CHAPTER 3

Previous Surveys and Excavations at Rayy

Plans of Rayy in the 19th Century

The first explorations at Rayy, as has previously been mentioned, were driven by the search for the ancient vestiges of old Rağā/Raghae. The first investigations on the site of the current Šāh ‘Abd al-ʿAẓīm are summed up in two topographical plans that had already been made in the first half of the 19th century. Robert Ker Porter (1777–1842) drew the first plan of old Rayy in 1821–22, showing it enclosed by a strong rampart (1821–22, 358–60). In 1840 another traveller, the French architect Pascal Coste, visited Rayy. The latter drew a more precise plan of the old city (see Rante 2007, Fig. 7). The plan of Ker Porter (Fig. 5), the only cartographic reference used in the subsequently published works, shows a reconstitution of the town which today is considered as the most reliable. The plan of Pascal Coste (Fig. 6) shows the totality of the site with all its architectural parts. Neither of these two plans is entirely accurate. The orientation is distorted on the plan of Ker Porter. One has only to compare the aerial photo provided in 1979 by Adle with the two plans to notice that the north indicated on the plan of Ker Porter is inaccurate. Pascal Coste, on the other hand, provides the correct orientation in his sketch. If one follows the orientation of Ker Porter’s plan the hill of Češmeh ‘Alī, for example, would be situated towards the north, while its actual situation is to the northwest. Moreover, Ker Porter omits to indicate the spring of Češmeh ‘Alī, noted several times in the old sources. In Pascal Coste’s plan the hill in question can be perfectly located on the site and it corresponds to the aerial photo. Moreover, the spring which issues out of the rock of the hill and runs towards the south, crossing the medieval town and cutting it in two, is noted by Coste. Ker Porter places Češmeh ‘Alī in the continuity of the rampart of the šahrestān. Coste more precisely situates this part of the town between the ramparts of the medieval town. Nevertheless, the latter surveyor does not show the boundaries of the šahrestān clearly on his map, doubtless because by that time they had already been destroyed. One of the possible reasons for this destruction could be the construction of the road leading to Tehran, which cut across the whole medieval town, passing by the foot of the citadel. In fact, Pascal Coste only draws one end of the rampart that disappears beside the road. This interpretation seems reliable and accords with Schmidt’s plan (see below). The second part of the wall as drawn by Coste, further to the west, could have joined up with the rock of Češmeh ‘Alī, and in this case the two 19th century plans (Porter and Coste) would show the same boundaries of the town. However, this possibility would not be compatible with Schmidt’s topography, elaborated when there was still the possibility of visualizing the different parts of the rampart. The orientation of the rampart of the šahrestān on Schmidt’s plan does not correspond with that of the medieval rampart. Coste’s plan is also clearer at indicating the water sources of the town. The French architect has drawn three canals in his plan, one of which goes directly towards Češmeh ‘Alī. Of the two others, one encircles the Kuh-e Sorsore (as in Ker Porter’s plan), while the other runs past the šahrestān.

1 In the title of these documents, Pascal Coste wrote ‘Ruines de l’ancienne Rages’.  
2 Département Patrimoine: Fonds Rares et Précieux et Documentation Régionale of the Alcazar Library, Marseille.  
3 It is also possible to see it through Google Earth.  
4 Only one of the sources shown supplying water to the town on Ker Porter’s plan corresponds with Coste’s plan.  
5 Concerning the boundaries of the town in the medieval period, see Adle (1990).
Pascal Coste’s Plan of Rayy

Coste presents a list of the characteristics and major landmarks on the top left of his plan. It seems clear that the architect began his description with the nucleus of the ancient site, the citadel (A). This is situated on a relief (Kuh-e Sorsore), the most westerly part of which forms a pointed headland; towards the east, the relief seems to flatten out and then ascends to join Bībī Šahrbānū. Coste notes some ‘debris from construction in baked bricks, in which can be observed pieces of stucco decoration’ (C), and other structures in mud brick and pisé on the citadel, probably in a tower.

Two ramparts run from the summit of the citadel towards a point in the middle of its east–west axis, one towards the north-west and the other towards the south. The latter (still visible today and indicated on the recently made plans, Fig. 11) crosses a tower (round on Coste’s plan) and follows towards the west; before crossing the road drawn by Coste, it again crosses a tower and turns towards the north (slightly north-west) to reach the citadel. This latter rampart, although it is not indicated with the letter ‘K’ (‘rampart’ in Coste’s plan), must correspond to that of the citadel.\(^6\) The rampart descends from the citadel, after having given rise to the citadel’s rampart, and continues on its route towards the south,

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\(^6\) The extreme fragility of this rampart and its much-damaged state, seemingly already so at that period, makes its recognition difficult. Coste, in fact, does not see it and draws the road. Only the recent excavations have been able to bring it to light, identify it as the rampart of the citadel and date it.