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- 1 The vastness of the monument known as Qaleh Iraj (1.6 x 1.3 km!), close by the modern Tehran, raised many questions on its chronology and function. Was it the ancient Ray, the four-corner city of Varena, a park for royal hunt, or a fort? In this paper, the results of surveys, excavations, satellite imagery, and textual analysis are combined to provide answers. In terms of domestic architecture, just a clay floor on a cobblestone bedding had been found within the vast intramural area. The defensive system, however, is impressive. Projecting semi-circular towers reinforced the defensive system and four gates, one for each side, opened along the perimeter enclosing a total area of 175 ha. Large arches on the outside of the wall connected the towers via a corridor of which just some sections survived. There were hundreds of rooms within the enormous walls.

- 2 Dating proposed hinges on intramural surface finds and the architecture of the wall, and also the results of eleven radiocarbon dates which brought the authors to set the construction between 380 and 420s CE. Ostraka and bullae, probably of commercial content, will be translated and fully published soon by Cereti.
 - 3 The lack of permanent structure within the walls, together with the massive defensive system containing interior structures, hint to a military function – likely one of the fortified tent cities attested by the Armenian historian Elishē. The four monumental gates and the hundreds of arches suggest that this prestigious monument was built to impress.
 - 4 The main functions may have been to supply military forces when needed, and to train or assemble soldiers as headquarter of northern Persia. These facts, and the comparison with Gabri Qaleh, suggest a revaluation of our understanding of Sasanian military strategy. This study opens new questions, and other studies on Sasanian fortresses are much needed to provide answers.
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