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## NOTES ON THE IRANIAN TRADITIONS IN THE ARCHITECTURE OF PARTHIAN NISA\*

During the last twenty years many archaeological excavation reports have been published, allowing a more articulated and better defined sequence of the building phases in the fortress of Mithradates – Old Nisa (Fig. 1) and attempting to detect the role of the site in those periods. The excavations carried on during the last twenty years by the Russian-Turkmen and by the Italian-Turkmen expeditions have been very remarkable for the understanding of the monumental central complex's main architectural phases. Although there are no elements for a precise absolute chronology, it is nowadays possible to assume that inside the city wall not all the structures belong to the same original building complex and that the Arsacid centre had a rather elaborate development. Since the first years of studies on the northern area of the Round Hall, the Italian archaeologists recorded the overlap of this building to more ancient structures (later on recognised as part of the Red Building). Meanwhile, the excavations in the area of the Square Hall noticed the existence of early Parthian masonries, later included in the mud brick platform of the building erected in a second phase. Since 2000, following the results from the archaeological excavations, it has been recognised the so-called Red Building as one of the first erected inside the fortress.

Although it is still difficult to give a sharp chronology of the various structures of the site, it is possible to define for the Arsacid period some of the main building phases. Likely, as already stressed by V.N. Pilipko,<sup>1</sup> the first structures erected were the fortification walls and the water system (actually badly known). Belong to an “archaic” Arsacid phase the remains of walls under the Square Hall or the ones located slightly to the north/north east (North-East Building or “Palace”), each one with a proper orientation. Because of the occasional and fragmentary character of these believed most ancient structures, it is far not possible to determine if they were contemporary. It is also hard to say if one of those is contemporary to the Red Building. All these structures mentioned above could therefore lead to the identification of more than one “ancient” (Arsacid) phases in Old

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\* The present paper resumes some of the conclusions advanced in the final report of the Italian excavations in Old Nisa (Invernizzi/Lippolis 2008).

<sup>1</sup> Pilipko 2001; Pilipko 2007. See also, recently, the attribution of the foundation of Old Nisa to the Seleucid period (Balahvančev 2005), a thesis not fully accepted by V.N. Pilipko (2007: 155).

Nisa. We can at the moment accept the idea that this site, in origin maybe an important “royal” fortified residence later on improved and developed with the erection of the central complex (Tower Building, Round Hall, Square Hall etc...).<sup>2</sup> During this second phase the radical changing of the plan organization in the entire central area of the fortress, shows most likely a swift of the centre utilization that from royal residence became – probably after the death of its founder Mithradates I – a huge memorial and ceremonial centre for the Arsacid dynasty.<sup>3</sup>

The majority of the structures of the central complex date to the second phase of the Nisa occupation and are therefore connected to the ceremonial sphere, involving the glorification of the dynasty. In these circumstances the Red Building gains a great value being the only integral testimonial of the “first” Mithradatkert. The site was constantly used for many years until relevant restoration works in the monumental complex were undertaken, probably during the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. Unfortunately, an exact dating of these building activities is very difficult, together with the valuing of the definitive abandon of the site.<sup>4</sup> However, it is plausible to think that still for a lapse of time after its abandon the fortress kept a sort of holy nature and that occasionally ceremonies took place, like the ones with the chalk (gypsum) spheroid offering performed in specific areas of the buildings.<sup>5</sup>

The architecture of Old Nisa, throughout the centuries, embraces different buildings styles without following a plan or schemes from a unique specific architectural tradition. The Iranian tradition is, however, the most predominant, as evident in the plan, the spatial conception and the building disposition. The architectural decoration is rather more oriented to a mixture of eastern and western motives. The most used material is the mud brick 40–42 cm for side and 13–14 cm thick (but sizes can change slightly in the different buildings phases).<sup>6</sup> Beaten clay (*pakhsa*) is used more for subordinate masonries or minor details, in particular during the later Arsacid phases. In the first phases stone and wood were employed and respectively used for column bases and shafts.<sup>7</sup> Chalk/Gypsum was mainly used to fix the decorative elements in terracotta, as for example in the assembled capitals (in Ionic or Corinthian order) or on the walls for merlons, decorated slabs, metopes<sup>8</sup> and shaped bricks,<sup>9</sup> stucco also recurred on cornices and friezes on the walls.

<sup>2</sup> Pilipko 2001: 340–352; Pilipko 2007: 256.

<sup>3</sup> Invernizzi 2001a.

<sup>4</sup> On this matter could be helpful the results of the still ongoing works of the Italian expedition of the Centro Scavi Torino in the south-western corner of Old Nisa: here, excavations are bringing to the light structures with levels probably belonging to the late Parthian periods of occupation.

<sup>5</sup> Messina 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Pugačenkova 1949 and 1958: 78; Pilipko 2001: 220; Invernizzi/Lippolis 2008: 217.

<sup>7</sup> Pilipko 2001: 239–240; Invernizzi/Lippolis 2008: 218–219. Wooden beam have been found also inside sections walls as reinforcement, mainly in correspondence of passageways and of course as wooden shingles.

<sup>8</sup> Pugačenkova 1949. For the weapons (*gorytos*) on the metopes of Old Nisa and on the first Arsacid coins see Gaslain 2006.

<sup>9</sup> Important is to underline that the terracotta architectural elements of Old Nisa have always been found in secondary context of a collapse and never *in situ*. Some of these elements have been also found on the ancient floor levels. The presence of different shapes and techniques of manufacturing in architectural elements led to the supposition that they were probably foreseen from the beginning, even actually this is not an objective data. For a recent study on the decorative elements in Nisean architecture see Invernizzi 2006.

As for the materials employed, not many differences are remarkable in the plan organization. All the buildings in Old Nisa have a regular and quadrangular layout. The Round Hall is considered to be unique but it is anyway constrict inside a square perimeter. The concentric schemes are predominant, i.e. the centre of a building – in some cases its geometrical centre – coincide approximately with the main hall (Fig. 1, 2, 5). The dislocation of the entrances to the interior of the building is variable. Secondary or auxiliary accesses are put on the side or on the back of the building while the main entrance can be on the axis of its geometrical centre (Round Hall, Tower Building, Square Hall; in the Red Building the axis is interrupted)<sup>10</sup> or off-centre (“Palace”, Square House).

Moreover, inside the central complex many irregularities are evident, also between constructions dated to the same period. A remarkable example is the Square Hall where the walls have a slightly oblique course in comparison to the near Tower Building.<sup>11</sup> Also different is the structure orientation in the buildings to the north-east (“Palace”), although it could be due the pre-existence of earlier structures. It seems therefore that the building orientation of Old Nisa responds to functional needings and to be influenced by the pre-existing structures or by the ground flowing: for this reason, it cannot be considered as a certain element for the chronology evaluation of the complexes.

The Red Building belongs to an earlier phases, in spite of its orientation – the same of the one of the Round Hall and the Tower Building. Before its erection, the terrain has been only partially levelled. The walls were erected directly on the virgin soil and not upon a foundation platform, like in the Square Hall and in the Tower Building. Only in the south-east corner, some beaten clay mixed with straw was added to level the soil to avoid the slightly pendency of the ground from west to east.<sup>12</sup>

Laying the walls directly on the virgin soil gives a first element to evaluate the building chronology as of an early date. Another indication is its location, close and parallel to the walls, that bring us to a logical building consecution which indicates the erection of the internal complex from the walls forward to the inside. The plan organization of the Red Building is not symmetrical: the western side is wider than the eastern one, although the columned hall is at the centre of the building (the geometrical centre is, actually, decentred but inside the central hall). This irregularity in the plan, maybe connected to the inclination of the ground or rather to an original project which had included other structures on the eastern (external) side of the complex, are hid by the presence of the perimeter corridors, which therefore had a function non exclusively limited to organize the internal ways.

Adequate and focused architectural studies on the principles of the project of the Arsacid centre have never been carried on. It is not possible to identify a universal architectural module recurrent, although frequent proportions and measurement are often similar (Fig. 2). At first sight the buildings seems to follow commune principles and the main halls have similar dimensions, although they are different from each

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<sup>10</sup> The Red Building and the Tower Building secondary façades are located on the southern side. In the Tower Building it seems to be monumental with a ramp or staircase leading to a portico.

<sup>11</sup> The two buildings are usually dated both to the second great building phase in Nisa.

<sup>12</sup> The heights divergences inside the building where normally left unchanged: the floors in the eastern rooms are lower compared to the floors adjacent the walls.

other. For example, if we inscribe the circumference of the Round Hall (about 17 meters of diameter) inside the Square Hall, it does not perfectly matches to the dimension of the tetrastyle hall (the Round Hall diameter is over one meter and half smaller). This measure varies again in the central block of the Tower Building, of about 20 m side while the central tetrastyle hall in Red Building (about  $15 \times 17$  metres) does not match with none of the three measures; moreover, it has rectangular shape instead of the regular square one.

Regarding the measures taken in the Square House, it is attempted by Pugačenkova to find a basic module of 2,28 m (equal to the length of the load-bearing walls of the building; Fig. 3) which multiples she recognized in the external perimeter, on the lengths of the courtyard sides and in the rooms' extent.<sup>13</sup> Actually, any exact correspondence in the sizes of the buildings components is not verified,<sup>14</sup> as is usually evidenced in the other complexes in Nisa. A reason could be found in the nature of the brick, made of an extremely deformable material. Although this consideration and the impossibility so far to recognize a recurrent system of measurement, it is clear – but still to be more investigated – the existence of an accurate project at the bases of the planning of the complex.

Following the genuine central Asiatic tradition the building materials used are, as mentioned above, clay, wood, stone, terracotta and chalk/gypsum. Stone and wood are not easy available in Nisa, and they were used substantially only in the earlier building phases. Inside the Red Building the stone, a local gray-greenish sandstone, is mostly used for the columns bases of the portico and in the central hall, but also for the slabs of the long dado/socle decorating the northern façade (Fig. 6).<sup>15</sup> The columns, following an Iranian tradition, were made by wood plastered and covered with bright colours and gold leaves. Terracotta acanthus leaves and volutes of corinthian assembled capitals have been also found in the area of the façade. The employing of material like wood and stone, mostly used in the earlier phases, is another confirmation for the assumed ancient date of the Red Building which maintained this elements also later on when, in the second building phase of the fortress, the more practical baked brick was overall diffused for the base and the column shaft itself.

Beside the general structure of the plan, the Iranian tradition is well recognizable in the Red Building just in the wooden columns on stone bases (Fig. 7). The Achaemenid typology with quadrangular steps plinth and a simple torus has been noticed in the central hall: in Old Nisa similar bases have been found in the Square House, to the east of the Square Hall, on the northern façade of the Tower Building (maybe here re-used) and in the area of the “Palace”. Elsewhere these elements were re-used and this makes it difficult to understand their precise provenance. The bases of the central hall of the Red Building measures  $125 \times 125$  cm and are made by two separate sandstone blocks;<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Pugačenkova 1958: 74–75, 76 (figure).

<sup>14</sup> Pilipko 2001: 247.

<sup>15</sup> Lippolis 2005; Menegazzi 2008.

<sup>16</sup> Different and unique are the bases of the northern portico, that might have been substituted in a later time and are composed by 5 assembled pieces (plus the torus separately made) covered by a plastered coat and coloured: this technique, as far as I know, has no punctual comparison in Central Asia in Parthian times.

one of these still showed traces of the covering in chalk and red colour.<sup>17</sup> The shaft of the column was plastered, coloured and decorated with gold leaves: beside the black, traces of red and yellow-ochre colours have been found both on the woods and gold leaf fragments. Probably these colours were originally also on the rafters of the roof, reconstructed with a central opening (skylight).<sup>18</sup>

Another shared element between Old Nisa and the Iranian architectural tradition is the presence of wide surfaces, floors and walls, refined in red purple colour: this is where the name “Red Building” comes from, being that building a place where this kind of finish work was largely used<sup>19</sup> (Fig. 8). This is not however the only example known in Nisa: the red purple surfaced plaster has been found also in the Square Hall (floor and lower part of the walls of the “red corridor”, upper part of the walls of the central hall) and maybe also the upper part of the Round Hall’s dome was red purple plastered.<sup>20</sup> In the nearby New Nisa coloured plaster has been found in the so called “red chambers” close to the cultural complex along the walls.<sup>21</sup> Ultimately, in the close site of Mansur-depe rooms with coloured plaster decoration and paintings have been excavated.<sup>22</sup> In the Square Hall, Round Hall and at New Nisa, the red-surfaced plasters and floors have generally referred to the second or third building phases,<sup>23</sup> while in the Red Building this kind of decoration was certainly foreseen from the beginning.<sup>24</sup>

Beyond the cases where pictorial decoration on clay have been found, in Parthian Nisa the walls can be entirely plastered with a thin layer of white chalky plaster or with the lower part (usually up to 110–130 cm height from the ground) finished with a more thick smooth coat, polished and coloured. For the walls usually a reddish colour and for the floor also a yellow-ochre colour is used. This characteristic coloured plaster is dis-

<sup>17</sup> The typology of the so called Achaemenid bases, very frequent in Persepolis (Apadana, Treasury, Fratarakas’ Temple), Susa (Apadana, Donjon building, porticos of the Chaour Palace), rock tombs (Naqsh-e Rostan, Persepolis) and even more diffused in the Caucasus provinces of the Empire (see for example Ter-Martirosov 2001: 155–163). The Red Building’s columns profile has comparison in Central Asia with some of the Oxus’ treasury bases where these are made by two different blocks of stone (plinth and torus, like in Nisa: Litvinskij 2000: 141–153, tab. 40–43, with a detailed study has been made on the diffusion of this kind of column in Iran, Caucasus and Central Asia), but they are also similar to the bases in Khalchayan (Pugačenkova 1966: 132) and in the *propyleon* of Ai Khanum (although here monolithics; Bernard 1973: 19, fig. 1).

<sup>18</sup> Invernizzi/Lippolis 2008: 108–110.

<sup>19</sup> The aversion to call this building the “Red Building” just because it is not the only one in Nisa with purple red coloured rooms, seems to be quite unavailing. After all the choice made by Pilipko as “Stone Slabs Frieze Building” or “South-Western Building” to indicate these structures (Pilipko 2007: 150–151) does not help for an easier identification of the buildings but can lead in to further confusions.

<sup>20</sup> It has been already elsewhere noticed that such a reconstruction is not beyond any doubt: see Invernizzi/Lippolis 2008: 220 nota 33.

<sup>21</sup> Pugačenkova 1958: 60–69. Along the north-western fortification walls of New Nisa the JuTAKE, between 1946 and 1949, discovered structures of Arsacid period. Above an ancient building on a stepped platform, surrounded by columns on three sides and with internal rectangular hall (III–II century B.C. according to the excavations), aristocratic tombs overlapped – the so called “red chambers” – during later phases from the first century B.C. The earlier construction has been identified as cult building (Pugačenkova 1958: 68) or as a funerary monument of a person of higher social status (Gullini 1964: 308–311; Grenet 1984: 89–92).

<sup>22</sup> Košelenko/Novikov/Lapšin 2000: 99.

<sup>23</sup> Pugačenkova 1958: 107–108.

<sup>24</sup> See the final report of the italian excavations in Old Nisa: Invernizzi/Lippolis 2008: 111 (room 21) and 115 (room 15).

tinguished from the other finishing by the composition and technique. Pugačenkova<sup>25</sup> stressed that the plaster consisted of a mixture of coats of clay (1,5–2 cm thick) and pinky lime with inclusions of sand (or very thin gravel), grinded fragments of pottery and baked bricks. On the top of the base, a strong red colour was applied and later on polished. The technique and the laying of the red-surface plaster in Nisa seem to follow the instructions written by Vitruvius on the plaster humidity-resistant or base coat for the pictorial representations in Greek architecture.<sup>26</sup>

So far have not been found cases where wax was employed during the finish works, it was however probably obtained with fat components (or sugars?) and later mechanically polished.<sup>27</sup> The studies carried on during the recent archaeological Italian-Turkmen expeditions have supplied further information regarding structure and its internal composition.<sup>28</sup> It is possible to observe from the stratigraphic section of some fragments that it is composed by a thin red coat above a lower white layer not clearly defined on a mixture of sand and clay. The XRF-analysis shows that the red pigment is a mixture of different minerals (Ca, Fe, S, Sr, K);<sup>29</sup> the XRD-analysis also records the presence of quartz, calcite (calcium carbonate) and albite (sodium, aluminium silicate). In different quantity further spot tests have detected the presence of sugars in almost all the plaster samples, probably used to bind together in absence of oils or proteins.

Although in the Mediterranean world the use of colour surfaced plaster, for walls and floors, is attested since the Minoic period,<sup>30</sup> only in the Achaemenid time this technique became largely used, mainly related to a monumental palatial complex. Despite the first theories based on the first excavations in Babylon pointed out that this technique came to the Achaemenids through the Chaldaean palaces, very soon it was demonstrated, that the levels of the southern palace of Babylon, where this practice was recurrent, was to be dated back to the Achaemenid period.<sup>31</sup> In fact, from the time of Darius I the technique became largely diffused in the Iranian architecture: we find it in his Palace at Susa,<sup>32</sup> in Tatchara, Treasury and inside a building in the southern area of the terrace at Persepolis<sup>33</sup> and, as above mentioned, in the Achaemenid pavilion at Babylon.<sup>34</sup> These

<sup>25</sup> Pugačenkova 1958: 64. See also Graždankina 1958: 51.

<sup>26</sup> Vitruvius, *De Architectura*, VII, 3: 5–10; 4: 1–3.

<sup>27</sup> Pugačenkova 1958: 64 (*ganosis*, cfr. *Vitr.* X, 2–4).

<sup>28</sup> I want to thank Lorenzo Appolonia (Direction de la Recherche et des projets cofinancés – Région Autonome Vallée d'Aoste) and Bruno Radicati (Department of Applied Physics “Nello Carrara”, CNR Florence) for the analyses carried on in loco and in laboratory on plaster, pigments and clay samples, see Invernizzi/Lippolis 2008: 197–208.

<sup>29</sup> The presence of titanium and plumb-ferrous elements to obtain the typical saturated and dark red colour is recorded in the test results made by JuTAKE: Graždankina 1958: 51. About red-surface plaster analyses and composition from Persepolis see: Matson 1953: 285–288.

<sup>30</sup> de Mecquenem 1947: 11 with references to the Festos' Palace; Olmstead 1959: 162 where he confirms that the practice to colour in red the plastered surface on clay and gravel bases is “already familiar to us in Greece”.

<sup>31</sup> Haerinck 1973: 114.

<sup>32</sup> de Mecquenem 1938: 322–334; de Mecquenem 1947: 10–11, 20–28, pl. II.

<sup>33</sup> Schmidt 1953: 159, 222 (Tatchara); 3 (notes 2), 42, 159, 182, 199, 215 (Treasury); 40, 55, 159 (building south of the Terrace).

<sup>34</sup> Koldewey 1931: 120; Koldewey 1932: 46–47; Schmidt 1953: 28, where he revise his dating theory previously suggested for the floors (Schmidt 1941: 827–829; with regards of this see also Wetzel/Schmidt/Mallwitz 1957: 24–25, 47) assigning a Seleucid date instead an Achaemenid one; Haerinck 1973.

kind of floor treatment, seem to be more complex compared to the ones discovered at Nisa (Figs. 3, 6). In Susa and Persepolis the technique with overlapped layers, of which the upper one was coloured (Vitruvius' *ruderatio*), consisted in laying a lower dick coat of gravels, fragments of unbaked bricks, clay and lime. Above this layer two additional *strata* more finely crumbled were placed. The last step was the colour, about 2 mm thick, mixed with very thin gravels and lime: the most frequent was the dark red purple colour, but yellow-ochre and black were also employed.<sup>35</sup> These plastering, recurrent in the Iranian tradition essentially for the flooring, have been attested both for internal (official rooms, but also private spaces and passageways) or external areas. In Old Nisa the final polish is always present, while in the Iranian area the most superficial layer seems to be less smooth with visibly inclusions (but it might be, however, due to the conservation conditions).

Even if the archaeological remains available are far from to be exhaustive and even if it is impossible to link univocally the use of this particular finish work to a specific destination of the buildings/rooms, the data from the Achaemenid context could suggest a relationship with the royal ideology since this kind of decoration has been found almost exclusively in palatial and residential buildings related to the dominant power. In the case of Nisa it is quite difficult to demonstrate a direct link between the royal ideology and the use of the red purple coloured plaster works. In New Nisa for example, the red chambers have been interpreted as graves of aristocracy members (or maybe people in some way connected to the royal family?), while the iwans of the nearby Mansur-depe as a cultic centre not far from Mithradatkert (probably also in this case connected to the Arsacid family?).<sup>36</sup> In the specific case of Old Nisa, maybe it is possible to recognize a direct relationship between the dominance of the red purple colour in the main spaces of the most relevant buildings of the of the central complex and the royal ideology and the exaltation of the royalty. During the Achaemenid period purple colour as a status symbol becomes in some way an institution, especially during ceremonies (in clothing, regalia, decorations etc...). At the end of the Achaemenid Empire, the purple became par excellence royal *insignia*, a tradition that will be later on taken by Alexander the Great and by his epigones.<sup>37</sup> Antagonists but heirs of Seleucids, the Arsacid kings, could certainly not neglect the symbolic valence of the purple colour in the Iranian and in the western world. It is relevant how a classic source describes the royal class as the continuation of the court of the royal Persian costume giving them the etiquette of *purpurei tyranny*.<sup>38</sup> Unfortunately, our knowledge on the royal cults and ideology of the Arsacid tradition is quite limited and it is difficult to see and feel the nuances. Nevertheless we cannot exclude the relation between the red surfaced plaster and royal celebration already dominant in the Achaemenid tradition and probably passed to the Arsacid one by the Seleucids.

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<sup>35</sup> Haerinck 1973: 113 and note 16.

<sup>36</sup> The Mansur-depe complex was interpreted by G.A. Košelenko as a ceremonial centre. V. Gaibov, following the previous interpretation made by Pugačenkova (Košelenko/Novikov/Lapšin 2000: 109) leans towards a royal residence.

<sup>37</sup> Reihnold 1970: 19; Virgilio 1999: 79.

<sup>38</sup> Horatius, *Carm.*, 1.35.11.

Concluding, it is possible to trace some consideration over the Red Building plan organization (Fig. 4) and its relations with the Iranian and central Asian traditions.<sup>39</sup> The general asset of the plan is clearly part of a consolidated Iranian and central Asiatic architectural tradition, linked both to the buildings with a sacral and/or ceremonial nature or to other solutions for the residential domestic and official architecture. The elements of which the Red Building is made off are the porticoes on the façade between lateral wings and behind a quadrangular tetrastyle hall surrounded by small rooms in a U-shape and external perimetral corridors to the east, west and south (with U-shape reversed respect the functional rooms). The external corridors were planned to divide the central block and, at the same time, to connect all the sectors of the building with internal and external areas. In fact each of the corridors is provided with at least an access to the adjacent external area. Looking at its plan the Red Building is a block finished in itself, as an independent complex, but we cannot exclude the presence, in its earliest phases – on the eastern and south sides – of pavilions or structures later destroyed.

Already at a first look the plan shows a general layout that can be interpreted as typical of the eastern Iranian architectural tradition. Some of its characteristics are often considered as indicative of a specific typology of religious monuments referring to some buildings whose destination and chronology still remain uncertain. Compared with the other cases studied, the Red Building seems at first sight to be part of a consolidated tradition of “religious” buildings typical of the Iranian and Central Asia areas.<sup>40</sup> A long tradition that, through the achievements of Surkh Kotal and Dilberjin, will survive until the Sogdian complexes of Panjikent.

Nevertheless, to consider the Red Building a temple is not a satisfying interpretation.<sup>41</sup> First of all, assuming for certain the hypothesis of the site as original fortified residence, this one has to be referred to probably just as a residential or palatial character even if it is not possible to exclude the presence of sacral areas inside. Moreover, the idea of a religious building can in no way be supported by the objective remains. In fact, the excavations did not relieve specific objects or altars, statues bases of fragments of structures that might indicate the affiliation to a sacral religious sphere. On the other hand, the absence of ashes deposits in the Red Building excludes its interpretation as a fire-temple and underlines that the building (as elsewhere in Old Nisa) were not abruptly abandoned and destroyed. Finally, the existence of a secondary (southern) access to the central hall is not at all appropriate for a temple’s cella but more of a reception hall. And, in fact, the tetrastyle central square hall layout is not exclusive of the religious architecture, but it corresponds to an architectural scheme quite diffused, also in secular context: we are able to find punctual comparisons within the Iranian and Central Asian residential and palatial architecture. At this purpose it is useful to consider the plan of some Graeco-Bactrian residences, where a recurrent architectural lay-

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<sup>39</sup> For a more detailed discussion see Invernizzi/Lippolis 2008: 365–384.

<sup>40</sup> A critical study on this matter is Boucharlat 1984: 133. See also Stronach 1985: 621.

<sup>41</sup> Pilipko (2007: 156) supports the same theory although limited to some observations on the Red Buildings plan organization. He only mentions without any further explanation that it cannot correspond to a temple plan.



out is attested.<sup>42</sup> The outline of the Red Building shows many common points with this residential architectural tradition. The origin of this pattern comes probably from the Iranian tradition, where it was diffused within the satrapies of the Empire and later on in Parthian period in Mesopotamia.<sup>43</sup> This model seems to be already known during the Achaemenid period, also in official sphere: the plan organization of some Achaemenid residences, if confronted to the one of the Greco-Bactrian residences, presupposes the existence of a local typology source of inspiration for the Central Asiatic architects.<sup>44</sup> The substantial analogies coming from these plans are the presence of a group of rooms on one side of a court, the dominant position of the central hall, the presence of a portico on the court and the U-shaped disposition of the rooms around the central block.<sup>45</sup> Even recognizing a “residential” character of some monumental buildings of Persepolis the absence of a corridor between the central hall and the outlying rooms (without spaces of a domestic nature) brings to their interpretation as official apartments for the activity of the king, rather than private units with secondary service rooms. The Red Building in Old Nisa has, compared to those “residential” buildings, a substantial difference: the perimetral corridor which does not divide the central hall from the rooms at the sides, but enclose the entire complex separating (but at the same time connecting) the inner rooms and the external area. This is actually another element that led to consider the building a construction for representative purposes. Moreover, the small rooms at the interior have no functional installation and are not apart from the central hall (even if they do not communicate with it, if we exclude the case of the northern side).

The formal treatment of walls and floors, the architectural decoration and the internal finishing works of some of the rooms (in general of the whole Red Building) seem to confirm the official representative nature of the complex with its centre in the columned central hall. On the other hand, inside the building, other spaces could have been thought for cult religious destination. The rooms with red purple colour 21 and 15 and probably also the two lateral projecting rooms of the portico, had probably a particular function reserved for specific ceremony with a restricted public attendance. The interpretation of the nature of the two rooms on the façade (probably added in a second time) and the small but richly adorned room 15 is difficult. Easier is the explanation for the room 21 overlooking the tetrastyle hall. The unusual dimension of this entrance reinforces the strong link between the main hall. The red purple plaster on the walls, the finely plastered pavements (here in yellow-ochre) and a large niche in the wall opposite to the entrance, are all elements that lead to think of a sacral nature of this (private) space. Probably it was used as a place for special ceremonies involving the figure of the king, maybe a sort of “palatine chapel” physically and ideologically linked to the tetrastyle main hall. The red purple colour, largely used inside the Red Building throughout all its construction phases, can be then strictly connected to the royal ideology. If it is correct that in the district of Nisa this colour was used also for the cultic (Mansur-depe)

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<sup>42</sup> Bernard 1976: 257–266, figs 1, 4, 5 for the origin of this plan typology and the problem of “type mégaron”: Francfort 1977: 267–280, figs 1–5 with a specific allusion to the results of this tradition in Central Asia and Iran from 250 B.C. until Sasanian period.

<sup>43</sup> Lecuyot 1993: 42.

<sup>44</sup> A typology “propre au domaine iranien de l’Est” according to Bernard 1976: 265.

<sup>45</sup> Schmidt 1953; figs 92, 97, 107; Bernard 1976: 261.

and funerary (New Nisa) environment (in some case maybe connected with the dynasty), this specific treatment of the surfaces must have been used in official and palatial buildings and handed over to the Parthians throughout the contact with the official Achaemenid residences. It is also possible due the symbolic meaning of the colour, that the use of purple in the buildings of these three centres might be interpreted as the presence of a direct link with the royal family or with royalty in general.

Either isolated or bounded since its origin to the other sectors of the citadel, the Red Building conserved certainly an high symbolism closely related to the royal figure. It is relevant to remind that the reconstruction of the central complex and the transformation of the entire central sector in memorial for the dynasty did not bring relevant changes on its plan. The strong conservatism noticed by the absence of radical changes even in the later phases of the Red Building at Old Nisa can point out that the building considered as the most representative element dated to the “first” foundation, symbol of authority of its founder and king, stayed substantially unchanged, both in the shape and in the original nature: an official pavilion constitute by a tetrastyle reception hall and several rooms at the sides, addressed to the king private rituals and cults and connected to the royal ideology.

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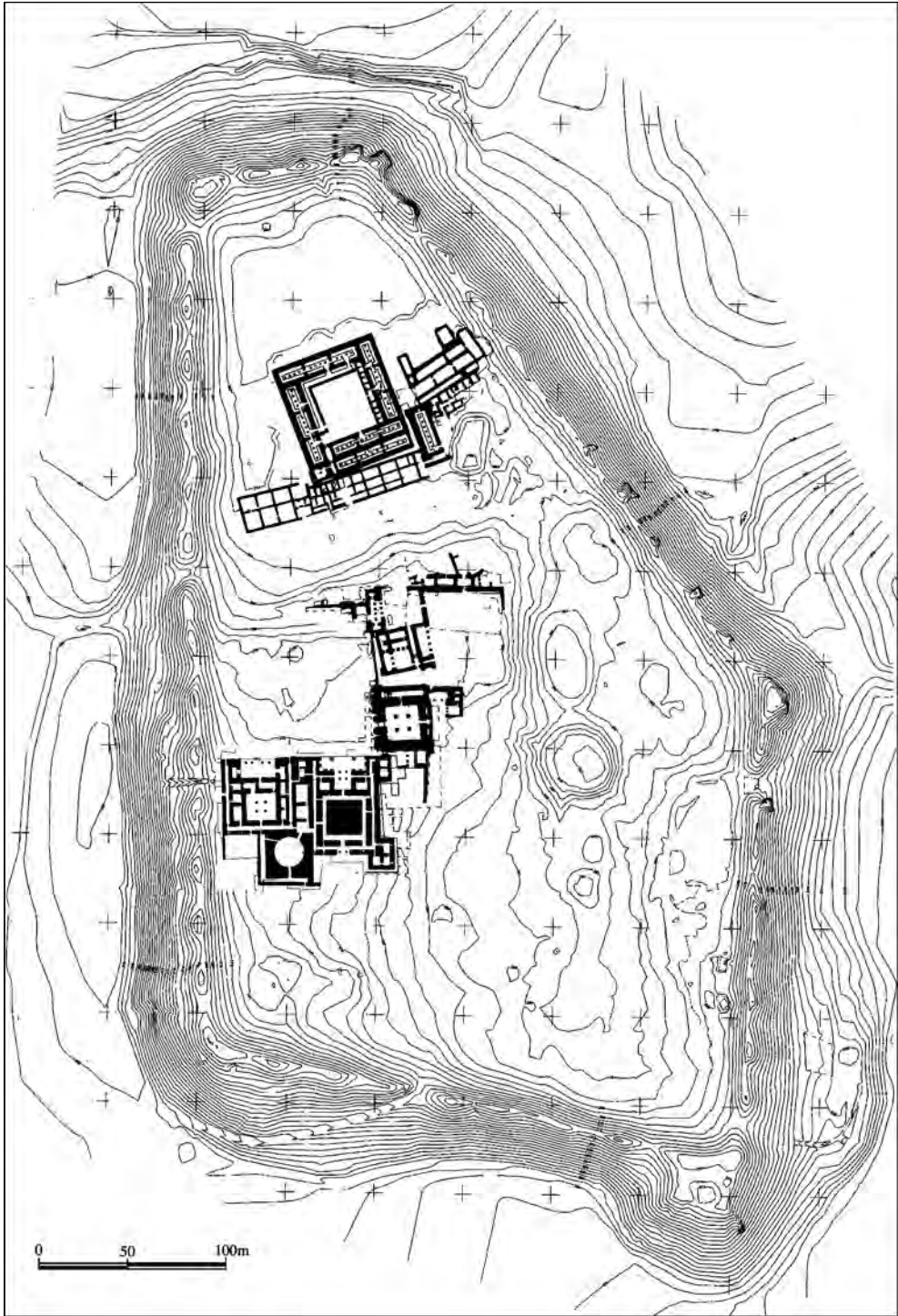


Fig. 1. Old Nisa (drawing by N. Masturzo)

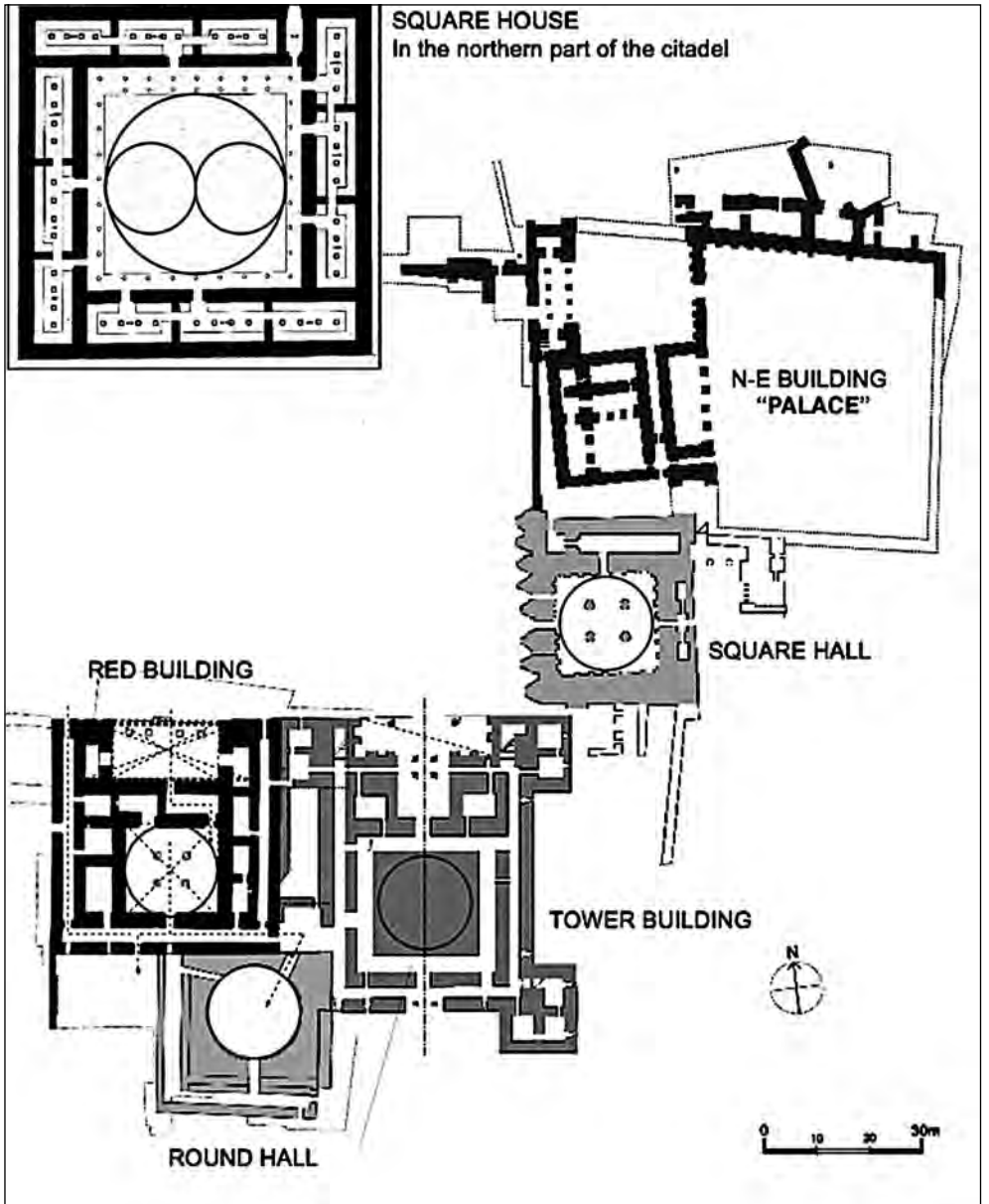


Fig. 2. Central complex buildings and Square House (comparative dimensions)

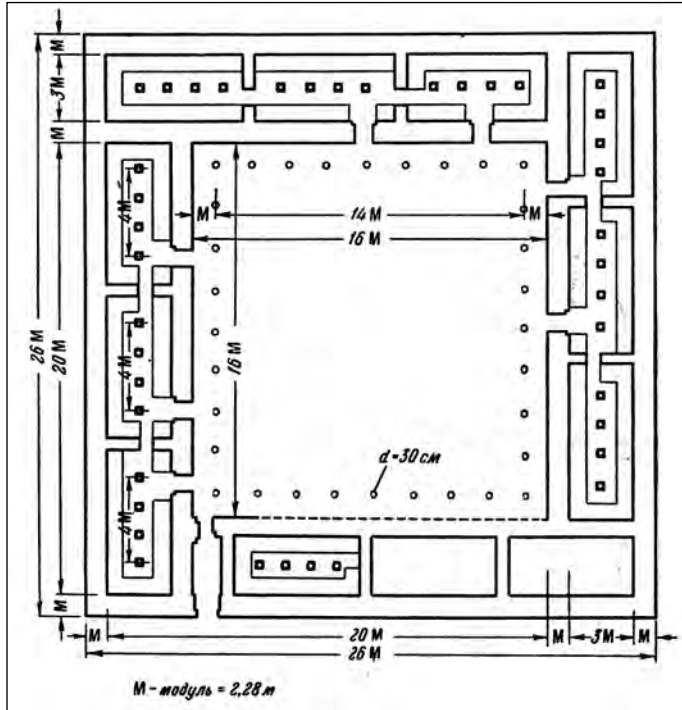


Fig. 3. The Square House at Old Nisa (after Pugačenkova 1958: 76)

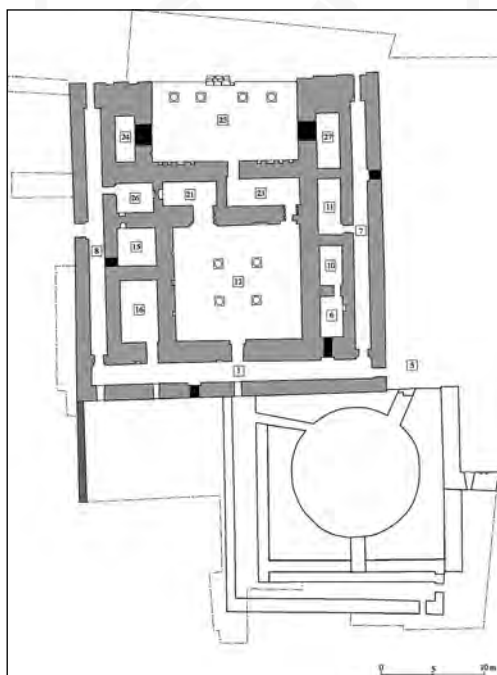


Fig. 4. Schematic plan of the Red Building and the Round Hall

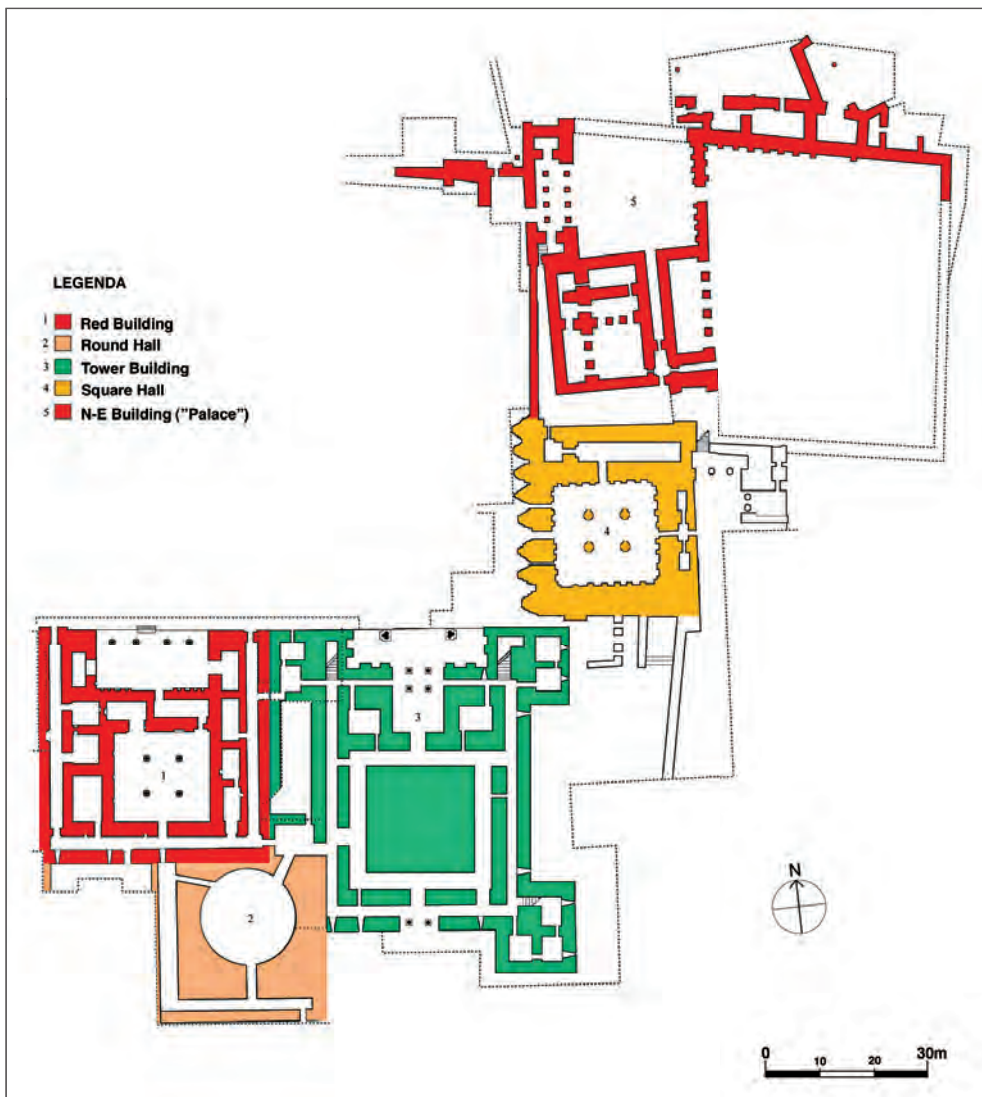


Fig. 5. The central complex of Old Nisa (drawing by C. Fossati)



Fig. 6. Old Nisa, Red Building: particular of the stone slabs socle of the façade



Fig. 7. Old Nisa. Red Building: the central tetrastyle hall





Fig. 8. Old Nisa, Red Building: one of the lateral room of the façade (room 27)



Fig. 9. Old Nisa, terracotta metope from the Red Building