



منظر عام لمدينة إصفهان ويظهر في الصورة المسجد الجامع
An aerial view of the city of Esfahan showing the Jame' Mosque

Esfahan

The City of Two Thousand Landmarks

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Esfahan, the enigma of Persia, combines the legacy of past glory within a magnificent present. This ancient city has not only preserved its enigmatic history but has emphasised this history through its contemporary reality. Moreover, it is a city that embraces more than two thousand cultural landmarks.

Esfahan's monuments represent arguably the finest examples of architecture in the Islamic world. The city thrives through an interweaving combination of two periods – the past and the present. Its streets are a living reminder of this fusion, where tall buildings are set against lofty trees. The architecture of Esfahan has a mysterious quality, preserving peculiar secrets, as in the two Shaking Minarets of Junban, wherein should you climb one and attempt to shake it, the second minaret on the opposite side will also move. *Esfahan nasf-e-Jahan*, proclaims the famous proverb: Esfahan is half the world. It is a beautiful description that illustrates the city's romantic past, its mild climate and deep sense of history, and its enduring fascination for the visitor as the "Paris of the East". ➤

Location and Population

The city of Esfahan is the capital of Esfahan Province, located within a fertile plain in the centre of Iran approximately 414 kilometres to the south of the country's capital, Tehran. It covers 250 square kilometres and is 1570 metres above sea level. The population of Esfahan is around 1,650,000. The river Zayandeh Rood, which is one of the main waterways in Iran, passes through the city with nine bridges crossing it - Khaju, Marnan, Si-o Seh, Chubi, Shahrestan, Bozorgmehr, Ferdowsi, Abuzar and Felezi.

City Name

It is said that Esfahan was formerly called *Espanan*, which is itself derived from the

word *Sipahkhan*, or soldier's encampments, as it was an army camp for Khosroes' army during the Sassanian era. It is the first city built by the Aryans and was the centre of authority and settlement of the Achemenid rulers during the Fourth and Fifth Centuries BC.

Historical Profile

The Growth of the City and its Ancient History

There are various views surrounding the growth of the city of Esfahan. Some historians believe that its founder is Tahmourth, whereas others believe it was established under Alexander the Great. Some historians mention that the city was established by the king, Jamshid Pishdari. Whatever its origins, the city flourished under

Sassanian rule led by Ardeshir.

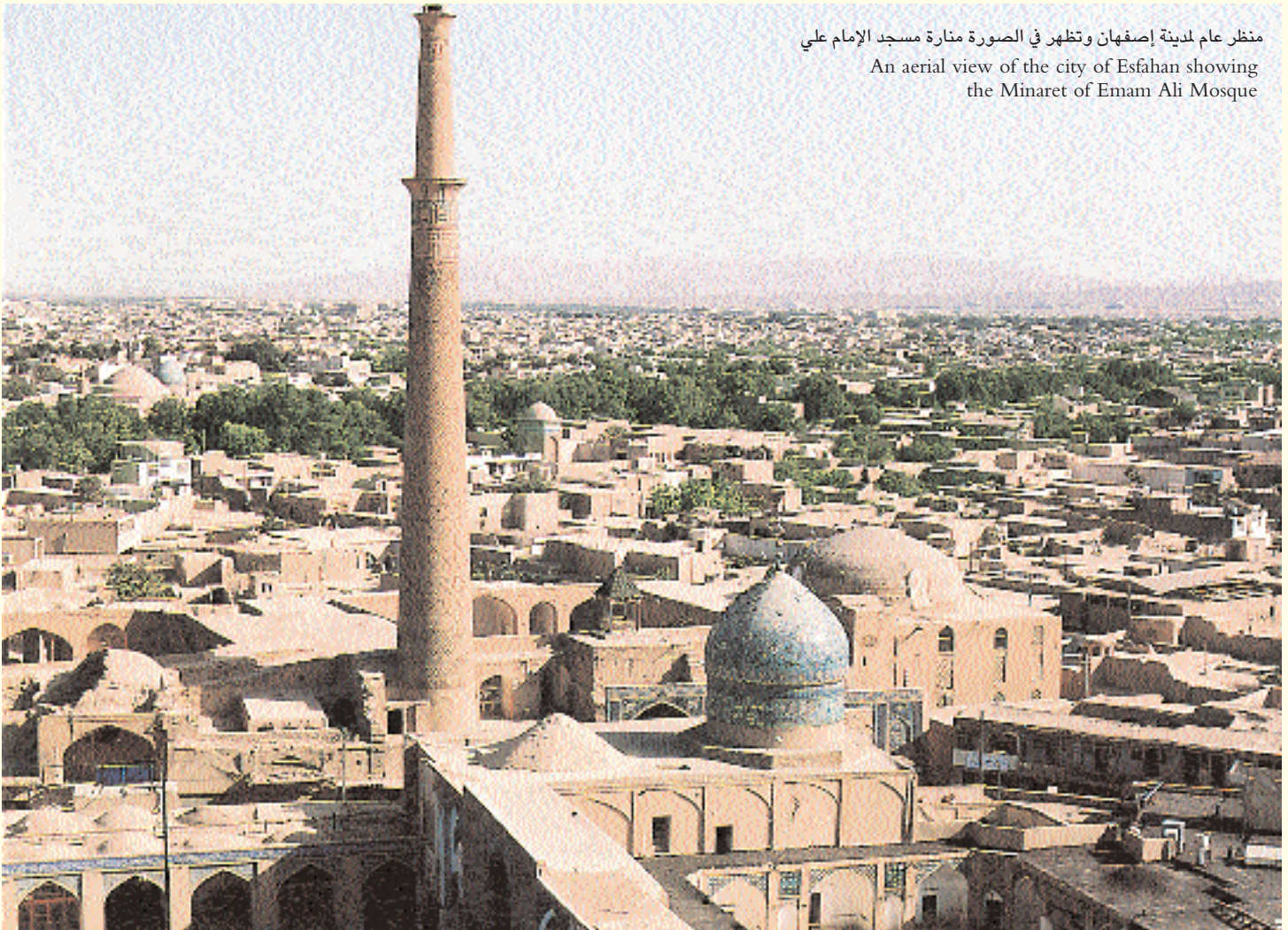
During the Sassanian era, seven families occupied the most prominent and important positions in Iran. These, in turn, selected Esfahan – then the empire's most important city - as the office of the crown prince. Esfahan was fortified during the period of Yazdgard III, the last Sassanian king, who used the city to protect himself from the conquest of Jalowlah by the Islamic army.

The City's Islamic History

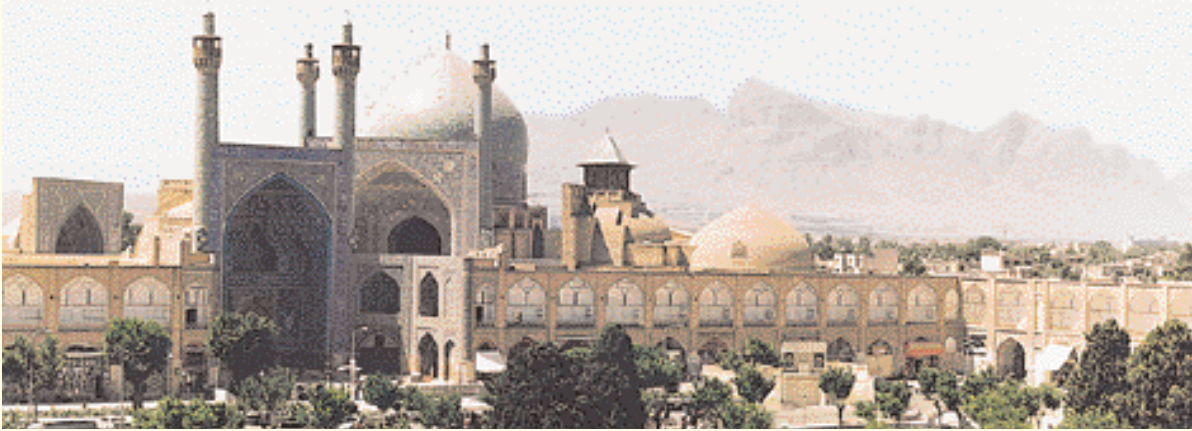
Esfahan was conquered by the Muslims in 21 AH (642 AD) and very quickly became the centre of the eastern world because of its moderate climate, fresh air, plentiful water and varieties of fruit-bearing trees.

To date, the city has preserved its distinguished architecture which characterised it during the various Islamic periods of its existence. It flourished especially in the Safavid era, and in particular at the time of Shah Abbas, when it emerged as a unique example of Islamic artistic and architectural ➤

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Esfahan is half the world.*



منظر عام لمدينة إصفهان وتظهر في الصورة منارة مسجد الإمام علي
An aerial view of the city of Esfahan showing
the Minaret of Imam Ali Mosque



میدان الإمام أو نقش
جهان - إصفهان
Emam Square or
Naghsh-e Jahan -
Esfahan

renewal, as shown in the works of such notables as the scientific engineer, Shaykh Baha al-Amili, who was born in Ba'albek in al-Amili, Lebanon.

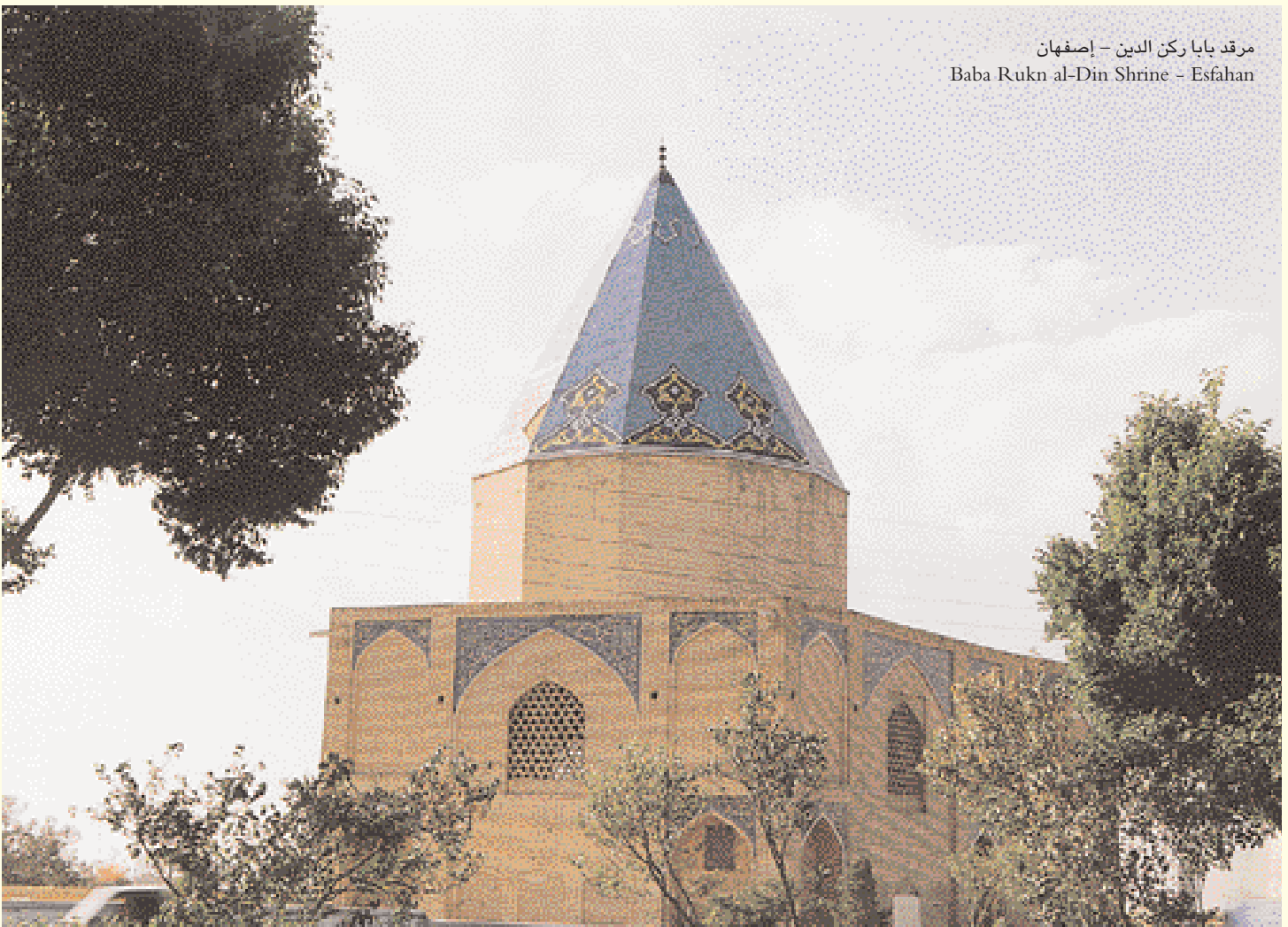
He was responsible for many of the prominent Safavid architectural landmarks which we marvel at today, including the Emam Mosque. He also designed

palaces, bridges, religious buildings, public baths and parks.

Esfahan Today

In the Pahlavi era, which followed the period of the Qajars, Iran became the focus of interest among explorers as well as tourists.

There is evidence that the city was the main interest of foreigners who greatly admired its historical character. In 1921, a "National Monuments Department" was established within the government to preserve Esfahan's historical landmarks, and in 1930, a law requiring the preservation of these monuments was established. ➔



مرقد بابا ركن الدين - إصفهان
Baba Rukn al-Din Shrine - Esfahan