

Mountain Villages of Iran

MASOOLEH

ZIARAT

DEYHOOK

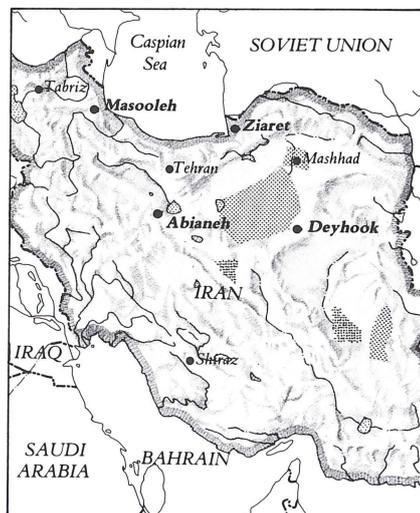
ABIANEH



View of the village of Masooleh from the opposite mountain.

Article and photographs by Farhad Niroumand-Rad

Self-reliant societies of differing climatic conditions have other developed exceptional vernacular architecture. Architecture of these communities has been structured purely on needs and protection, to accommodate basic necessities for man's living environment. The blending of nature and architecture in Iranian villages has developed a unique architectural pattern. Here four villages of the Iranian plateau with geographic similarity and climatic differences are examined. Masooleh and Ziarat are two villages in the northern region of the Iranian plateau. Masooleh on the west and Ziarat on the east of the Caspian Sea have a moderate summer and a cold winter. Abianeh (and



Deyhook¹⁾ are two villages in the central region of the Iranian plateau. Abianeh to the southwest (like Deyhook on the southeast) of Dasht-e-kavir have a hot, dry summer and moderate winter.

The relatively isolated, mountainous setting of these villages has made access to them difficult. These villages are unique due to their setting and climate. Networks of the cities and villages in each of

Left: Map of Iran showing the location of the villages in relation to the Caspian Sea and Dasht-e-Kavir.

¹⁾Deyhook was destroyed by an earthquake in Tabas region (east-central region of Iranian Plateau) in September of 1978.



Masooleh

Above: Window treatment of commercial units (the lower buildings) and residential units (the upper buildings).

Left: Houses have a direct access from the pathway and in majority of houses the living quarter on the second floor opens out through the balcony to the surrounding environment.

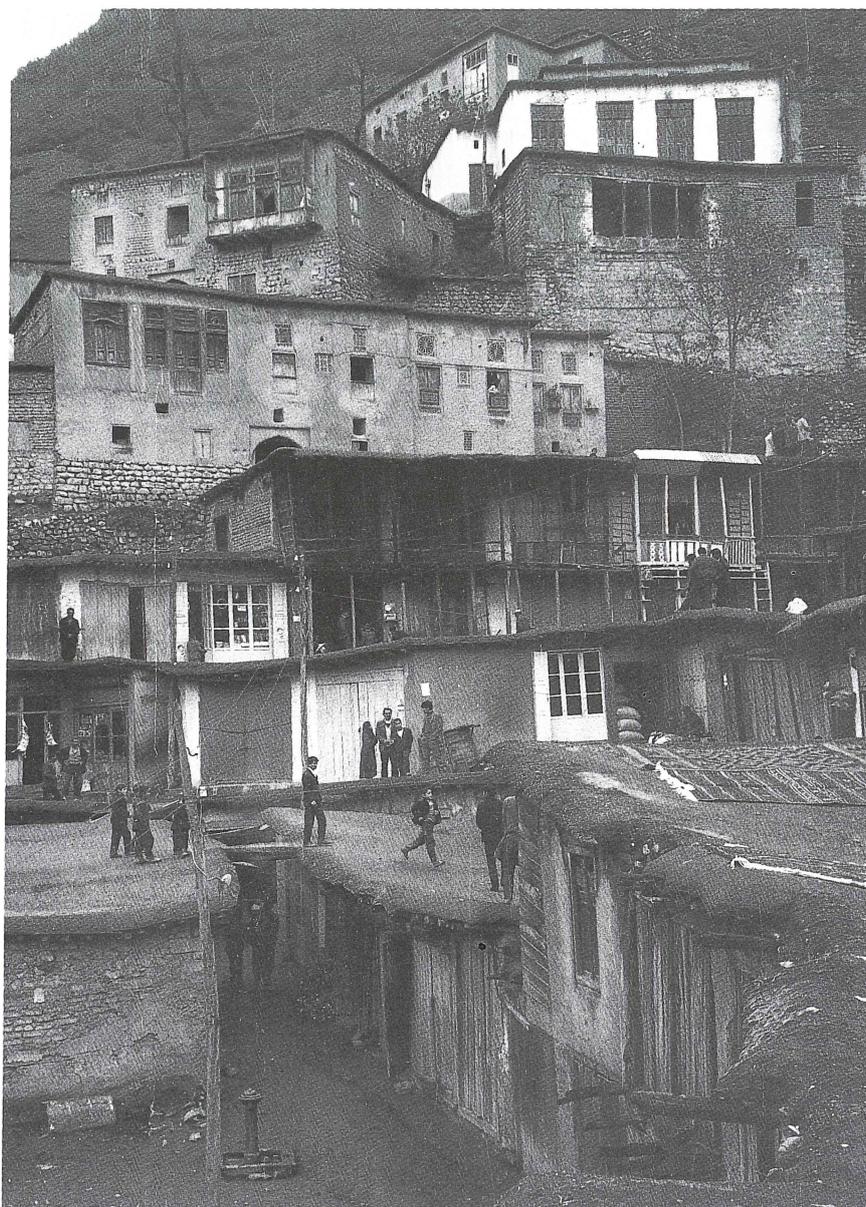
Right: Juxtaposition of series of attached houses in relation with the access way.

these regions are unrelated to each other in a geographic sense, and communication between them is difficult. Although the culture, beliefs and traditions have similarities, the natural environment, crop system, land ownership, and social structure of each village have ordered the inner and outer spaces of each village differently in their unique setting.

Nature

A predominant characteristic of these villages is the combined texture of buildings and landscape, following the organic order of their settings. The overall fabric





Masooleh

Left: Commercial district (bazaar) of the village of Masooleh where elements for public use are located and is the centre of activities in the village.

ences a strong, enduring feeling of densely organised space from the convergence of the natural route with the village. A natural gateway leading to a naturally culminated area as one approaches the village arouses a perception of inhabitable space in the distance. A similar sense of enduring space is generated within the village by its natural setting and the spiritual intent of its inhabitants. This has induced a common idea which is adapted in each village according to their unique environmental expression. One grasps the essence of space by walking through the village. Changing spatial qualities within the village also give similar transcendence of space when entering a building.

The encircling paths in these villages penetrate through open and covered, positive and negative, spaces while giving access to the buildings. These paths occasionally open onto 'dead end' areas, which change the rhythm of one's movement through the village. These areas function as a common space, serving a series of residential units, or as a public space in front of a mosque or commercial district. Paths that penetrate through the spaces subsequently disperse into different levels of lanes. They not only follow the sequential creation of the buildings, but they are adapted to the slope of the site and the shifting terrain. This natural sort of deference, of the path to its site, has created an enduring arrangement of spaces within the village. These paths not only provide privacy for the units, but also give an overall view of the village, while drawing one into public spaces.

An intermediate space on entering a building has been included, which is expressed differently in each village. Entrances to the units in Masooleh often occur at the point of a setback in a series of units. They are indicated by an arched opening. The entry axis is further emphasised by a small square opening. In Ziarat the inner space of the building has become a part of the environment of the village through the balcony. Entrances to these buildings are a series of steps leading to a balcony, in front of the living space.

Entrances in Abianeh are through an opening carved out of the continuous surface of the building along the path. Set into either side of the entrance are seat-

of these villages reflects the origin of an incremental growth of natural elements. The connecting paths, stemming from functioning centres (public or private spaces) and leading to individual cells (houses or rooms) are adapted to natural elements and specificity of function.

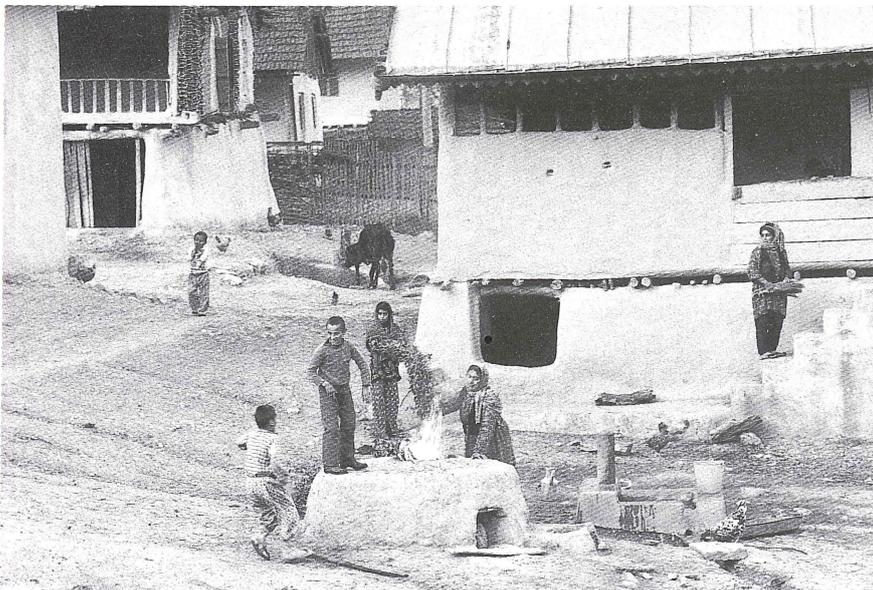
Man has moulded his living space in these villages according to nature, as a potter brings clay to life by turning it into pottery. Natural forces and environmental elements are employed to make each village environment liveable. Gravity and contour lines have shaped the walking patterns of the villages along which the run off and waste water are also drained. The slope of land is used to protect the village, as well as individual units, from the forces of nature. Indoor and outdoor spaces are formed to increase the heating

effect of the sun, or reduce the amount of sun in the space. Winding paths circulate the prevailing wind of the village to ventilate spaces, yet protect the units from sun, wind and sandstorm.

The juxtaposition of buildings in each village is intimately related to the landscape and confirms the indelible influence of nature on their unique architecture. Architectural elements, local materials and construction techniques of each area have created a unique texture of dwelling units and public buildings with nature. The complex composition of clustered buildings has produced a unified effect upon the total fabric of each village and its physical surroundings.

Arrival

In approaching these villages, one experi-



Ziarat

Above: View of the village of Ziarat from opposite mountain.

Left: Public open space of the village where elements for public use such as, oven and source of water are located, and is the centre of the public activities in the village.

Below: Pathway where stairs are used as an intermediate element to give access from the path to the residential units.





ing platforms, integral with the arched Masooleh. (In Deyhook entrances are created by passages through a hierarchy of space). Public spaces within the village can be both open and covered, one leading to the next. These spaces ultimately give way to individual units through intermediate elements such as courtyard, archway, ramp, or stairs.

Order

The location of these villages in a semi-mountainous setting has produced a unique adaptation of buildings to the landscape and its climate. Orientation of the buildings on the land and restructuring of the terrain have developed a specific organic order in each of the settings. The environmental expression of each of these villages has produced a great variety of spaces, shapes, and forms between the buildings.

In the northern villages, Masooleh and Ziarat, buildings are clustered linearly, relative to the contour lines of the mountain side. The village of Masooleh has naturally developed along paths connecting living units to the main route or

operating centres of the village. Steep land has formed these paths on different elevations on the mountain side according to the contour lines. The attached buildings of Masooleh have formed a series of limited and continuous linear patterns following the form of the land. Growth of the village along the path has created a series of terraced buildings at different elevations because of shifts in the topography of the terrain along the slope. The continuity of façades of the linear buildings is broken into different planes by the shifts in the buildings in order to follow the land formation.

The linear juxtaposition of units without any apparent separation has created a continuous pattern of window openings. This continuity is broken by: a change in land formation which created a natural barrier, a merging of two pathways where the building ends, a blending with nature where the slope of land changes. These buildings are protected on one side by the mountain, and on the opposite side they face the natural landscape, oriented toward the sun. These buildings vary from one to three storeys in height

Deyhook

Above: Courtyard houses in the village of Deyhook are inter-connected by joining together over the access ways, creating pathways of the village.

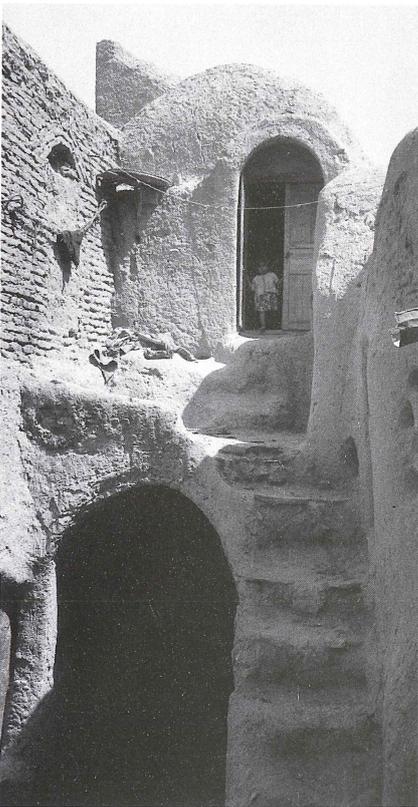
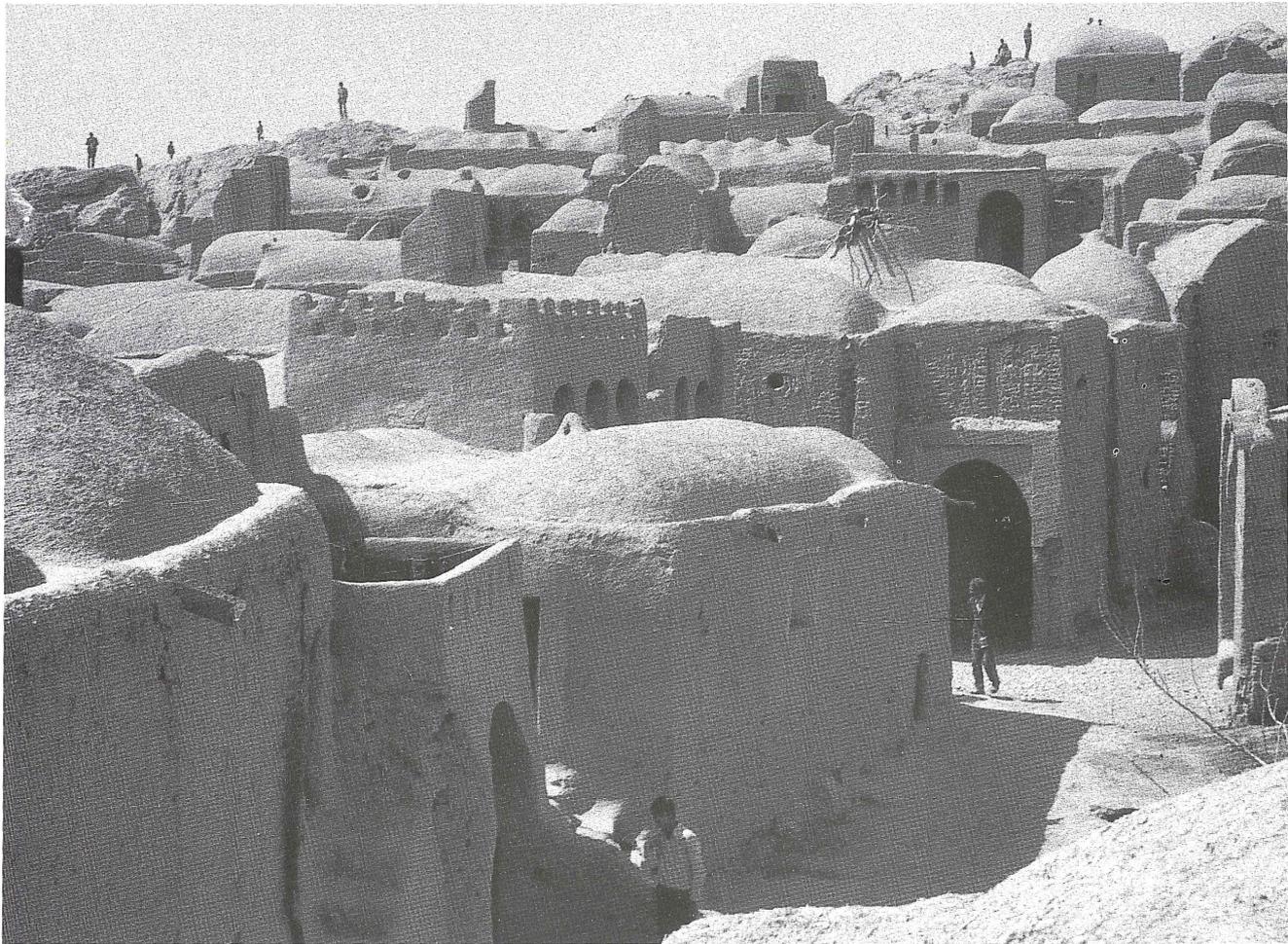
Above, right: Rooftops showing the inter-connection of courtyard houses and their access to the main encircling pathway.

Right: Completely introverted houses consist of a central space covered by a dome, surrounded by modular living spaces. The space is ventilated through the opening of the roof of the central space.

depending on the size of the families. The entry level is occupied by service spaces such as kitchen, washroom and storage. Upper levels are used as the living quarter overlooking the buildings below from the balcony.

The linear pattern of buildings in Ziarat has an approximate parallel in layout of the buildings in Masooleh. The sloping site of the village has brought about a series of detached linear patterns of buildings and pitches of roofs have given a random appearance to the cluster of the village.

Unlike Masooleh, the order of residential units along the sloping land in



Ziarat is counter to the contour lines, thereby developing split-level structures. The lower level of the buildings is occupied by service spaces such as storage and animal sheds. The living quarters are located on the upper level and open to the surrounding environment through the balcony. The upper level merges with the sloping pathway through stairs and link the building with public spaces.

The central villages, Deyhook and Abianeh, are tightly compact with interconnected buildings as a result of excessive heat and unpleasant winds. Integration of buildings with landscape has brought these villages into a concrete relationship with nature, following the form of the land; villages have become one with nature.

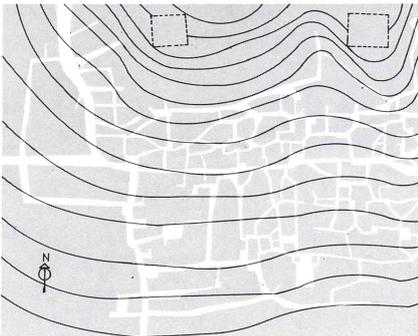
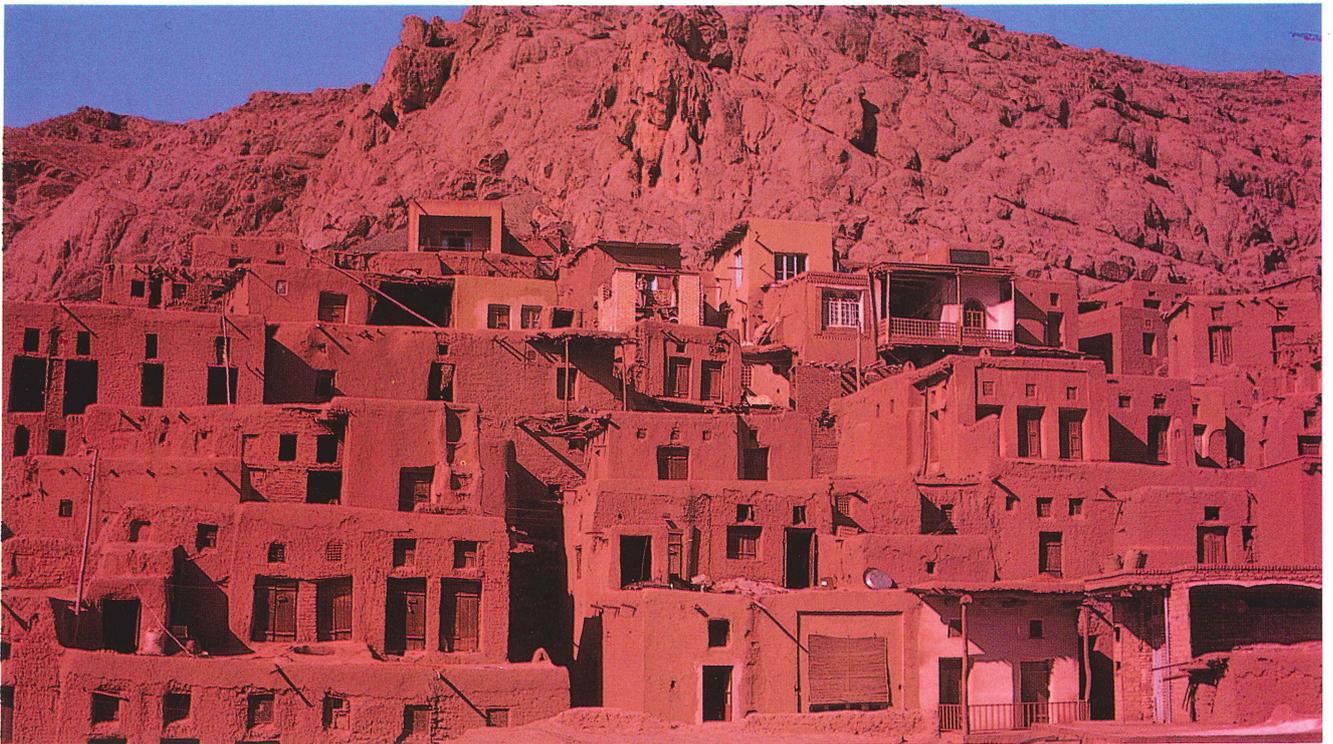
The clustered fabric of the village of Abianeh has seemingly inherited the combined influence of nature in both northern and central villages. Integration of buildings in Abianeh is less dense, and more open spaces are created within the village because of its moderate climate. The steep land has led to juxtaposed buildings along the contour lines at diffe-

rent elevations. This has given a linear pattern to the village cluster. Changes in height of the buildings, according to their elevation on the mountain, has produced a harmony of the village with its natural environment.

Steep grades have caused a linear plan instead of a concentric plan for the residential units. The slope of land has allowed the advantage of creating split-levels in the multi-level structures. The number of floors in a building are a result of the size of families. Lower levels of residential units are reserved for an animal shed, an oven and storage, while the upper levels are used for living quarters.

Common Space

Public and private spaces in these villages are generally structured according to the basic living necessities of the inhabitants. Common spaces are generally well-defined, and appear intermittently along the path. These spaces are accessible from a group of residential units. Public spaces not only accommodate daily use of such facilities as the communal oven, the water pump and the animal manger, but

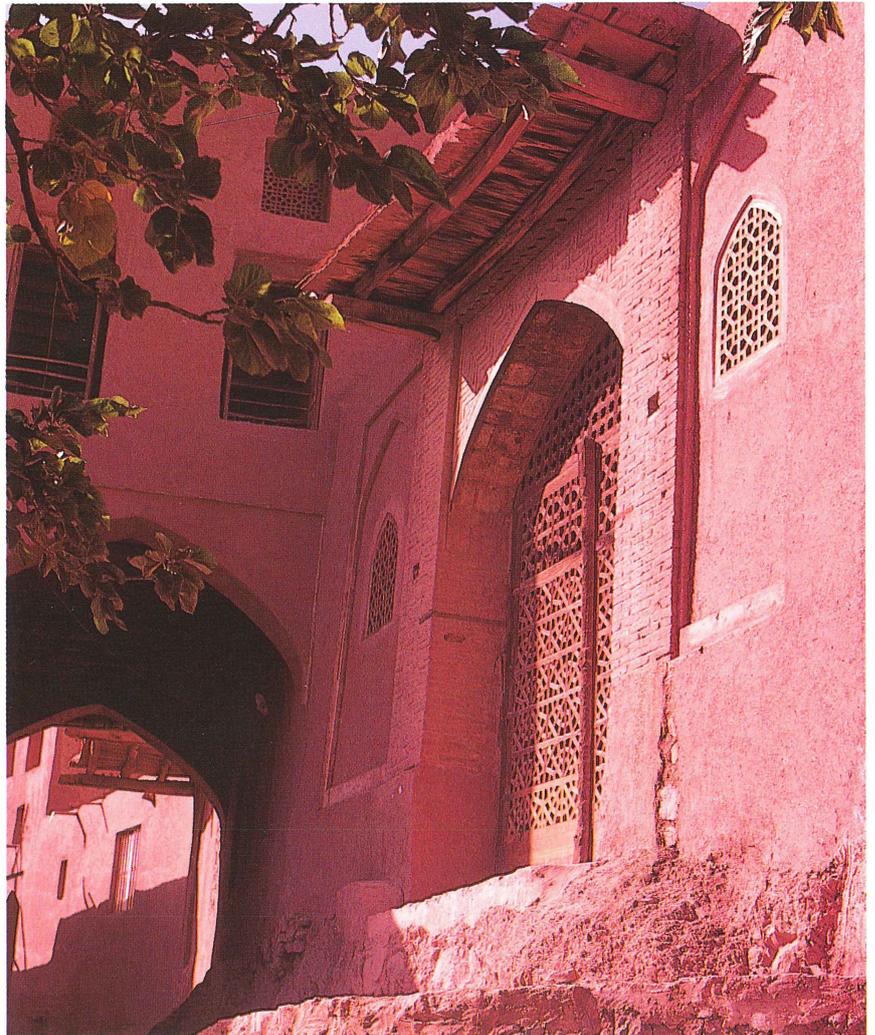


Abianeh

Above: Map of Abianeh, showing the topographical conditions of the site.

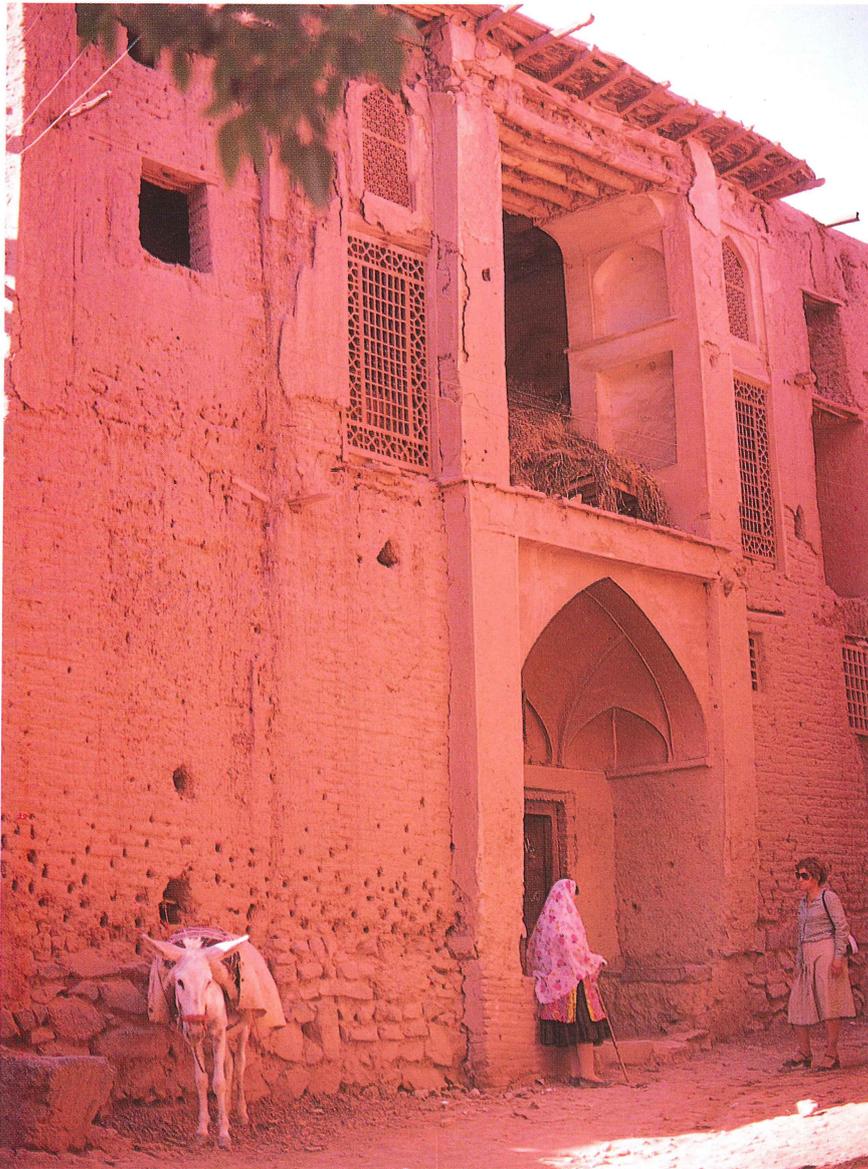
Top: Village of Abianeh, Iran built against the steep slope of the mountainside.

Right: A typical doorway to a house. Additional dwelling space has been obtained by building over the street.



also are meeting places where the daily business of the village is discussed.

These villages are basically self-contained, relying on their own production for purely local consumption. Trade is not a strong factor in these villages and surpluses of products are exchanged in an informal manner by the residents. Trade has only become a dominant element in Masooleh, where the commercial district forms the central spine of the village and also functions as a common space. The commercial units of Masooleh have assumed a linear form, following the pattern of residential units, and disperse at



Left: Entrance of a house with steps connect the house to the pathway through an entrance space. Space opens up to the entrance door by setting back the walls and creates a sitting area.

Below, far left: Courtyard of a house in which a tree has been coaxed into acting as a parasol.

Below, left: A first floor balcony.

different levels. Only the pattern and colour of windows identify the commercial district from the rest of the village.

Ownership

The interaction of land ownership, crop system² and social structure of these villages with their differing bioclimatic conditions also has played a significant role in forming the pattern of the village. The social structure of each village is a manifestation of a hierarchy that is highly dependent upon its production system. (This hierarchy is seen in the building pattern of Deyhook. The residence of landowners are easily recognised in the village. The territory of landowners is defined by walls containing their residential units.) The composition of these dwelling units creates a winding path, insulating the residences of landowners from the clustered buildings of the working masses. The clustering of buildings expresses different characteristics, as questions of ownership and property are naturally resolved. This informal resolution of property encourages flexibility for the expansion of buildings, and has created a rich variety of spaces and functions. This custom of allowing construction of buildings over connecting paths has integrated the fabric of the village.

The extension of buildings over a path or adjacent building, the sharing of a common courtyard or facilities in a common space, the use of roofs of buildings as a public space, or the sharing of a common wall is customary in all of these villages. These issues are usually resolved among families. Attitudes toward land ownership have physically bound the fabric of the villages together and express the homogeneity of their societies.

²Crop system in each Iranian village is specific to its society and has been structured according to the availability of production elements: land, seed, water, labour and tools. Crop systems of Iranian villages can be categorised regionally and it is a separate subject by itself.

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