

# Magnificent Dokhtar Castle in Fars Province



## Iranica Desk

The southwestern province of Fars, as the old capital of the Sassanid dynasty, is home to a significant number of historical monuments from that era. This collection, comprising cities, architectural structures, and stone carvings, spans the years of the Sassanid government from 224 to 651 CE. Among the eight registered sites in the region is Dokhtar Castle of Firuzabad.

This defensive fortress was constructed by the founder of the Sassanid dynasty to safeguard the initial capital of his government. Dokhtar Castle is a notable attraction of Firuzabad, situated near the modern city of Firuzabad, and has been listed on the National Heritage List.

Located 110 kilometers south of Shiraz, Firuzabad serves as the center of a county of the same name in Fars Province. The castle is positioned north of the city, atop a mountain overlooking the road from Firuzabad to Kavar. Its purpose was to protect the historical city of Gur (modern-day Firuzabad), the capital of the Sassanids, and it is situated near the prominent bas-reliefs of the Tangab valley.



## Firuzabad

The city of Firuzabad was nestled in a valley of the same name, which, due to its geographical features, provided natural protection with its high mountains and rocky structures. This characteristic, coupled with its proximity to rivers, captured the attention of ancient kings. Evidence indicates that centuries before the onset of the Sassanid era, the Achaemenid kings established a thriving city with formidable walls in the region. When Alexander the Great, in his campaign in Iran, was unable to breach Gur, he diverted a river toward the city to flood it.

During the Parthian era, the fame and prosperity of Gur waned, until in the Sassanid era, following Ardashir Babakan's triumph over Ardavan V, the ancient city experienced a revival and regained its former glory.

## Architectural overview

Dokhtar Castle, spanning over 2,000 square meters, begins from the lower parts of the narrow valley and extends to the highest point of the mountain. The main structure of this castle is situated at the mountain's peak and is constructed with plaster and rubble stone. The surrounding walls of Dokhtar Castle are strategically placed based on the natural topography of the mountain and its steep rocky slopes. It appears that this defensive fortress had a height of approximately six to seven meters.

Dokhtar Castle is impregnable, as it is enveloped by high mountain rocks from the north, west, and south. A robust stone wall, visible from the east at a distance of one kilometer, effectively prevented infiltration from that side. Watchtowers were strategically positioned on all surrounding rocks to safeguard the central building, and the sole entrance to the fortress remains a staircase in the southern part of the castle.

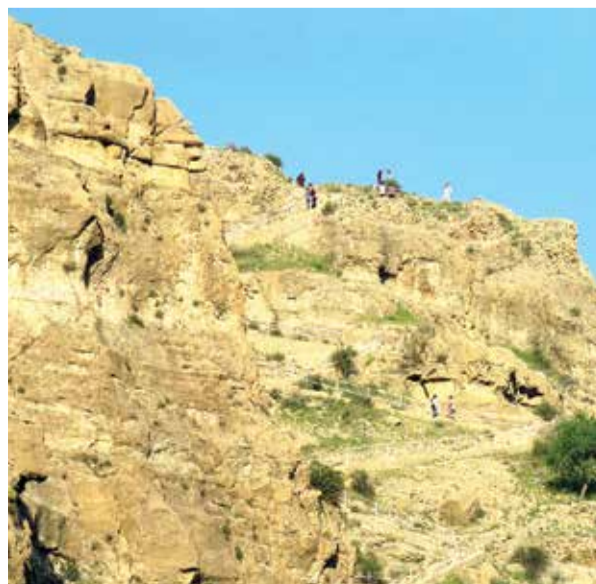
In a section of Dokhtar Castle, a cave entrance is visible, which, according to excavations, served as a hidden route connecting to the ancient city of Gur. This route was utilized to transport manpower and food to the castle during enemy invasions.

The primary residential and royal section of the castle comprises three staircase-like structures. This edifice, measuring 120 meters in length and 40 meters in width, boasts a rectangular shape. Each of these three sections exhibits unique architecture and is interconnected to the others via a spiral staircase. At the highest section and the end of the palace, remnants of a magnificent ivan (portico) and hall are visible, along with traces of a domed structure. Dokhtar Castle features walls extending from the rocks towards the river, designed to protect the passing road alongside the castle. Both

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the outer and inner walls are adorned with plaster decorations reminiscent of those used by the Achaemenids at Persepolis.

The castle comprises various sections including a hall, ivan, interconnected rooms, watchtowers, corridors, water reservoir, central courtyard, and spiral staircase. Initially surveyed by researchers from Switzerland and UNESCO, the castle later underwent restoration by the Fars Province Cultural Heritage Organization following a severe earthquake. Unfortunately, many rooms, corridors, and walls have been destroyed or suffered serious damage over time due to the pressure exerted on them.

## Middle level

The middle level features a central courtyard surrounded by halls with barrel vaults, some of which have platforms. One of the halls in the central building includes a space for cooking. In the east of the central courtyard, a platform and a spiral staircase provide access to the highest floor of the Dokhtar Castle complex, featuring a vaulted ceiling. The middle level of Dokhtar Castle contains private rooms that likely served as accommodations for guests, guards, and watchmen.

## Highest level

The highest part of the castle boasts a large ivan and a hall with a dome, indicating it is likely the royal residence. Remnants of ceremonial benches can still be found in parts of this hall, and the main hall of the third section is surrounded by rectangular halls with outer walls designed in a circular fashion.

Adjacent to the eastern wall of Dokhtar Castle lies an area that, based on archaeological findings, once functioned as a royal bathhouse. This space maintains a constant temperature of about 30 degrees Celsius throughout the winter and summer seasons. Although few remnants remain today, evidence suggests that water was always present, keeping the interior space humid.

## Best time to visit

Fars Province experiences a warm climate in the summer and a cold, dry climate in the winter, with low precipitation. Therefore, the best time to visit the castle is during the spring when the weather is moderate and pleasant for tourists. For a visit to Dokhtar Castle, it is advisable to opt for the early hours of the day to take advantage of daylight and avoid the midday heat. Given the mountainous location of the castle, it is recommended to have appropriate equipment for a regular walk, such as ample water, suitable footwear, a sun hat, sunglasses, and sunscreen. The path to the castle is dusty and rocky, but not overly challenging or long, and doesn't require specialized equipment.

## First level

The lowest level of Dokhtar Castle, serving as the entrance to the palace, is located in the southwest corner. This section leads to a hall with platforms on both sides of its entrance. At the end of this hall, a semi-circular bench with five decorated armrests is visible. To the right of the hall, a doorway leads to the middle level of the palace via a spiral staircase.

On the first floor, there are towers in various directions for surveillance purposes, with walls featuring spaces for archery. Additionally, there is a cistern and two hidden wells, which are remarkable given the facilities available at that time.