaemenid temples.
- One other part of artworks are indicators of a merging of Greek and Iranian arts. This can be seen in remains of temples in Estakhr.
- Third part of artworks in this era are arts that are mostly Greek: such as Temple of Anahita, Kangavar, whose internal design were after Greek architecture. [10]

Urbanism in Seleucid Era:

After the collapse of Archaemenid Empire by Alexander and seizure of the territory by him, a starting point in urbanism system and its form was initiated. Alexander had always attempted to expand a culture of new-buildings in areas he ruled and knew that an easier way to do this was possible through centralizing sporadic population into few centers. In this way, he tried to develop urbanism and began establishing different cities. Seleucid people chose fertile lands appropriate for military purposes for creating new cities. Greeks’ policy was imposing a change in state under their dominance and this was often done through development of urban life, applying changes in urbanism and promoting it. This was then followed in Parthian era. In Seleucid era, a great historical change was made and self-governed cities in Grecian style and fast development of urbanism. These self-governed cities fell into some categories: one category included cities that existed in advance and Greeks made them promoted. The second were new cities established by Seleucid people after Alexander. These cities served as place for occupying immigrants. Other than these two categories, they recognized some villages as being capable of becoming cities which they transformed into cities. Or they promoted towns and drew a fence around them. They granted polis rights (city-state) to city center and the citizens. Fourth category were some military colonies which had polis rights and were granted title of ‘city’.

So, cities can be divided into four groups:
1. Newly-established cities by the Greeks
2. Transformed Iranian cities
3. Villages and towns transformed to cities
4. Military colonies which got promotion and received the title of ‘city’.
Since Seleucid and Parthian Eras, forms of cities were based on following relatively defined principles. Some cities were formed in a shape of a chess. Often, these cities had two main crossroads and other streets and alleys were in parallel with them. Such design go back to ancient Egypt and they can be deemed as the outcome of minds of those who were familiar with agriculture, land division, and irrigation networks.\[13\] what is noteworthy in this era is the effect of Greek culture, art, architecture and urbanism. In addition, amalgamation of two different viewpoints can be seen: a system (Seleucid Empire) is the absolute power and dominant, while the other is noble’s democracy. Alexander attacked Iran and fired Persepolis at the time of Darius, the third. His commanders governed Iran, having a foreign ideology with themselves. Transforming Iranian cities in Seleucid Style was not an easy job, due to tribes and tribal councils. This problem was even worth when cities had to be divided into different local places with separate municipalities and stadiums. In this sense, cities were categorized into self-governed and semi-self-governed ones. Cities’ economical role was agriculture and animal husbandry. Homogeneity of different markets, money popularity, application of methods of agriculture and distribution among farmers are among important indexes of this period. Despite all these arrangements, Seleucid policies never went deep in Iranian society.

Generally speaking, principles of urban planning, urbanism policy, and spatial structures in Seleucid era can be investigated through the following points:

1. One urbanism activity in Seleucid was establishing newly built cities and towns using Greek Style and Chess network of Hippodamus, which was mainly done to strengthen power and preserve Seleucid territory. This type of urban centers were regularly military “colonies” whose residents were mostly armies. For this reason, they were granted a number privileges, such as self-governing, and could be located along very important strategic roads. Although, in comparison with other countries of Anatolia Eyalet, Iran and Mesopotamia were less exposed to Greeks’ conquests, historical resources have noted that many new towns and cities have been established by them in these two countries. In some resources, establishment of 70 cities in Iran has been allocated to Alexander and Seleucid Era. Among these, 9 cities have been established in banks of Persian Gulf, including Entakieh Pars. Seleucids established Qumis (near Damqan) which then became a capital in Parthian Era. This city employs the most salient elements of Greek urbanism in its structure. This process of urbanism has limited ranges, but two consequences have followed it in Iranian urbanism:

a) Regarding social matters, this has led to urbanism colonization, which was a result of occupying Greek immigrants in newly established cities.

b) Regarding urbanism, it caused Hellenized urbanism. Fundamental properties of this method were city management in the form of self-governed city-states and designing of city roads according to chess network of Hippodamus. \[14\]

2. Another activity of Seleucid urbanism was rebuilding of many central cities and ancient village-cities using Greek urbanism. An important element that has been introduced in this type of cities which is a replication of Greek cities, is the existence of square as a social and public place. This element was added to skeletal structure of cities. This square, like its first model in Agora, is a center of cultural, commercial, and organizational exchanges. All main buildings and constructions of a “Persian-Hellenized” city centers around this square. It is like if this square serves as a center for the realization of city dominance on surrounded areas. However, this square is a representation and validation of Seleucid Empire. Since, in this type of cities Medonian and Greek were not noteworthy, these were often governed as poleis(self-governed city-states) and they did not use its rights and privileges. Meanwhile, in historical resources, only self-governance of Shush has been rectified. The reason for this can be its geographical position which, in relation to its realm of effectivity, has been appropriate to be transformed into a polis. In Seleucid, which lasted less than a century, city and urbanism continued its way to development but annulled it through a pass period from a native Iranian style to a compound style, i.e. Persian-Hellenized, and left artworks and evidences of skeletal organization in many different spots of the country. \[14\]

Persian-Hellenized city was located in where it would be:

1. along or near communication or main roads.
2. Along a military citadel or an ancient city of the region, which was full of surrounded villages.

Therefore, “Persian-Hellenized city” is a military city in its initiating points; a city that was formed on the basis of Greek city-state; its residents are either Greek or natives located in a social circle of followers of Seleucid Empire. \[5\]

**History of city and urbanism in Parthian Era:**

Parthians belong to Parni tribe – which was a part of Dahae tribe. Dahae was a set of scythain tribes who were nomadic and lived in steppes between Khazar Sea and Aral Sea.\[16\] When Parthians started to exist, whole Iran was under the governance of Greek Seleucids who had made cities of their own in this country, the most important of which was Seleucia near Tigris River. Since Parthians were like Iranians, they behaved kindly with peoples with all religions and from all nations and named themselves “fil-hellen” which meant “friend of
Contrast of self-governed Persian-Hellenized cities with Seleucid Empire, which was more of a fundamental issue rather than a superficial one, led this contrast to contradiction. Seleucid Empire which was, in one hand, in struggle with newly-established state of Rome and, on other hand, in contradiction with its own self-governed cities, starts to divide gradually. This division became faster by constant uprisings of tribes and finally results in its total collapse. [5]

Tribal communities could succeed to vast Parthian boundaries with the help of village societies and some parts of urban communities – parts which were deemed as “foreigners” and not “citizens”. Referring to Archaemenid Empire, this empire quickly changed its tribal and state organization and made a totally new formation of that. Making use of Seleucid experience, this empire succeeded to create a centralized state for the first and the last time, which was based on coordination of dynasties. It was the only centralized and, at the same time, decentralized government established in Iran at that time. Coordination and homogeneity of three communities under the dominance of this empire led this empire to rule the country for near six centuries, promote trade, promote goods and financial communication and in this way accelerate urbanism. [5]

In 212 BC, a set of uprisings and turmoil began in Iran which put an end to Parthians. This set of uprisings was first in the form of small local struggles between heads of states near Pars, which was independent at that time. [8]

Boundaries of Parthian Empire

What gradually emaciated this empire was home wars. The empire was old enough and wars inside it moved it towards emaciation and collapse. [11]

Parthian Empire was like a pyramid on top of which existed kings, below which satraps, i.e. states’ governors, below which nobles and then Greek merchants were placed; and at the bottom of this pyramid farmers were seen, tolerating the heaviness of this pyramid. [12]

In this era, people were divided into five categories: great owners (king and those around him) - Magis and clergies – state officers – tradesmen and possessors – villagers and farmers. [9]

Clan and dynasty was very important in the monarchy. Nobles could only rule over Parthians’ dynasty. Kings were chosen from among two Parthian councils, one of which was comprised of relatives and clan while the other was comprised of intellectuals and Magis. [15] In Parthian Era, Magis and druids were not powerful. Unlike Sasanian Empire, they did not form a great and powerful social class. However, it is said that religious heads had meetings which were held in parallel with grandees meetings (including heads and headmasters of great tribes), but they were not that powerful, [15] Tradesmen and farmers had small lands and villagers were among low class of the society. However, abovementioned groups were in a low level in terms of socio-economic position. Slaves and foreigners comprised another social group. Slave events in this era had not a decisive role in economic position of the country because their force and power was mostly used in chores and sometimes in agriculture, king workshops, and temples. Slave laboring has been observed more in Greek cities of Durham, while it has been less in other parts of the country. Majority of slaves were war captives and foreigners. [13]

Although it is impossible to overlook the struggle of tribal elements in cities, undoubtedly the importance of social classes was superior. A system based on military purposes in which dominant classes that owed slaves were comprised of Greeks and Macedonians. This was because, since Alexander’s conquests, immigrants
regularly married local people. Iranians and Suriens covered a great number of social classes owning slaves and were involved in city management and members of heads councils and nobles governing poleis. As a result, struggle in cities was in the form of tribal wars. Inside the city, there were huge amounts of residents who were like slaves. These uprisings were the result of struggle between classes and slavery in cities. Few were great local representatives who were Iranian, were among nobles and mixed with Greeks. Conglomeration of tribal elements in slave class was a reason for the growth of noble owning slaves in the cities. This led to a status in which noble community who were connected to head councils and noble governors oppose other social classes in the society and also cause contention among different groups. [3]

Amalgamation of Persian-Hellenized city-states with surrounded areas, removal of socio-cultural and economic-political inequalities between this two types of living places, imposition of self-governance by city-states, etc. are consequences of determined decision of Parthian Empire for the blossoming of Greek concepts in the society. Retrospective movement toward native concepts – particularly Persian Style – in all aspects of life and production and their updates lead Parthian Empire to organize a totally different form of establishment and living. [5]

**Economic structure of Parthian Era:**

After Parthians were established, socio-economic changes in the country, unlike Seleucid Era, became gradual and slow. Commerce was playing such a significant role that they never allowed other states to endanger it. [1] One other salient feature of Parthian governors was revival and reproduction of ancient methods, under which production was increased. [3] agriculture and commerce formed the basis of Parthian’s Empire, while industry was not that important. [16]

Constant presence of representatives of tribal and village representatives in the city caused maximum interweaving of three tribal, villagers, and urban societies. Besides serving the main center of exchange and industry, the city was involved in agriculture, too. Village, not only as an element in contrast to city, but also it serves as complementary element of the city in trade and industry. In this vein, the concept of “Parthian Shar” equals to what it meant in “Persian Shar”.

**Organizational structure in Parthian Era:**

At first, Parthians accepted country divisions of Seleucid Era, which was itself divisions of large provinces by Archaemenids. [3]This great state was governed by governors or Satraps who were at the top of the country. In the contingency of Parthian Empire existed small governors who ruled some states as representatives of local noble dynasties. It was governing Mesopotamia and dominance on Central Asia that had gained importance for Parthian Empire. [4]

Organizational system of cities was managed by parties and councils. Parthian city in this era was the main element of its political existence. City is the crucial place of the state’s decision making and consultation of dynastic elements. Conclusion of public thoughts in the city led to critical decisions in many cases. In addition, city can make decisions about the King – as the symbol of the state.

**Culture and art in Parthian Era:**

In Greek cities (new Seleucid cities), which were established near permanent garrison, the formal language was Greek and Iranians were strongly involved with learning Greek. This type of implications are bewildering a lot. For example, if Iranian were familiar with Greek, nowadays, we would have a wider repertoire of Greek, rather than few economic words such as Dinar (Denarius) and /sim/ (silver) and few others. Furthermore, regarding art, Iranian culture could not accept many elements of Greek art; despite great demand of Archaemenid and Parthian architecture on Greek art, Iranian culture could not accept it except for Corinthian order in Khureh.

One policy of Parthians in confronting with Greek culture was their superficial preservation. Using Greek as an international language is an evidence of that. Perhaps, the most important phenomenon of this era was mixture of their tribes and cities. Reduction of social and materialistic distance between organizational, political, and military classes and common people, i.e. working class, resulted in changes in people’s lives and urbanism. Still urbanism in Hamedan (Ecbatana), Babel, and Shush is a valuable heritage, based on which Parthian urbanism was defined and Parthian architecture designed.

Now, everything is indicator of the fact that Iranian were defeated by Alexander, but never turn face from their own culture. In the small square, Greek handwriting has gained great importance only because Parthian handwriting was not paid attention. In coins on which all figures are Parthian with no similarity to Greeks, the first thing to be noted is fire, fireplace, and Iranian clothes with ArchaemenidShalgh (popular Archaemenid clothes). On Gulden with the figure of Arsaces I, cultural contest is obvious, which is an imitation of Greek gulden, but here an archer is sitting on a chair holding an arch and wearing plain-climbing clothes has replaced Apollo sitting behind a shield. On his guldens, MithridatesI shows himself a lover of Greeks, but this can also be the result of a political impetus.
Urbanism in Parthian Era:

Lands under the governance of Parthian Empire were of two kinds; one kind, which had a governor, was managed by the center, and the other were cities under the control of Parthian, which had king. Three councils were in charge of appointing state leaders. One was king’s family, the other the tribe or religion leaders, and the third was an amalgamation of these two, which together formed a “Mahestan”. In Parthian Era, the country was divided into small states which were as big as Seleucid Satraps. In this Era, organizational system of the country was based on parties and councils. Further, some cities were in the form of a caravan, called “caravan cities”.

Parthian Empire lasted for 470 years in Iran, during which 29 Arsaceses governed the country. Parthian capitals were Ctesiphon and Seleucia. At the beginning of the establishment of Nisa city-state, near present Ashgabat, and Dargaz, near Abiward, were king’s residences, while in summer when king left Babel to Medes, Parthia, and Gorgan, sometimes Ecbatana and sometimes Hecatompylos served as residences of the monarchy. Undoubtedly, feudal system which led to lack of power centrality, clan disagreement, contradiction of Mobads were factors for the emaciation of this empire. Also, western and eastern wars during five centuries can have also helped this ending.

Main results of the Empire were defending Iran against destroying attacks from eastern tribes and maintenance of its totality against Roman’s violations.

Parthian Empire destroyed Seleucid’s skeletal organization and demolished its symbol, i.e. Persian-Hellenized city. It coalesced city with its surrounding area and preferred environmental discipline over logical and preplanned one. For the first in the history, circular cities were formed in this era, such as Nisa and Firouz-Abad. Like Persian Style Shar, Parthian Style Shar embodied parts such as governmental citadel, middle Shar, and outside Shar. These concepts were similar to those of Persian Shar. [5]

In urbanism, Parthians replaced Chess Style with Circle Style so as to reach greater security. As it was previously mentioned, this era saw many internal clashes. Circle cities can be defended better than a square one. This urbanism style continued until Sasanian and Islam eras. In addition, bazaar existed though without a certain shape. (They were semi-bazaar and seasonal). Also, Greek notion of city had some influences on Parthain cities, but this was not as much as those in Seleucid Era. [15]

Babel texts and artworks are indicators of the claim that, since Greek civilization, Parthians were Greek advocates so that guldens in that era are engraved with Greek calligraphy and Mithridates the great is known as a friend of Greece. In this way, in Parthian governance, Greek immigrants did not exist and even this tribe, though nomadic, established cities, including Ctesiphon, and chose them as capital. Also, in Babel, there are instances of Parthian urbanism. Parthian city of Ashur was established on ruined remaining of Ashur, the ancient capital, and was destroyed in 116 by Trojans. Parthian kings ordered the establishment of this city in 100 BC, and it was built by Iranian. Iranian ancient style of architecture in this era is semi-circle roofs, subsequently transferred from Khorasan to Mesopotamia. This type of roofing on big porches characterized Parthian magnificent buildings in history of architecture.

In some cases, Greek immigrants intermingled with natives and formed a common community. Also, they sometimes created new gatherings near old cities. Parthian urbanism art in streets is inspired by Greek art and has a Greek way of thought. On the other hand, many Parthian cities adopted an organic growth that had mostly Greek inhabitants. Some cities in this era have pre-designed architecture, many of which have developed, while others have either transformed to villages or ruined. Also, some have been relocated. Cities made by Greeks were mostly square and four-sided, unlike Parthians who built them like a square. They built fortification around it, with leaving places at the stone gate for archers, and groups of shooters. Often, these citadels and cities had two internal or external walls, between which there was a moat. The citadel was either placed in one corner or at the center of the city. At one corner of the city there was an entrance.

Most of these citadels and cities had an entrance near the citadel. All these cities had citadels and these citadel went back to old times when Archaemenid transformed and gradually developed them into cities. Investigating cities of that era, they came to the conclusion that cities could be divided into three main parts: a citadel at the height, nobles’ houses, and placement of agricultural community. All types were surrounded by fences.

The most popular method of urbanism of that era was Chess Style and perpendicular streets. Commercial centers, i.e. industry and market people, were located along the way to the gate. Building materials were plaster, mud, bricks, and adobes. Although Parthians could make great changes into urban planning, but one can still see traces of Seleucid urbanism. Spatial-skeletal organization of internal Shar is, more or less, what was in Persian Shar:

1) Governmental citadel: A symbol of Parthian Empire and an important trace of Parthian city-power comprised of castles, temples, courts, official and military installations, and gun and food storehouses. Governmental citadel was a symbol of unity and social agreement (dynasties and three tribal, villagers, and urban societies) and like always was a strategic point. Old citadel was an important section in official-political cities before Islam, also a residence for kings, governors, and courtiers. This section was usually placed on a central and the best spot of the city and was higher than other areas. It has a way out through a gate. For each old citadel, a
castle and a fortification was built for aims of preserving its inhabitants. This part was independent in which all needs of the inhabitants were fulfilled. [13]

2) Middle Shar (Sharestan): A set of different local areas including bazaars and squares remained from Persian-Hellenized city with houses of special architecture. Two rooms were located on each side of a small middle room, with a roofed porch on the front through which one could go to three other spaces, all of which were surrounded by a circular fence. Sharestan, a place for the residence of courtiers, nobles, and armies. This section also had a fence and other fortification requirements. In Seleucid and Parthian era with special social and hierarchical position, Sharestan was developed and gained importance. Here, city management was on the part of the citizens. In comparison with other elements of the city, citadel and Sharestan were more important; they serve as residential areas for those who have critical roles in city management.

In cities before Islam, square was an official-political area rather than a social one. Before Sasanian, bazaar was a place for selling and buying of certain goods, but regarding economic system and city efficiency, except for portal cities, in other cities bazaar had not seen its final representation, i.e. an important urban element in which exchange and production of some goods was prevalent. [13]

3) External Shar (Savad (vicinity)): an expanded set of including local areas, bazaars, gardens and farms which is usually surrounded by natural fences such as mountains, jungles, rivers, etc. External Shar (Savad (vicinity)), like external Persian Shar is a place for residence of tribal, villagers, and urban communities, next to middle Shar. In the vicinity, usually cities, villages and resorts were established for farmers and tradesmen. Villages and mentioned area was in strong communication with urban areas whose establishments were simultaneous with city establishment. [13]

Conclusion:

In the present study, Iranian history, especially Seleucid and Parthian, was surveyed in response to the proposed assumptions. As it is obvious from the above mentioned arguments, Parthian vulnerability to architecture and urbanism is a consequence of notions that are prerequisite for the establishment of city in a certain governing period. To this aim, two areas were investigated with regard to their forming structures and were comparatively examined against each structure including cultural, economic, official, and political. In this way, general conclusions were drawn from the comparison of each of these elements and each of them had deep influences on art of urbanism in each era. Therefore, cultural, economic, and political factors have crucial roles in effectiveness of Seleucid art on Parthian art. Calligraphic study of governmental eras in Iran show that Seleucid is the era which saw a lot of aggression of Greek Empire on the country and finally lead to its defeat.

Alexander’s and Seleucid’s attempts to spread Hellenized philosophy and social system did not have basic and constant results. Rather, it was more like a transient cultural influence on those Iranian living in the cities and did not have any impact on villagers and tribes living outside cities. Alexander’s successors introduced a novel model of human interaction and residence; one that embodied both Greek city-states and Iranian city-power. Shar in this era is an eclectic concept. In Seleucid Empire, an amalgamation of Archaemenid city which was based on power and Greek city which was based on organization of the state was established. This simultaneously embodied features of both Archaemenid and Greek city. In addition, institutions, such as meetings, councils, and representatives which were concepts imported from Greek culture, were in these cities too. New area such as squares, public places, entertainment and sport places were also created in the cities. Generally speaking, it can be expressed that after Alexander’s attack urbanism was dealt with more seriously. Moreover, after Alexander, his successors expanded urbanism for political and economic purposes and this was due to the notion that huge amounts of Archaemenid kings’ treasures were plundered.

The era after Seleucid had decentralized structure in which tribal societies had Parthia at its center and had made Parthians rule over vast part of Archaemenid territory. Parthia attempted to formalize some type of state and regional self-governance. However, this type of self-governance and independence was not in line with Seleucid cities and the concept of polis and Greek city-state. With Parthian government, such concepts and cities gradually removed from socio-political scene of the Iranian society.

Amalgamation of Persian-Hellenized city-states with surrounded areas around it, removal of socio-cultural and economic-political inequalities between this two type of living sites, imposition of self-governing to city-states, etc. are the result of Parthian Empire to remove Greek concepts from the society. Retrospective movement toward native concepts – particularly Persian Style – in all aspects of life and production and their updates lead Parthian Empire to organize a totally different form of establishment and living. It mixed city with the surrounded area and replaced logical and planning discipline with environmental spontaneous one. For the first time in the history, it was in this era that circle-shape cities were formulated and cities such as Nisa and Firouz-Abad were established. Parthian Style Shar, like Persian Style Shar, had divisions such as governmental citadel, Middle Shar and External Shar and these concepts were relatively identical to those of Persian Shar. In Urbanism, Parthian replaced Chess Style with Circle Style in order to reach at greater security.

In Parthian Empire, Shush was an important province which had the very role of embodying anti-Greek movements. Although this city never revived its validity as an Archaemenid city, but it had greater quality in
comparison to the quality it had in Seleucid Era. All in all, embossed designs and sculptures found from this era mostly exhibit Eastern Art. However, sculptures have characteristics of Greek art while preserving Eastern art properties.

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