

The Ties that Bind: Sacred Geometry in the Zoroastrian Yasna Ritual (Nērangestān 60-61)

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The Yasna is the central ritual of Zoroastrianism. In its basic function, it is performed daily in the morning in a special precinct in the fire temple by two priests, and takes about two and a half hours. It is most elaborate at the transitional points of the seasonal festivals, in particular during Nowruz at the spring equinox. Even though the central ritual of the religion, it is not a communal activity. Its actions exclude members of the community, who may however watch, particularly the sponsors of the specific performance.

The ritual area is a rectangle that is oriented towards the south and enclosed by protective furrows. There is a fire-vase in the south, the seat of the main priest in the north, and in front of him the central ritual table with twelve instruments arranged around its rim (Fig. 1).

To the observer the Yasna is unusually complex and enigmatic. It has been well recognized that the Yasna, like other such rituals, involves the representation of cosmic space and cycles. For example, Duchesne-Guillemin summarized the general symbolic function of the layout and instruments as representations of the cosmos in horizontal and vertical space as follows:¹

1. Duchesne-Guillemin 1966: 85-87.

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I wish to thank Maclaren USA & Morteza Rastegar Family Endowment for their support of the *Nāme-ye Irān-e Bāstān*, in striving for harmony and peace through education and creating awareness

Touraj Daryaei
Editor

Nāme-ye Irān-e Bāstān

The International Journal
of Ancient Iranian Studies

Vol. 4, No. 1, Spring and Summer 2004

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Nāme-ye Irān-e Bāstān

The International Journal of
Ancient Iranian Studies

Vol. 4, No. 1, Spring and Summer 2004
Ser. No. 7

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Published by Iran University Press

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NIB is published twice a year, in September and March. All editorial communications from outside Iran should be addressed to the Editor at the:
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Fax: (0098 21) 88725953
E-mail: NameBastan@iup.ir
Annual subscription rates (postage included) are \$20 or £14 or Euro 22.

ISSN 1735-3912