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The Communication Roads in Parsa during the Achaemenid Period

MOHAMMAD-TAGHI IMANPOUR, Mashhad

The geographical situation and strategic position of Elamite Anshan, later Parsa (modern Fars), had made it suitable for both nomadic and sedentary populations, attracting the attention of men from early times and becoming one of the early centres of human settlement on the Iranian plateau. The existence of many archaeological sites, monuments and prehistoric mounds in southwest Iran all indicate that many of the plains and valleys of this region including Parsa had been settled for long centuries.¹

The strategic position of this area between Mesopotamia in the west and the Indus valley in the east also made this region the centre of communication between those civilisations long before the migration of the Persians to this land.²

Following the arrival of the Persians in southwest Iran and the foundation of the Persian Empire by Cyrus the Great (559–530 BC) and its extension by Cambyses (529–522 BC) and Darius the Great (522–486 BC) as well as the construction of Pasargadae and Persepolis, the Persian capitals in this region, Parsa became the centre of administration and communications and traffic in this period. Although the Achaemenid Royal Road system, in particular the Persepolis-Susa Royal Road as one of those communication roads has been studied by scholars of the ancient history of Iran,³ the routes of other roads inside of Parsa have not been examined extensively. Attempts have been made on the basis of classical sources, archaeological evidence, Persepolis Tablets and Moslem Geographers to identify the routes of these roads inside Parsa during the Achaemenid period.

Before Shiraz arose and became the capital of Pars in the Islamic era, the Marvdasht Plain in Pars where Persepolis located was the centre of convergence for the roads from inside and outside Pars. Apart from the Persepolis-Susa Royal Road which was frequently mentioned in classical sources and the Fortification

1 SUNDERLAND 1968, p. 399; ROSENBERG 1985, p. 51; CAMERON 1936, pp. 5–7.

2 Stein 1936, pp. 111–220; idem 1940, pp. 1–27; idem 1937, pp. 187–242; idem 1934, pp. 122–133. For more information about concurrent irrigation systems in Parsa and Tepe Yahya and Mesopotamia see ZAGARELL 1982, p. 85.

3 ARFAEE 1991, pp. 29–45; GRAF 1994, pp. 167–189.

and Treasury Tablets it is not easy to draw up precisely the routes of the other roads that were running inside Parsa during the Achaemenid period. The Moslem geographers, however, paid special attention to those roads and their distances in the Middle Ages so that this information together with the Persepolis Tablets and the archaeological evidence can help to trace the route of some of those roads connecting Persepolis to other parts of the Persian homeland, Parsa, in particular when we remember that each road and its stations, as well as the distances between the stations are comprehensively reported by those geographers.

In the reports of the Moslem geographers Shiraz is usually considered as the capital of Parsa and the point of departure. We see, nonetheless, some confusion in their reports about the names of the stations and the distances, which is, of course, understandable. It is because over the years some of the roads were abandoned and new routes followed, or, depending on which season they travelled, the travellers chose different roads. For example, there were a number of roads in the mountainous regions which during the winter it was impossible to pass with caravans and heavy commodities. Accordingly, the travellers had to follow longer but easier routes. In other words, when they travelled with heavy luggage and with a big caravan, they had to choose the easier roads.⁴ No dramatic change, however, can have taken place in the routes of the old roads, because in ancient times they always followed the natural passes. Moreover, we know that no dramatic technological changes took place to affect the transportation system, and accordingly the routes of the main roads, in ancient times. Thus, those reports can be helpful in identifying the routes of the roads which run inside and outside Parsa in the ancient history of Iran. Furthermore, taking into account that Shiraz was located in neighbourhood of the Marvdasht Plain, where the main station seems to have been located in ancient times, the description of the Moslem geographers (with some modification) can be also considered valid for the ancient history of Iran including the Achaemenid period.

The most famous road which connected Parsa to the Khuzistan lowland was the so-called Susa-Persepolis Royal Road, which continued from Susa to Mesopotamia. This road, the logical western terminus of which lies in the area of Susa, leads on the opposite direction toward the south-east and went up into southern Iran, Parsa via the southern Zagros, Ramhormuzd, Arjan and modern Bahbahan.⁵

4 SCHWARZ 1929, pp. 221–222.

5 In addition to an Achaemenid cuneiform inscription which was discovered in the Ramhormuzd region in recent months, the ruins of two Achaemenid buildings with the remains of four columns and traces of 18 columns have also been identified on the site indicating that Ramhormuzd was an Achaemenid important location, probably one of the main stations on the Susa-Persepolis Royal Road. See <http://www.cais-soas.com/News/2009/April2009/08-04.htm>

It seems that this road from Arjan, an Elamite and Achaemenid site,⁶ continued its way eastward until it reached an important station in the Fahlyan and Norabad region where we can see the remains of many ancient historical monuments from the Elamite, Achaemenid and Sasanid periods.⁷ In addition to the Kurangan relief carving of Elamite date and the Achaemenid ruins in Fahlyan, there are the remains of a great fortress, Sapiddez or Qaleh Safid (The White Fortress), to the east of the confluence of the Shish Peir and Shirin rivers, east of modern Norabad.⁸ This fortress, which was defended with strong walls, is identified as Hidali by A. M. ARFAEE.⁹ He believes it was the stronghold of the Elamite king during Assurbanipal's campaign against Elamite cities including Susa.¹⁰ The name of Hidali is also mentioned in Persepolis Fortification Tablet 23 indicating that it was probably built for military purposes during the reign of Darius the Great and later.¹¹ According to this evidence, thousands of kilos of goods were stored in this warehouse, probably for the needs of those who travelled between Susa and Persepolis. This information is also confirmed by archaeological discoveries in the Mamasani district, i.e. in Qaleh Kali where remains of Persepolis-style column bases have been identified in recent years.

A joint excavation under the supervision of ALI REZA ASGARI CHAVEDI, from the Iranian Centre of Archaeological Research (ICAR) and DANIEL THOMAS POTTS of the Australian team from the University of Sydney has been carrying out excavations at an Achaemenid historical site in Norabad in Mamasani, Fars province in the southwest of Iran, between Susa and Persepolis since 1381/2003. During the second round of excavations at this Achaemenid site a restricted amount of remains of a columned balcony and a hall and its stairway, were discovered; this is one of the ten largest buildings with a structure similar to Persepolis. This Achaemenid building has huge columns with a base about one meter thick the same as the Persepolis columns. The dimensions are similar to that of the columns of the Hall of Hundred Columns of Persepolis. There are traces of lotus flowers on the base of the columns and the colour of the columns

6 For more information about Arjan as an important historical location in southwest Iran and as a crossroads between the Elamite and the Persian empires see ALVARES-MON 2006, pp. 1–524.

7 MOSTAFAVI 1978, pp. 85–89.

8 Ibid. p. 87; cf. A. M. ARFAEE 1991, p. 43.

9 ARFAEE 1991, p. 43; cf. ARFAEE 2008. The existence of a stronghold in this place, between Khuzistan and Parsa, is also mentioned by SHARF AL-DIN ALI YAZDI (1972, pp. 489–496) indicating that Timur, on his march in 795 (AD 1393) from Ahvaz to Shiraz through Bah-behan, stormed the great White Fortress of Qaleh Safid (the ancient Hidali) on the way; cf. DE BODE (1843, pp. 75–83) who in his journey to Mamassani region followed this route.

10 ARFAEE 1991, pp. 37, 43. For the Assyrian campaigns against the Elamites see CAMERON 1936, pp. 165–168, 192 and 202; COOK 1983, p. 88.

11 ARFAEE 1991, pp. 37, 43.

is the same as that of the Persepolis columns.¹² It is believed that the building could be one of the buildings of the famous Lidoma city and a depot for the collection and storage of the taxes of the region with a similar function to that which has been attributed to the Borazjan construction in the Bushire province in south-western Iran.¹³ It is also possible that the place called the Persian Gate by classical authors, where Ariobarzanes, the satrap of Parsa, stood against Alexander's troops (Arrian, III, 18, 1-3) was located around this site.¹⁴

Comparing the Persepolis Fortification Texts and classical sources with the later reports of the Moslem geographers, however, it seems that the Susa-Persepolis Royal Road split into at least three branches in this region, a northern, middle and southern road. The northern branch, which passed from a mountainous region through narrow gorges and a defile, ran eastward and then through the Tang-e Kaman (Narrow Crescent) or Persian Gate defile and along the Shirin river, reaching Ardakan in the north-west of the Marvdasht Plain. From Ardakan, the road headed to the Kamfiruz district, and thence in the northern mountainous edge of the Marvdasht Plain reached Persepolis. It was probably this road which was followed by Alexander himself at the head of a force consisting of Macedonian infantry with lighter units (Arrian, III. 18. 1-3, Quintus Curtius, V. 3.16-17) while at the same time some of his troops under his commander Parmenio, with the Thessalian cavalry, the allied and mercenary contingent, all the other more heavily-armed units, and the baggage-train, followed a southerly road (the middle road) along the Shish Peir or Shol river eastward to Persepolis. After passing the Tang-e Khas, this road runs to Khallar, near Bayza on the western edge of the Marvdasht Plain, through some less mountainous plains.¹⁵ According to Moslem geographers, this road from Khallar turned down to Guyam (Juyam) reaching Shiraz along the modern Shiraz-Ardakan road.¹⁶ From Khallar and through the Marvdasht Plain this road most probably headed to Persepolis and Istakhr during the Achaemenid and Sasanid periods, but in the Islamic era, when Shiraz became the capital of Fars, it went down to Guyam and then to Shiraz.

This second branch of the Parsa-Khuzistan road (the middle branch) is well described by Moslem geographers of the Middle Ages. Leaving Shiraz, the high

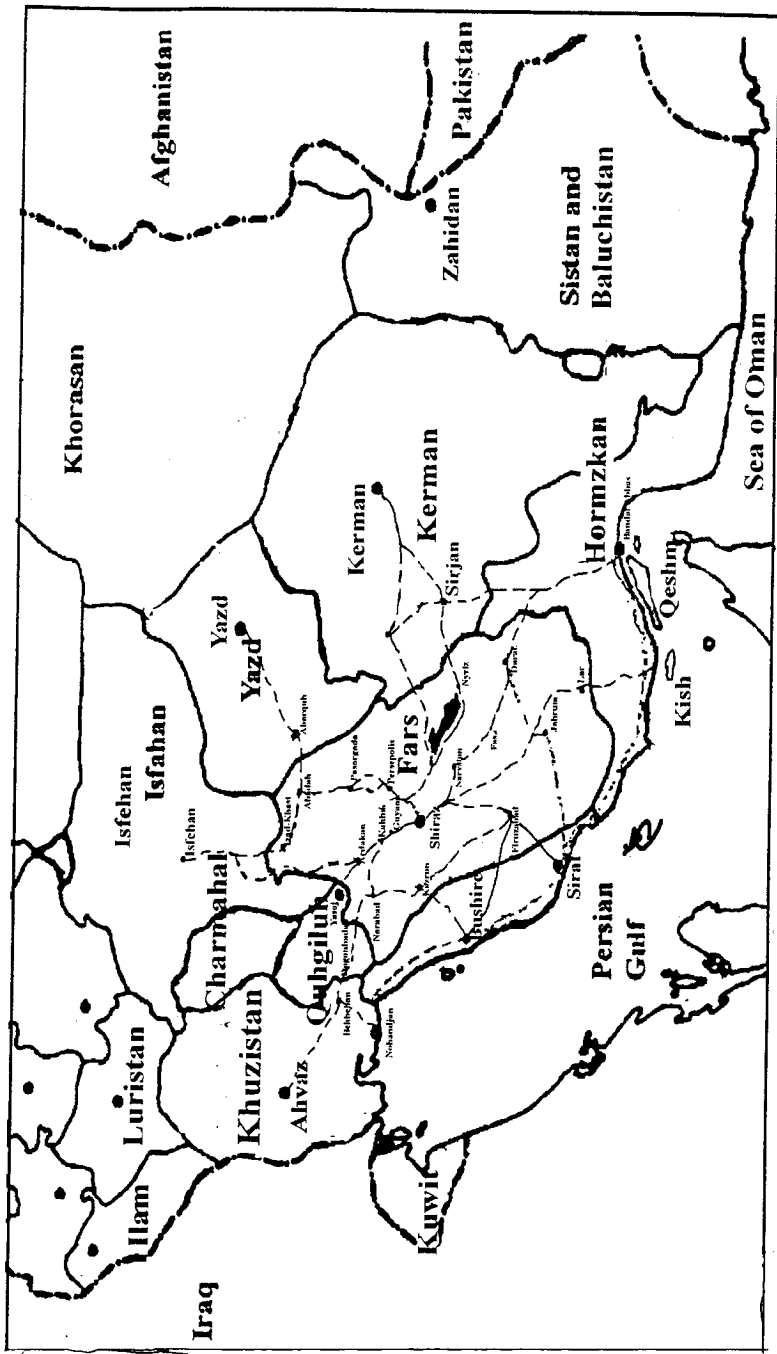
12 <http://www.payvand.com/news/08/feb/1076.html>

13 For the result of those excavations and latest view on the subject see ROUSTAEI/POTTS 2004; POTTS/ROUSTAEI 2006; POTTS/ROUSTAEI et al. 2006; POTTS/ASGARI CHAVERDI/PETRIE et al. 2007; POTTS/ASGARI CHAVEDI 2009, pp. 208-282.

14 HANSMAN 1972, pp. 118-119.

15 STEIN (1938, pp. 314-315; 1940, pp. 11-27) in his archaeological journey in western Iran from Shiraz to Khuzistan mentioned the two branches of the Susa-Persepolis road, but with a little difference he considered this southern road as the main road followed by Alexander. He suggested a more southerly road located in Shapur district as the road which was followed by Parmenio's troops; cf. KINNEIR 1813, pp. 72-73.

16 For more information about the location of Khallar and Guyam see RAZMARA 1976, pp. 89 and 206.



Map: Roads and communication in Persia

road to Khuzistan went off to the north-west by Guyam and Khallar near Bayza in the western Marvdasht Plain. The road turned west and then along the Shish Peir river and through the Kharrarah and Kurjan and Bowan valleys, in the Doshman Ziyari district, reaching Nobandjan, located as far as six km south-west of Qaleh Safid, near modern Norabad.¹⁷ The location of Khallar in Bayza district, to the north-west of Shiraz as well as the location of Nobandjan to the west of Shiraz, close to modern Norabad district, is almost certain.¹⁸ Moreover, the location of both the Bowan valley and Kurjan or Kurkan of which the latter still preserves its ancient name, corresponding to "Wolf" (Gurg in Persian) can be geographically identified.¹⁹ Both are located in eastern Norabad along the southern Shoul or Shish Peir river in Doshamn Ziyari district. This southern road, however, was less mountainous and more pleasant, and was very probably the second Susa-Persepolis Royal Road used during the Achaemenid period. There was also a third road (the southern road) which went southward from Nobandjan to the district of Shapur and along the modern Norabad-Kazrun highway to reach Kazrun.²⁰ This road headed to Firuzabad, and from there it turned north and reached Shiraz or Persepolis in ancient times.²¹ Since this southern branch of the Royal Road between Susa and Persepolis probably served sometimes for the annual journey of the great king and the royal family, accompanied by a large number of officials, soldiers and attendants of the royal court, it is likely that the road will have been provided with all the necessary requirements such as rest-stations, garrisons and storehouses for frequent long journeys.²² The earlier discoveries at Tepe Hakvan at Moshkan in Fars (between Shiraz and Firouzabad) by Mostafavi, the site that Mostafavi believed was probably a station on the Royal Road connecting Suruvan (Fahlian) to the south-east and which traversed Bishapur, Kazrun, Jerreh, Frashband and Firuzabad and went then to the province of Persepolis, is in agreement with the above claim.²³

- 17 IBN-I AL-BALKHI 1921, p. 147; cf. SCHWARZ 1929, pp. 222–228. For the location of the Nobandjan and Qaleh Safid ruins, both located near modern Norabad, see DE BODE 1843, p. 78; MUQADDASI (1994, p. 401) noted that it was one day's distance from Shapur.
- 18 Ibid. and RAZMARA 1976, pp. 89, 206.
- 19 SCHWARZ 1929, p. 227. Most geographers have mentioned the beauty of this region and the valleys through which the Shoul river flows; cf. IBN-I AL-BALKHI 1921, pp. 146–147; RAZMARA 1976, p. 77.
- 20 ISTAKHRI 1989, p. 116; IBN-I AL-BALKHI 1921, p. 162; MUQADDASI 1994, p. 400; SCHWARZ 1929, p. 22–226; IBN-I AL-HUQAL 1987, p. 54. Along part of this road which connected Kazrun to Bahbahan Baron DE BODE journeyed in the nineteenth century (1843, pp. 75–83). According to TABARI (1973, vol. 2, pp. 583) the historian of the early Islamic era, Artaxerxes Papakan, the Sasanid king, in his campaign against the king of Ahvaz, also followed this road; HANSMAN 1972, pp. 118–119.
- 21 MOSTAFAVI 1967, p. 3008; idem 1978, p. 88.
- 22 MOSTAFAVI 1967, p. 3008; idem 1978, p. 88.
- 23 The site has been reviewed by RAZMJOU 2005, pp. 293–312.

The Persepolis plain in the pre-Islamic period and Shiraz in the Middle Ages were connected to the south, the Persian Gulf coast and its islands, by three main roads. There were many important ports on the Persian Gulf, well described by the geographers. Kays (modern Keysh) and Hurmoz are located in the south-eastern part of Parsa on the Persian Gulf; Janabah (Kenaveh) and Mahruban (Bandar Daylam) on the western side; and Siraf (present Bandar-e Taheri) in the middle of the coast of the Persian Gulf.²⁴ Persepolis and Istakhr and, later, Shiraz were connected to those islands and the Persian Gulf coast by various roads.

Leaving Shiraz and the Marvdasht Plain, one road went south-eastwardly to the Persian Gulf coast via Fasa (Pasa), Darabgired, Frag (Prag), Lar and Tarum. This road, after crossing those districts, turned due south and struck the coast where the modern city of Bandar Abbas is located.²⁵ The second road, which we can interpret as the middle road to the Persian Gulf coast, was that which went down via Kuvar, Firuzabad and then on by its different branches to reach Siraf, one of the main emporia on the Persian Gulf coast in ancient and medieval times.²⁶ The western road, which connected central Parsa to the south, almost followed in its course the present highway which runs from Shiraz to Bushire, for it passed by Kazrun and Dariz to Tawwaj (Brazjan), the important commercial town of the region in the tenth century,²⁷ and thence to Jannabah or even to Mahruban and Siniz (in the present Daylam region) in the south of ancient Arjan.²⁸

Parsa was connected to the north, to Isfahan and Khorasan via three separate roads. The westernmost road was that which was used only in winter when movement on the other mountainous roads was impossible. This road branched from Shiraz in the Middle Ages, and from the Persepolis plain in ancient times went to Guyam, and from there turned off to Bayza in the Marvdasht Plain, thence via Kurad and Khallar in the north-west of the plain, it headed to the famous and pleasant Plain of Ujan and then to Samirum and Isfahan.²⁹ The middle road was the summer road which led from Shiraz or Persepolis, and went north to Isfahan through mountainous country, following the narrow gorge along the Pulvar river. After passing, Tang-i Bulaghi to the south of Pasargadae, the road went north and north-west, where it finally reached Izadkhast and Mayin in the

24 For more information about the position of those ports in ancient and present times see: EQTEDARI 1969, pp. 3–12, 327–331, 810–873; BALL 1986, pp. 95–115.

25 WILSON 1908, pp. 162–169.

26 BARTHOLD 1984, p. 160; IBN-I AL-BALKHI 1921, p. 163; IBN-I HUQAL 1987, p. 52; ISTAKHRI 1989, p. 114; MUGADDASI 1994, p. 399. For more information see SCHWARZ 1929, pp. 248–250; MINORSKY 1937, p. 127. For more information about the situation of Siraf see BAHRAMI 1977/2536, pp. 6–7.

27 MONTEITH 1857, pp. 108–119.

28 FISHER 1968, p. 29; IBN-I AL-BALKHI 1921, pp. 162–163. For more information about the position of those southern coast cities see EQTEDARI 1969, pp. 3–89.

29 KINNEIR 1813, p. 79; FRYER 1912, pp. 225–231; also cf. MUGADDASI 1994, p. 403

north of Parsa. In Tang-i Bulaghi, where the river in full flood in the narrow valley can carry any truck away, and where the west bank consists in places of an almost sheer cliff face, the ancient highway used a surface boldly cut into the rock 30 m above the river-bed and more than 250 m in length, which it is believed had been made in the Achaemenid period.³⁰ The various stations and the distance of this road are also described by the geographers of the Middle Ages.³¹ The easternmost route, the Khorasan road, went from Shiraz north-eastwards to Istakhr, and parallel with the middle road reached the Pasargadae region and Deh Bid. Here the main road went off to the right, going by Abarkuh to Yazd, while the second branch turned to the left toward Isfahan, passed through Surmak and Abadaeh and joined the summer road at Izadkhast. This eastern road is at present the main highway connecting Isfahan and Yazd to Shiraz in modern Fars.³² There were at least three roads which connected Shiraz to northern and southern Kerman.³³ The two branches of these roads went south-east to Kerman through the Marvdasht Plain and along the Kur river. At the end of the plain this road divided into two branches. One went to Sirjan in the Province of Kerman along the northern shore of the lake of Bakhtigan, and the other one followed the southern shore of this lake. The northern road went from Shiraz to Shahr-e Babak, via Harat and Shahr-e Babak and came to the town of Sirjan in the south-west of Kerman. The second branch, which followed the southern shore of the lake, reached Nayriz and from there, turned north-eastward and reached Sirjan.³⁴ The third road, the southern road which connected Shiraz to south Kerman, went through Fasa and Darabgired. This road, which closely followed the modern Shiraz-Darabgired highway, went from Darabgired to south Kerman.³⁵

There were other local roads which connected the individual towns and villages. For example there was a road which connected Darabgired to Jahrum and Kazrun or Firuzabad to Jarrh and Kazrun.³⁶ There was also a coastal road which connected southern cities of the Persian Gulf to one another from east to west.³⁷ It is worth noting that the archaeological evidence also proves the existence of such roads and the communications from central Parsa in four di-

30 STRONACH 1978, p. 166.

31 SCHWARZ 1929, pp. 230–237; KINNEIR 1813, p. 78.

32 IBN-I AL-BALKHI 1921, p. 164; MUQADDASI 1994, p. 402, LE STRANGE 1930, p. 297; ISTAKHRI 1989, p. 115.

33 LOVETT 1872, pp. 202–207.

34 ABBOTT passed along this road by in 1849–1850 on his journey through Persia, see ABBOTT 1855, pp. 66–78.

35 IBN-I AL-BALKHI 1921, pp. 163–164; TOMASCHEK 1883, pp. 33–40; ABBOTT 1857, pp. 147–161.

36 For instance see ABBOTT 1857, pp. 161–184; MOSTAFAVI 1978, p. 88. Many of these local roads were followed by STEIN in his archaeological tour of ancient Parsa. Cf. STEIN 1935, pp. 488–497; idem 1936, pp. 111–221; idem 1937, pp. 188–213.

37 EQTEDARI 1969, p. 2.

rections, the south, north, east and west. For instance, the discovery of some stonework in the Persian Gulf littoral of Siraf, similar to the stonework found in Qasr-i Abu Nasr, near Shiraz, indicates that central Parsa was connected to Siraf at least during the Sasanid period, if not in the Achaemenid one, too.³⁸ On his archaeological tour in ancient Persia, Sir Aurel Stein discovered many prehistoric objects parallel in age with the pottery identified at Tepe Sialk in Kashan, Tepe Yahya in Kerman, Susa in Khuzistan and some prehistoric sites in Mesopotamia, all indicating a cultural and commercial communication between Parsa and those civilisations.³⁹

In summary, bringing the above information all together indicates that the geographical and climatological setting of a region is always of major importance in affecting the way man lives and evolves. The geographical situation and strategic position of Parsa in southwest Iran made it suitable for nomadic and sedentary ways of life as it became one of the early centres of human settlement on the Iranian plateau. Following the migration of the Aryans into Iran, Parsa attracted the attention of the Persians, and it became the focus of the indigenous settlement of the Iranians on the plateau. After the creation of the Persian empire by Cyrus the Great in the centre of Parsa and the foundation of Persepolis by Darius the Great in this region, Parsa became the centre of communication and convergence inside and outside of Parsa and traffic within the Persian Empire. One of those main roads which connected Parsa to the western part of the Persian Empire was called Susa-Persepolis Royal Road and has been frequently mentioned by classical sources. There were other main roads which connected Persepolis to southern, northern and eastern cities within and outside of Parsa.

38 SARFARAZ 1971, pp. 188–189.

39 STEIN 1936, pp. 111–220; idem 1940, pp. 1–27; idem 1937, pp. 187–242; idem 1934, pp. 122–133.

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