

## **Reflection of Achaemenian Beliefs on their Temple Design**

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### **Abstract**

Various opinions have been put forward about Achaemenian beliefs and thoughts, especially about the religious beliefs of the Achaemenian kings such as Cyrus the Great. Scholars rely on Herodotus's statements that "they didn't look at building temples and altars as a religious tradition, they refer believing in these things as ignorance and foolishness in the converse opinion to Greeks. They didn't believe that Gods had the same nature of human. In their religion, Zeus (Ahura-Mazda) was the sign of the blue dome of the sky and was a wise master. Their traditions were going to the highest peaks of mountains praying and offering sacrifice to God. Sun, moon, fire, water, wind and other divine existences are only bodiless Gods that Iranians pray and offer them sacrifices." According to Herodotus Iranians in the Achaemenian era, had no idol, temple and altar.

In this article we have used the most accessible sources and references to study Achaemenian religion and their temples. Various opinions from the researchers have been cited here. The historic art of the Achaemenians, the inscriptions, and fire alters quadrangles and fire temples (or Brasmadana) the Achaemenian shrines which were generally located in holy areas are being focused in this article.

**Keywords:** temple, Achaemenid, religious art.

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### **Introduction**

Capture of power by Persians was the most important event in 550 B.C. The vast power domain belonged to The Achaemenian emperor. In Assyrian calendar, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Salmansar in the year 834 B.C. named after Parsoua country in southwest of Uromieh lake. It was the time when control and power of Pars regions were controlled by Farevartish, the king of Mades. According ancient belief, Persians settled and resided approximately during 700 B.C. in the Parsoumash the southeastern region which was considered as the state of Eilam. Herodotus believed that Achaemenian dynasties were progenies of Pasargad who were settled in Pars and the head of the family was Hakhmanesh. After its victory over Eilam and arising disputes between Assyrians and the Medes Emperor, Persian army possessed and captured Anzan (Anshan). Cyrus the Great named himself the grandson of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chayeshpash. He rebelled against the Medes emperor in 553 B.C. and by shitting sides of number of the Medes soldiers, the latter was defeated and demolished. Thus, Cyrus celebrated the Persian Kingdom in Pasargad. Whose period of power was during 530-559 B.C. (Pirnia, 1362, pp.60-62). A.T.Olmsted insisently states that: In Persian land, "Ariaramen" gifted his throne to his son Arsham and in other branch Cyrus showed his throne to his son Kamboudjieh. Arashtehvigh gave his daughter Mandana to be married to Cyrus. Cyrus II and Kamboudjieh were born from Mandana. Cyrus II was king of Enshan and ruled to "Parseh Gardeh" in 559 B.C.(A.T.Olmsted, 1381,48). Babelian texts also refer to the final

battle and the capturing of Ekbatan, the last defense base of Medes lasted for three years (550-553 B.C.)(Pierre Briant, 1381, 48). Ghirshman and some other researchers know Cyrus II as a Great king, but authors of these books only consider Cyrus III as Cyrus the Great on the basis of the inscription of Darius at Bisotoun which introduces the king as the 9<sup>th</sup> king of the era.

### **Thoughts and Beliefs of the Achaemenian**

There are different theories presented by scholars, about the beliefs and thoughts of the Achaemenians, specially their initial kings including Cyrus the Great and Darius. In fact, each of them holds a summary of ideas or documents related to that period. We shall discuss some of the important ideas:

Some of the most important references are the Achaemenian hand inscriptions, but the general properties are as follows: In initial hand written books, the first God among the Gods is Ahouramazda. He is "Vazraka" or The Great God (named as "Mathishatah Baganam"). In the first inscription related to Darius I at Naghsh-e-Rostam, Ahouramazda is referred as the Great Creator God of land, earth and human, and the only one who gifted the kingdom to Darius. From the point of view some researchers including Widengren, although Darius only referred Ahouramazda, and recalled him as the greatest God, he also believed in other Gods as well and didn't deny them at all .He used the term Baga instead of current terms of "Yazatah" in Avesta which is under control of Ahouramazda. The other case is focused on creation of land, heaven and

human. From the point of view of Widengren, creation of the world is more praised in inscriptions than Avesta (J.widengren, 1371, 224). Avesta was not collected and written by the Achaemenians, and that is why researchers deny Zoroaster's as the religion of the Achaemenians. Merry Boyce believes that Achaemenid dynasty followed Mazde-yasna and Zoroaster's religion and stated that: One reason for Achaemenian to leave Avesta unwritten is the invention of writing which is done by the devil, so they didn't apply it to document their holy texts and kept them unwritten. Although the main language for official correspondence was "Arami", Achaemenians ordered that their Persian language be used in royal inscriptions. Due to this reason, special form of Heliograph line was invented. On the other hand, oral learning based on Zoroastrian teaching aided Greeks to get familiar with Zoroastrian and Persian religion during Achaemenian era (Marry Boyce, 1381, 77).

There are some researchers who have opined differently about Cyrus's religion. Marry Boyce thus says actions done by Cyrus was the same as the real Zoroastrian. He favored justice and peace in his kingdom. He did not insist his foreign citizens to accept his religion, in fact, forced conversion was considered as a void action, Because of the high number of Zoroastrian with their tendency to follow up their family religion, he always encouraged people to have a good and correct belief, based on morality of religion. Among those people, the Jews of Iran who were granted permission to return from Babel to their native land, also

Cyrus reconstructed their holy temple in Jerusalem. This was only one of the liberalizing actions of Cyrus the Great. By that time, Jews were interested in Iranians and their Zoroastrian religion (Marry Boyce, 1381, 78).

The Prophet Ashiyae referred Cyrus as one who took action in the name and with power of Yahweh and stated that: "Now, my follower (Cyrus) who is under my support bring justices for all nations and as long as he wants to spread justice, victory is with him. The prophet for the first time in the literature of Jews referred to Yahweh as creator with high rank in such way that Zoroastrian praised from Ahoura-Mazda. Similarities between Zoroastrian teaching and the holy Bible are in such ways that the initial chapters, show the effects of Avesta over the Bible after setting Jerusalem free.

At the same time of Samuel Nyberg, Duchesne Guillemin have opined "There is no doubt that Cyrus believed heartily in his ancestor's religion which was so simple from the point of views of traditions, rankings and principles. He may be influenced by severe rankings and principles of Babel religion with their ambitious temples and their complex ceremonies. Also he didn't bring differences between Babylonian belief and his own belief for praising the creator of heaven, the great men of tribes and natural phenomenon. His Arian religion was so simple that could contain all other religions. Yahweh of the Jew from the point of view of Persian was equal to Ahoura-Mazda with no difference. Babylonian policy also replaced with Persian royal policy

which holds different point of views and religion. And that would be an important event in religion and global peace (Duchesne Guillemin, 1375, 200).

Marry Boyce further believed that Kamboudjeh was a follower of Mazdeyasna religion and she considered Darius as a real follower on the basis of his inscription. Near east nations didn't write the names of their gods and prophets in their inscriptions and texts and so Achaemenian did not write the name of Zoroaster in their inscriptions because they followed near east styles of writing (Naghsh-e-Rostam inscriptions). Darius also permitted his people to worship gods of their ancestors or to pray Ahoura-Mazda and followed the way of his father Cyrus in the field of religious regulations (Marry Boyce, 1381, 83).

During the period Xerex, rigid regulations were made to unite the vast empire and prevent rebels (Xerex inscriptions in Perspolis). The Ardeshir II, according to Shoush and Hamedan inscriptions, named Mithra and Anahita alongside Ahoura-Mazda. In the Perspolis inscriptions of the Ardeshir III there is reference of Ahoura-Mazda and Mithra. Widengren says: "although we can not find any name of Mithra in inscriptions of early Achaemenid kings, but Mithra was praised significantly in the beginning of the Darius I.

Mithra or Mehr is one of the most important gods in Persia and had prominent place among Persians from the beginning of the Darius I and during the initial years of Achaemenid kingdom, who was praised more than the other gods after Ahoura-Mazda. Widengren says that, Mithra's

religion was related to Medes more than the Achaemenian (J.widengren, 1371, 173). In the Achaemenid period, Mithra's great festival (Mehregan) was celebrated with a considerable glory. As many archeologists including Ghirshman emphasize burial ceremonies of Achaemenid, burying dead in stone was different from Zoroastrian regulations and they use this to prove that the Achaemenid kings used to follow Zoroastrian terms except Cyrus. But placing body of deceased kings in stone tombs was performed during Medes and, also continued in Ashkani and Sassanid eras. As Marry Boyce says, deceased body of Achaemenid kings were mummified, this proves their belief in remaining parts of the deceased king this relates probably to the word "Khovarna" which means soul of royalty. There is another reason that proves the existence of a special burial ceremony in the royal family, which made royal families to prevent deceased body contacting with living being. Regarding the Achaemenid belief Zabihollah Safa states: "We can find principles of Mazdeyasna thought in Achaemenian religion. The duali aspect of Zoroastrian religious can be found in Achaemenid inscriptions. Although they didn't explicitly refer "Angre-Minou" and devils but "Daroga" (which means lie) is considered as the enemy of the religion and the basis of all evils. The western Iranians used "arta-van" as the opposite of "Daroga". Unlike eastern granian Zoroastrians, the western Iranian would not have struggled with other religions followers. Rather they respect them and used to praise their gods in their homelands (Zabihollah Safa, 1376, pp.65-67).

Many people make mistake between “Frawahar” or the sign of “Far-e-Kiani” (glory of royalty) with the sign of Ahoura-Mazda, or some people consider “Frawahar” as a kind of twin for human being and the soul of deceased people. But Shapour Shahbazi says: “The ring and mankind with wings is the sign of royal glory of some kings and a sign for the Iranian race.”

### **Moghs and Clergyman in the Achaemenian Period**

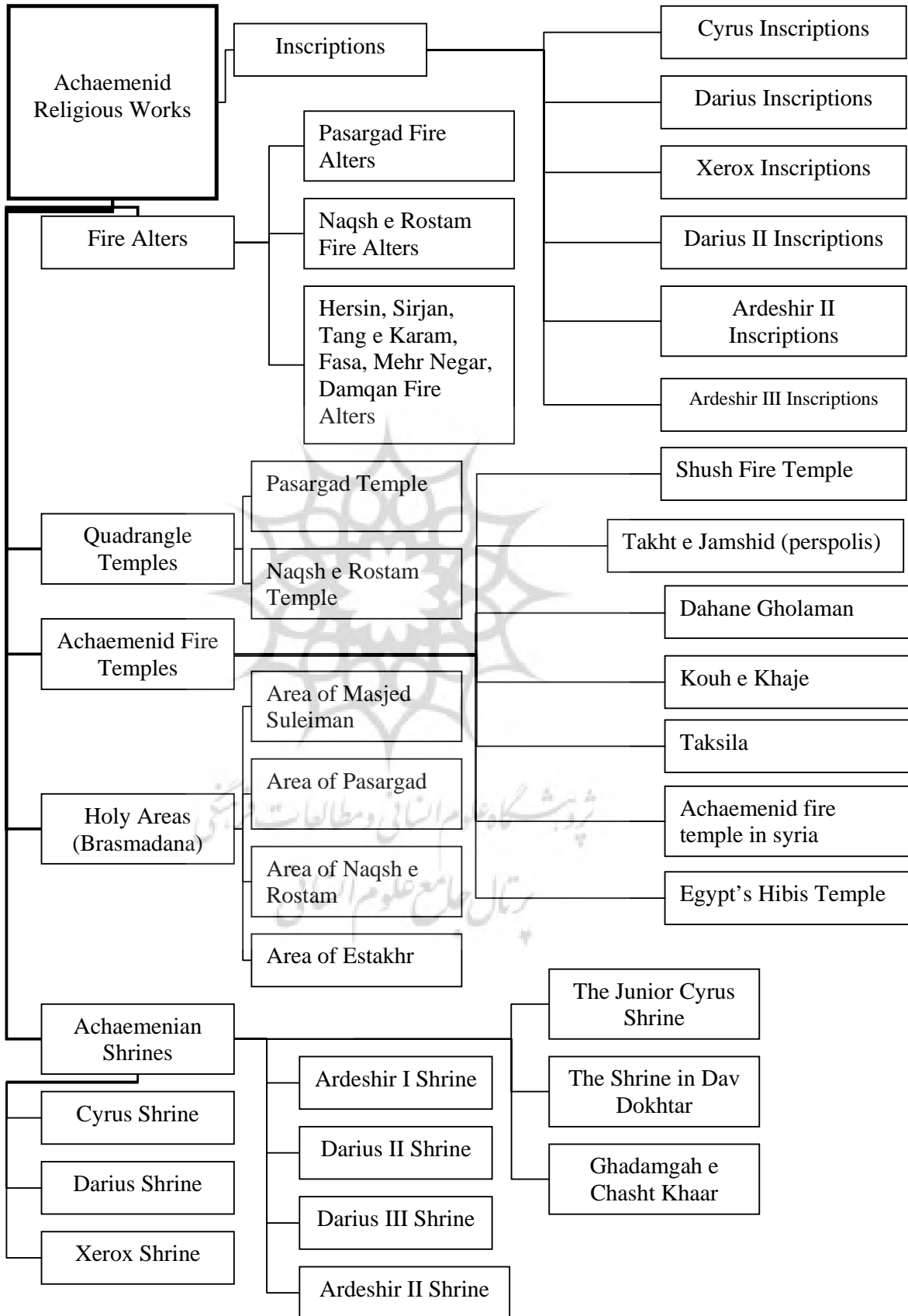
As we know, Moghs was a Medean tribe who perform special ceremonies of fire and sacrifice. At the time of Achaemenids, they were serving Persians as a clergyman and used to perform burial ceremonies, same as the Zoroastrian (J. Widengren, 1371, 191). Marry Boyce stated that all great holy places had special clergyman and holy fires required permanent and continuous care. Great clergyman of holy fire was referred as “Magoupi” that means “Great clergyman” who had other clergymen under his control. Also some proofs are obtained about religious schools which were related with great religious foundation or charity affairs in the Achaemenid period. “Pray saying” clergyman was another group in this organization. Growth of Zoroaster as the state religion and construction of large number of holy places caused a sudden increase in the number of clergyman during this period but we have no clear and correct definition of their organization. Eastern clergyman

(As-Evar-Vans) and western clergyman (Moghs) might have join each other to organize a union, and each province city and region kept some dependency for their execution of ceremony and language. Iranian cities in spite of accepting the Persian language, maintained their own languages i.e. (Parti and Soghd). Few figure remaining from Achaemenid show clergyman of that period with a garment of belt and sleeve to cover their body up to knee. They preferred white loose fitting pant, a cap with stuck down edges to cover the face (Marry Boyce, 1381, pp.93-95).

Moghs was excited to rebel against the government by “Gomatha” who was suppressed by Darius. Darius fought against Gomatha was not just a political clash but also a new doctrine to deal with rigid faithful Moghs with tendencies of Mades and Mazdeyasna religion.

### **The Achaemenian Religious Architecture**

The Achaemenian religious architecture contains holy fire temples; fire alters including “Suleiman prison” or “Kamboudjeh tomb” in Pasargad and “Zoroaster Kabba” in Naghsh-e- Rostam. It was be said that holy fire places constructed during Achaemenids show characteristics of the period which are highlighted in diagram. Holy areas or “Barzamdane” are examples of these places. Then we’ll discuss about Achaemenian quadrangles and shrines which represent their culture and religion (Diagram 1).



### **Quality of Prayers and Its Reflection on Holy Places**

As has been mentioned archeologists view Achaemenid thoughts and beliefs differently, however, through their inscriptions and books, we can conclude that (even from what Zabihollah Safa says) fundamentals Mazdeyasna and Zoroastrian ceremonies were also prevalent in that era. They also respected other religious principles specially monotheist religions which was prominent in different Achaemenian provinces. On the basis of researches, we can thus say that people used to go to high places to praise Ahoura-Mazda (Holy wisdom), and prayed inside stone and brick fire temples (Table 5). Accordingly they constructed fire temples and stone benches to pray Ahoura-Mazda at high places like mountains such as Soffeh-Sarmasjed, Bardneshandeh, Pasargad, Shoush, Perspolis, etc (Table 2).

Holy fire had to be kept in a closed space and only Zoroastrian priest were authorized to access holy fire. This square shaped space was usually made over a 10x10 m<sup>2</sup> area and ceiling was held with 4 pillars, surrounded by a corridor. The size of the fire room can be calculated according to the appropriate distance of objects from the fire (almost 3.5 steps), were surrounded by small rooms and a corridor to keep aromatic woods or any other necessary things to keep the fire burning. There was a yard around the building which was

surrounded by another set of small rooms. To enter the yard (which possibly was used to perform group prayer sometimes) from building, two step staircase was used (especially the staircase on to sides of the building. People would gather around the fire from three sides and would never surround the fire from four sides or wouldn't walk around it. They wouldn't offer their sacrifices in the fire room but probably sacrifices were offered in an open area but special place to offer sacrifices is rarely seen in Achaemenian holy places. The plan of some Achaemenid temples are shown in Table 1. The quadrangle temples such as Zoroaster Kabba and Suleiman Prison are another Achaemenian religious buildings. These buildings were constructed usually with the height of 7.5m with cross shaped plans and were similar to Medes era such as Noushijan and Urartu temples. There were only window frames on outer of the front walls. These buildings are described in Table 3. Another religious place of Achaemenid period is located in Ghadamgah-e-Chastkhar (Table 4), located on the south slope of Rahmat mountain with an incomplete construction. Characteristics of this place are different from the other Achaemenian temples: Regard of incomplete structure, we can say that it's a base of a temple which had to be constructed on a stone bench with a balcony. There are some Ashkani era graves and a water spring near these buildings.

Table 1 Achaemenian Fire Temples

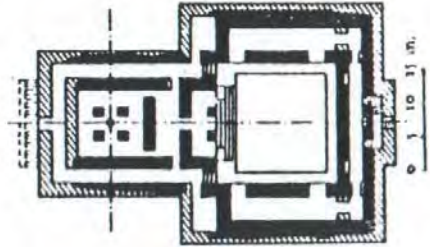

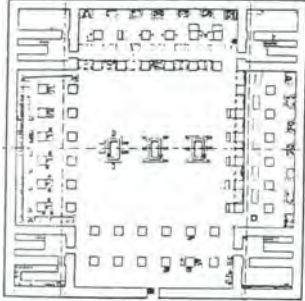
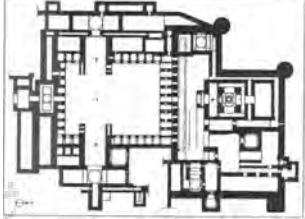
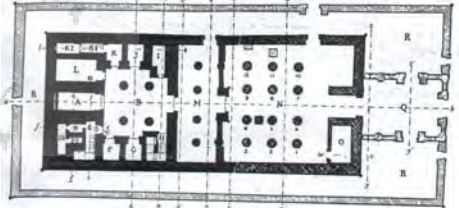
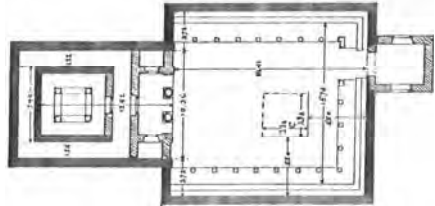

No.	Fire temple's name	Properties	Plan
1	Shoush Fire temple	Base of a stone bench A holy fire room dimensions are 10m X 10 m, and has 4 pillars. There is a corridor around the room. Another corridor in front of the holy fire room. The terrace has two pillars. There are two smaller rooms around terrace and corridor. Building entrance is in east side of it and entrance stair way is connected to entrance with two gates.	
2	Farat-e-dara Fire temple	4 pillars holy fire room surrounded by a corridor. Another corridor in front of the holy fire room. Terrace has 4 pillars	
3	Dahan-e-Gholaman Fire temple	Built on a stone bench. Building area is 54x54 meters. 4 scouting tower on 4 corners of the building. 145 rooms are around the main yard. Each room area is 5.2m x 3.4m. Pillars cross section is 1.1m x 1.1m. A brick size is 51cm x 51cm x 10~11cm. building entrance is located on east side of it. there is another building constructed in north of the temple with the area of 53.6m x 43m	
4	Kooh-e-Khaje Fire temple	Main room is square shaped with 4 pillars. A corridor is around the holy fire room. Clergyman room is located behind the main room. Entrance stairways are on two sides of the building. The temple has a terrace with pillars, a central yard and rooms around the main yard.	
5	Hibis Fire temple (Egypt)	Main room is square shaped with 4 pillars. Several rooms around the main room. There is a corridor on 3 sides of the building with wider entrance. The temple has a yard and a terrace with pillars. Temple's entrance is only from one side of it and from one of its lengths.	
6	Sehr Fire temple (Syria)	Main room is square shaped with 4 pillars. A corridor is around the holy fire room. There are rooms on two sides of the terrace and corridor. The terrace has two pillars. The yard has terraces and is connected to the outside with a medium room.	
7	Taxila Fire temple (Afghanistan)	Main room area is 158ft x 58ft with 4 pillars. The terrace has pillars and there is a corridor around the temple.	



Table 2 Achaemenian Holy areas







No.	Name of the Holy Area	Properties of the Holy Area	Image of the Holy Area
1	<b>Takht e Masjed Suleiman</b>	Takht e Masjed Suleiman is possibility Parsumanch, The Capital of Chishpash I, Takht e Masjed Suleiman is also known as Takht e Sar Masjed and has huge bed rocks with proceeding stories which are connected to each other with four stairways from four sides.	
2	<b>Takht e Bard Neshande</b>	Takht e Bard Neshande looks alike Takht e Masjed Suleiman but with 28 stairs ,each stair has the width of 8.5m and has 4 stairways from four sides and the bed rock looks alike a cross . Takht e Bard Neshande is made of hand made cubic bricks made of red stone same as Takht e Masjed Suleiman	
3	<b>Pasargad Holy Area</b>	In 1.5Km west of pasargad on a rectangular area which had a wall once upon a time lays the remains of a religious building, Opposite of fire alters which holy fire used to be lit up on them.	
4	<b>Naqsh e Rostam Holy Area</b>	Naqsh e Rostam is located in 4Km of Rahmat mountain and Perspolis. It has a religious inscription from Ilami Era. Zoroaster's quadrangle temple. Four Achaemenian shrines and some fire alters are located in Naqsh e Rostam.	
5	<b>Estakhr Holy Area and Takht e Tavoos</b>	The remaining of Estakhr ancient city is located in north of Rahmat mountain in form of stone parts. An Anahita temple of Sassanid era remains in Estakhr ancient city.	
6	<b>Bistoon Holy Area</b>	This Area has a religious usage from Mades era. The remaining of a Mades temple lays under Darius inscription (the most significant inscription of Achaemenian Era). There are some Solouki, Ashkani and Sassanid era works remained in the area.	

Table 3 Achaemenian Quadrangle temples



No.	Name of the Quadrangle Temple	Properties of the Quadrangle Temple	Image of the Quadrangle Temple
1	Pasargad Tower	Belongs to Cyrus Era and has a height of 2.5m. It is made of 16 rows of stone bricks which are connected to each other with metal abutments. The remained wall width is 7.5m and it seems that other collapse walls of the building had the same width. A stairway consist of 30 stairs is located in front of the wall and used to lead to the entrance door. The ceiling was made of four black en-Blocked stones as the same as window panes	
2	Naqsh e Rostam Tower	Naqsh e Rostam tower is located in Naqsh e Rostam holy area. The building's height –with accounting the 3 storey bed rock- even reaches 14.22 m. width of each side is 7.3m. The walls are made of glassed limestone. Holy brackets are made of black stones. Stone bricks of the wall and brackets are connected to each other with metal abutments. Each wall is made of 22(or 20 rows) of stone bricks. There is a stairway in northern side of the building the spans of stairs vary from 1.12m up to 2m. The width and height of each stair is 26cm. Each side of the building has 17 tooth shaped stones which stick out of the surface of the walls near their higher edge. Entrance gate has the height of 1.75m and the width of 87cm. the area of the inner room is 3.2mx3.2m and the height of the 5.5m. thickness of the walls varies from 1.54 up to 1.56m	

Table 4 Achaemenian Rock Temples


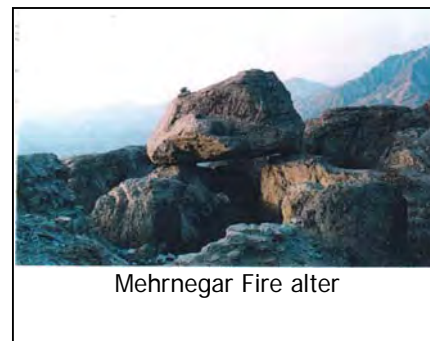
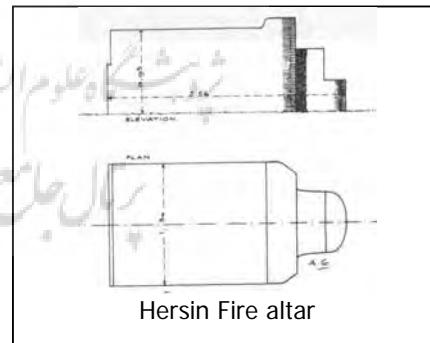
Name of the Achaemenian Rock Temple	Properties of the Achaemenian Rock Temple	Image of the Achaemenian Rock Temple
Ghadamgah e Chasht Khaar	Ghadamgah e Chasht Khaar is located in southern foothill of the Rahmat mountain formed of two stone benches. The first stone bench has the span of 20.1m and the width of 13.1 and the height of the 3.4m from ground level and the second one has the same area of the first stone bench but 3.4 higher than the other one. Both stone benches are connected with a stairway, each stair has the span of 2.4m and the width of 40 cm and the height of 25cm. There are 5 holes dig on the wall which the higher bench ends to. The size of the holes is 2.3m width and 3.5m height and 30cm depth. There is a bracket over each hole. The bracket has the span of 2.3m and width of 30cm and the height of 1.1m. there is another hole on western wall of the second bench its entrance size is 1.5m x 1.5m and its depth reaches 2m.	

Table 5 Achaemenian fire altars

No.	Fire altar's name	Properties and dimensions	Image
1	Pasargad Fire alters	<p>Height:2m Area:2.5m by 2.5m It is considered that pasargad fire alters are the development of Mades era's Noushijan holy place. The lower part has three stairways and is the platform of the upper part.these belonged to a special area for saying prayers (Barsamdane). Maybe one of the benches was used as fire altar and the other (with no stairs) was used for people to say prayers on it at nights. 1- Mery boyce, 1382, 78. 2- Shahbazi, 1375, 88-89</p>	
2	Naghsh-e-Rostam Fire alters	<p>Height of the fire alter: approximately 1.5 m and 1.65m Lenght:140 cm and 150 cm Width:130cm and 140cm Holes depth: 12cm and 17cm Both benches are used as fire alters with the same utility and with semi-conical shape and look alike engraved four-pillar temples. Arthur Christiansen with regard to quality of Achaemenian prayers and religious traditions show that they might be constructed a bit before Achaemenian era.</p>	



### **Conclusion**

We can conclude that the Achaemenian were real followers of Mazda and despite of cultural variety of their vast empire they never tried to impose their religious regulations to their non-Zoroastrian citizens, rather they respected monotheistic religions (as even we can account them as monotheists) by helping them to repair and rebuild their holy places and used to appreciate them to live innocently. This is the for most reason to prove their liberal mind. Contrary to Herodotus, we can clearly identify a number of holy places, fire temples and throughout Iran and other country including Hibis Temple in Egypt, Zela Temple in Turkey, Sehr Temple in Syria, Taxila Temple in Afghanistan, and several other temples in India, Pakistan, and Iraq.

These temples of Achaemenid era had a deep impact on the next dynasties such as Sassanid and Ashkani temples. The Cross (Chalipa) is the dominant form in design of quadrangle temples which is previously existed in Noushijan Temple of Medes era and Urartu Temples. It is even used in some special fire temples which are based on a four pillar structure and a surrounding corridor design. Such plans were manifested with some differences in Sassanid and the Ashkani architectures. Most of holy places were constructed on stone benches higher than the surrounding area.

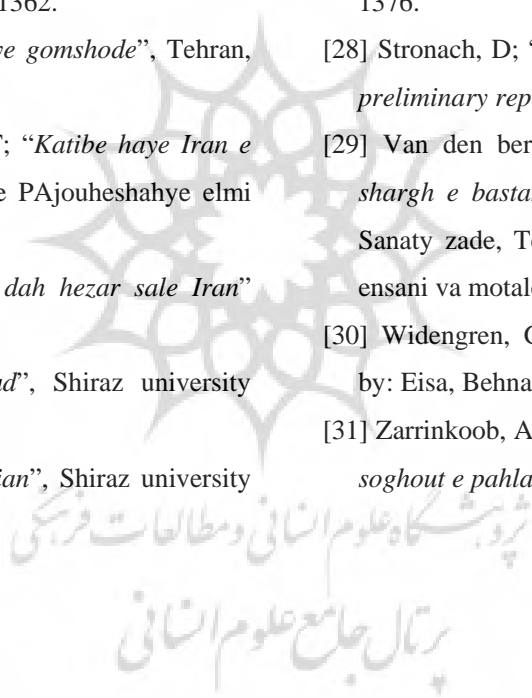
Achaemenian temples followed Mades temples in architecture but comparatively they were constructed more magnificently on rock and mountains. With regard to poor accessibility to the rooms, Chalipa symbol was transferred in shape of the buildings. Temple inscriptions about praying

against the fire and the royal sign “Far-e-Kiani” describe Achaemenian believes.

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## انعکاس باورهای هخامنشیان بر طراحی نیایشگاهها

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### چکیده

در مورد باورها و اعتقادات هخامنشیان و بویژه شاهان آنها از جمله کوروش کبیر نظریات گوناگون و گاه ضد و نقیضی بیان شده است. اکثر محققان در این زمینه به گفته هرودوت استناد می‌کنند. هرودوت درباره کیش و آیین هخامنشیان گفته است: "ساختن قربانگاه و معبد نزد ایشان رسم نیست و اعتقاد به این قبیل چیزها را ناشی از نادانی و حماقت می‌شمارند. بر خلاف یونانیها، معتقد نیستند که خدایان از جنس و ذات بشرند. در آیین ایشان زئوس (اهورا مزدا) نماد گنبد نیلگون آسمان و سرور داناست. رسم آنان این است که بر بالاترین قله‌های کوهستان رفته و به درگاه خدا نیایش کرده و قربانی کنند. خورشید، ماه، زمین، آتش، آب، بادها و سایر هستیهای یزدانی و اینها تنها خدایانی هستند که بدون هیكل از همان آغاز، ایرانیان آنها را پرستش کرده و برایشان قربانی می‌کنند."<sup>۴</sup>

به هر حال به نظر هرودوت ایرانیان دوره هخامنشی بت و پرستشگاه و محراب نداشتند. برای تحقیق در مورد باورهای آنها و همچنین نیایشگاههای هخامنشیان در این مقاله از بیشترین منابعی که در دسترس بوده استفاده شد و به تمام نظریات محققان اشاره شده است. در مورد آثار مذهبی هخامنشیان، کتیبه‌ها، محرابهای آتش، معابد چهارگوشه و آتشکده‌ها، محوطه‌های مقدس یا برزمدان (Barzamdān) و آرامگاههای هخامنشیان که عموماً در محوطه‌های مقدس قرار داشتند، اشاره شده است.

پس از بررسی نیایشگاههای این دوره، نتیجه می‌شود که از نظر فرم و نقشه بر معابد دوره‌های پارسی و ساسانی تأثیرگذار بوده و فضای مربع شکل چهارستونی و ایوان ورودی آن در دوره اسلامی و در بناهای قرون اولیه ایران و کشورهای همجوار مشاهده می‌شود.

واژگان کلیدی: نیایشگاه، هخامنشیان، آتشکده‌ها، آثار مذهبی

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