

Taq Kasra

Tāq Kasrā (*Arabic*: طاق كسرى, *romanized*: *ṭāq kisrā*), also transcribed as *Taq-i Kisra* or *Taq-e Kesra* (*Persian*: طاق کسری, *romanized*: *tāḡe kasrā*) or **Ayvān-e Kesrā**^[1] (*Persian*: ایوان خسرو, *romanized*: *Eivâne Xosrow*, meaning *Iwan* of *Khosrow*) are the remains of a **Sasanian-era Persian** monument, dated to c. the 3rd to 6th centuries, which is sometimes called the **Arch of Ctesiphon**.^[2] It is located near the modern town of **Salman Pak, Iraq**. It was the facade of the main palace in **Ctesiphon**, and is the only visible remaining structure of the ancient capital city. The archway is considered a landmark in the **history of architecture**,^[1] and is the second largest single-span **vault** of unreinforced **brickwork** in the world after **Gavmishan Bridge**.^[3]

History

The exact time of the structure's construction is not known with certainty. Some historians believe it was constructed under **Shapur I** who ruled Sassanian Persia from 242 to 272 AD^[4] and some other believe that construction possibly began during the reign of **Anushirwan the Just (Khosrow I)**^[5] after a **campaign against the Byzantines** in 540 AD.^[6] The arched **ivan** hall, open on the facade side, was about 37 meters high, 26 meters across and 50 meters long, the largest man-made, free standing vault constructed until modern times.^[7]

The arch was part of the imperial palace complex. The **throne room**—presumably under or behind the arch—was more than 30 m (110 ft) high and covered an area 24 m (80 ft) wide by 48 m (160 ft) long. The top of the arch is about 1 meter thick while the walls at the base are up to 7 meters thick.^[6] The **catenary arch** was built without **centring**.^[6] In order to make this possible a number of techniques were used.^[6] The bricks were laid about 18 degrees from the vertical which allowed them to be partially supported by the rear wall during construction.^[6] The quick drying cement used as mortar allowed the fresh bricks to be quickly supported by those that were previously laid.^[6]

The Taq Kasra is now all that remains above ground of a city that was, for nine centuries—from the 2nd century BC to the 7th century AD — the main capital of the successor dynasties of the Persian empire: **Parthians** and **Sassanids**. The structure left today was the main **portico** of the audience hall of the Sassanids who maintained the same site chosen by the Parthians and for the same reason, namely proximity to the **Roman Empire**, whose expansionist aims could be better contained at the point of contact.

The structure was **captured by the Arabs during the conquest of Persia** in 637.^[6] They then used it as a mosque for a while until the area was gradually abandoned.^[6] In the early 10th century, the

Abbasid caliph al-Muktafi dug up the ruins of the palace to reuse its bricks in the construction of the **Taj Palace** in **Baghdad**.^[8]

The monument is also the subject of a poem by **Khaqani**, who visited the ruins in the 12th century.^[1]

Modern era

In 1851, French artist **Eugène Flandin** visited and studied the structure with **Pascal Coste**^[9] who remarked "the Romans had nothing similar or of the type."^[10]

In 1888, a serious flood demolished the greater part of the edifice.^[11]

In 1940, the British writer **Roald Dahl**, then undergoing pilot training at **RAF Habbaniya** near **Baghdad**^[12] took an award-winning photograph using a **Zeiss camera** of the Arch of Ctesiphon in Iraq which was subsequently auctioned by the Dahl family to raise funds for the **Roald Dahl Museum and Story Centre**.^[13] The photo made £6,000. In his autobiography *Boy* he writes:

You may not believe it, but when I was eighteen I used to win prizes and medals from the Royal Photographic Society in London, and from other places like the Photographic Society of Holland. I even got a lovely big bronze medal from the Egyptian Photographic Society in Cairo, and I still have the photograph that won it. It is a picture of one of the so-called Seven Wonders of the World, the Arch of Ctesiphon in Iraq. This is the largest unsupported arch on earth and I took the photograph while I was

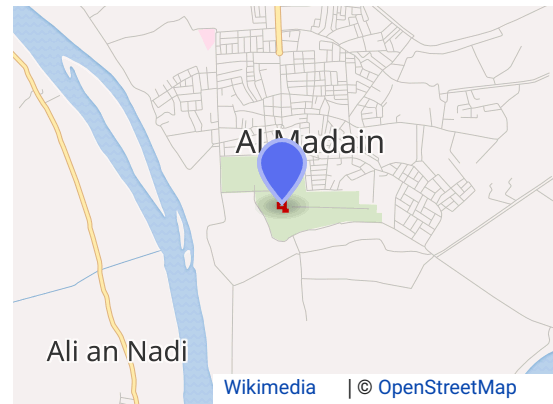
Taq Kasra

Native name

طاق کسرى (Arabic)



Tāq Kasrā in 2022



Location

Asbanbar quarter of Ctesiphon, Al-Mada'in, modern Iraq

Coordinates

33°5′37″N 44°34′51″E﻿ (https://geohack.toolforge.org/geohack.php?pagename=Taq_Kasra¶ms=33_5_37_N_44_34_51_E_type:landmark)

Height

37 m (121 feet)

Built

ca. 3rd–6th century AD

Architectural style(s)

Iranian architecture

training out there for the RAF in 1940. I was flying over the desert solo in an old Hawker Hart biplane and I had my camera round my neck. When I spotted the huge arch standing alone in a sea of sand, I dropped one wing and hung in my straps and let go of the stick while I took aim and clicked the shutter. It came out fine.^[13]

The monument was in the process of being rebuilt by [Saddam Hussein's](#) government in the course of the 1980s, when the fallen northern wing was partially rebuilt. All works, however, stopped after the 1991 [Persian Gulf War](#). From 2004 to 2008 the Iraqi government cooperated with the [University of Chicago's](#) Diyala Project to restore the site at a cost of \$100,000.^[14] The Ministry of Culture also invited a Czech company, Avers, to restore the site. This restoration was completed in 2017.^[15]

On March 7, 2019, a partial collapse further damaged the Taq Kasra, just two years after its latest restoration was completed.^[15]

In January 2021, Iranian Minister of Cultural Heritage [Ali Asghar Mounesan](#) mentioned that a credit of about \$600,000 would be required for the restoration of Taq Kasra.^[16]

Documentary film

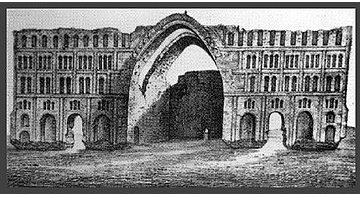
In 2017, [Pejman Akbarzadeh](#), based in the Netherlands, made the first full-length documentary film about Taq Kasra: *Taq Kasra: Wonder of Architecture*. The monument had been in danger of [ISIS](#) attacks in 2015–2016; Akbarzadeh feared that it might be destroyed soon, and therefore felt urgency to film his documentary.^[17] The film explores the history and architecture of Taq Kasra with many scholars and archaeologists in various countries.^[18]

Gallery

Taq Kasra Gallery



Location in Ctesiphon, modern Iraq



1824 drawing by Captain Hart



1864 drawing



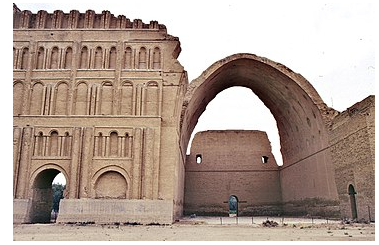
1923 Iraqi postage stamp, designed by [Marjorie Maynard](#), featuring the arch



1950 photograph



2009: Iraqi officials and American military officers discuss plans to renovate the existing structures.



2016 photograph



The [National Museum of Iran](#), the architecture of which is adopted from that of Taq-i Kasra



Taq Kasra, Madain, [Iraq](#)



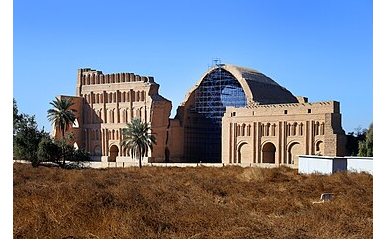
Taq Kasra, Madain, [Iraq](#)



Taq Kasra, Madain, [Iraq](#)



Taq Kasra, Madain, [Iraq](#)



Taq Kasra, Madain, [Iraq](#)



1932 photograph

See also

- [Persian Empire](#)
- [Sasanians](#)
- [Al-Ukhaidir Fortress](#)
- [Hatra](#)
- [Persian architecture](#)

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External links

- Taq Kasra Online Information Center (<http://taqqasra.com>)
- Archent: Taq-i Kisra (<http://archnet.org/sites/5282>)
- Global Heritage Fund page on Ctesiphon (<https://web.archive.org/web/20080106225654/http://www.globalheritagefund.org/where/ctesiphon.html>)
- Swiss journalist's photos of Taq-e Kasra in 1970s: "Taq-e Kasra; a Persian archaeological sight outside Persia" (<http://persiandutch.com/2010/10/12/taq-e-kasra-perzische-archeologische-vindplaats-buiten-perzie/>) (Photo)