

The Zoroastrian Temple Cult of Fire  
in Archaeology and Literature

Part 1

by

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## Abstract

Zoroastrians have long been called 'fire-worshippers'; but the question remains why only they should be termed so, since veneration of fire has been a wide-spread custom in the world, and since moreover the Zoroastrians themselves venerate not only fire, but other natural objects also. The particular characteristics of the Zoroastrian veneration of fire can be defined as follows: first, because they emphasize the purity of fire, they avoid as far as possible any contamination even of the hearth-fire. Second, they place a sacred fire, especially established and perpetually maintained, in a temple, and make offerings of three kinds, fuel, incense and fat, to it itself.

However, if these particularities are considered as reasons for naming Zoroastrians 'fire-worshippers', the second one needs to be re-examined, for Zoroaster himself did not mention temple fires, and the concept of the temple fire is not found even in the later Avesta. According to Greek writers, the Persians in early Achaemenian times appear not to have had a temple cult. Nevertheless, some time in the fourth century B.C., possibly in the reign of Artaxerxes II, the temple cult of fire seems to have been established, perhaps in reaction to the image cult of Anāhitā. Since that time, the temple cult of fire has occupied a central part in Zoroastrian observance.

The development of this cult can be traced from archaeological evidence, such as surviving fire altars and their representations on seals, coins and tomb-reliefs, and also from temple remains. There is also the evidence of the Pahlavi books, and the living Zoroastrian tradition.

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Chapter I. Theological points of Zoroaster's  
faith with regard to fire

The main sources for knowledge of Zoroaster are his own prayer (the Ahuna Vairyo)<sup>1</sup> and his hymns (the Gāthās). From these it can be learnt that he was an Iranian, who probably lived in very ancient times, well before 1000 B.C.<sup>2</sup> He reformed the ancient Indo-Iranian religion, according to a revelation sent to him by Ahura Mazdā. As the Iranians had not acquired the art of writing in those days, they transmitted Zoroaster's words orally in his own language from generation to generation. The Gāthās came to form seventeen sections (hā's) of the Yasna liturgy<sup>3</sup>, and thus were included in the Avesta, the Zoroastrian sacred book which was finally written down in the Avestan script during the Sasanian period. Thanks to the survival of these hymns, it is possible to a certain extent to trace Zoroaster's own thoughts directly.

The prophet's fundamental concepts were based on dualism, and he understood the existing world as a battlefield for the fight between two uncreated Beings, good and evil, Ahura Mazdā and his adversary, the Hostile Spirit, Angra Mainyu. 'In the beginning (there were) the two spirits... the good and the evil in thought, word and deed' (tā mainyū + paouruyē... manahiçā vaçahiçā shyaothanōi hī vahyō akəmçā, Y.30.3). When 'these two spirits met, first they created life and non-life' (tā hām mainyū... jasaētō m paourvīm dazdē gaemçā ajyāitīmçā, Y.30.4). Thus Ahura Mazdā was comprehended to be the creator of life and of the whole world. The Creation of the world, described in detail in the Pahlavi Bundahishn,<sup>4</sup> was carried out in seven stages: first the sky (asman-), made of stone; next water (āp-) and third the earth (zam-). Then plants (urvarā-) came

and then animals, "originating in the uniquely-created Bull (gāv aēvō.dāta-). Sixth was Man, Gayō.marətan-, the primeval First Man. And lastly, both existing in itself and pervading and animating all Creation, fire (ātar-) was formed.

Each creation, it seems, was brought into being by, and was under the guardianship of, one of a group of great divine Beings, the seven Aməsha Spəntas (Bounteous Immortals). The sky was assigned to Xshathra (Dominion), water to Haurvatāt (Wholeness), the earth to Ārmaiti (Devotion), plants to Amərətāt (Life), animals to Vohu Manah (Good Thought), men to Spənta Mainyu (Bounteous Spirit), that is Ahura Mazdā himself, and fire to Asha (Righteousness).

The world, thus created by Ahura Mazdā, is controlled by asha, the principle of order and righteousness. Asha/rta<sup>5</sup> is a very important concept for the Iranians and Indians. It was originally conceived as an 'impersonal force'<sup>6</sup> and neuter principle, maintaining the regularity of the world. Everything in the world is subject to its fixed rule, from the movement of the sun, moon, stars and such things in nature to man's way of life, sacrificial procedures, and private and social morals. In other words, every aspect of the world is organised and exists through asha/rta.

It was Zoroaster, it seems, who first conceived of a divinity Asha, guardian of the principle asha, and placed him among the seven Aməsha Spəntas. As a divinity, Asha was the most often invoked of all by Zoroaster, but the concept of the still impersonal principle survived. Asha shows the 'righteous' way, not only at the universal level but also on the small-scale or inner level, that is social, moral and sacrificial. An ashavan<sup>7</sup> is a man who follows the way shown by Asha and leads his life as it should be led if the hostile beings do not intervene. The Drug is a Being opposed to Asha, the

pagan principle drug having been the negative to the principle asha, a force destructive to the world.

As we have seen in the Creation-myth, fire was held to be present in all creation, as well as existing as visible fire itself. The sky has the fiery sun, and the earth has many individual fires. Even water has a connection with fire<sup>8</sup>, much more so all living things, men, animals and plants. To live means to have a life-force which animates the living things as they breathe and grow and change. This life-force is understood as fire. Fire blessed the one who sacrificed to him, saying: 'may an active mind and active life be with you' (upa thwā varəzvātca manō varəzvaticā haxshōit anguha, Y.62.10).

Since life is controlled by the principle asha under the divinity Asha, and since the link between life and fire is clear, the relation of Asha/asha with fire is one of the most important concepts at the centre of Zoroaster's thought. He regarded fire as a constant reminder of Asha, saying as follows:

'Then to your fire, at the giving of reverence,  
truly as long as I shall be able, I shall think  
of Asha'

(at ā thwahnāi āthrē rātam nōmanghō ashahyā mā,  
yavat isāi, manyāi, Y.43.9).

According to the Gāthās, 'the holiest spirit', that is Ahura Mazdā, the Creator of life, 'chose asha for himself' (varatā... ashəm mainyush spənishtō, Y.30.5). In this respect the trio of asha, Asha and fire stand obviously on the side of the Creator, Ahura Mazdā, in the Creation and in the continuance of its 'spənta' nature.

The concept of a general last judgment may first have been

apprehended by Zoroaster among mankind. He, as the prophet of a just and rational religion needed the doctrine of an ultimate reward for good deeds. Moreover, in his understanding of this world as the battlefield between two Spirits, good and evil, he prophesied the final victory of the good God, and needed a general judgment in order that people should be chosen for the kingdom of Ahura Mazdā. This concept of Doomsday must have been a very effective and impressive element in his preaching.

The selection of the righteous is to be made by the ordeal of passing through molten metal (ayah xshusta). For them, this will be only a pleasant path, but for the evil, it will give great pain and lead to destruction. The use of molten metal at this last ordeal is characteristic of Zoroastrianism, and fire then plays an important role too. As it is asked: 'what is the reward which you shall grant to two parties (i.e. ashavan and drugvan) by your blazing fire, Oh Mazdā, by molten metal?' (yam \*xshnūtəm rānōibya dā thwā āthra suxrā mazdā ayanghā xshustā, Y.51.9), the relationship of fire with Doomsday is obvious. But there exists no image in the Gāthās of evil being burned directly by fire, or of fire purifying evil. The only implied physical work of the fire is that it melts the metal with its heat; and in Y.51.9. the reference to fire seems less to physical fire than to fire as a symbol of the virtue by which men may be saved. 'The reward (will be) to the ashavan' (savata<sup>V</sup> ashavabyō, Y.30.11), and the ashavan is the one 'who prepared the world (for salvation)' (yōi īm fərashēm \*kərōnaon ahūm, Y.30.9), and who is to live in the kingdom of Ahura Mazdā.

As the personification of 'order' in the Ahura-created world, Asha represents moral righteousness or the way of righteous living, and accordingly establishes the standard by which men are judged.

The relationship of Asha and fire with the judgment is also clear in the next verses:

'Then, Oh, Ahura! we long for your strong fire, through Asha, most swift and powerful, to be the visible help to the faithful, but, Oh, Mazda! to the hostile, the manifest violence of the turning of the hand'  
 (at tōi atrēm ahurā aojōnghvantam ashā usēmahi asishtam  
 ēmavantam stōi repantē cithrā.avangham at mazdā daibishyantē  
 zastaishatāish dārshtā.aēnangham , Y.34.4).

Therefore the reason why Zoroaster sometimes mentioned only fire in connection with Doomsday might have been that fire alone was enough to remind his followers of the image, already formed in their minds, of the last day.

Fire was usually given very physical epithets by Zoroaster, as if he had real fire in his thoughts. The word fire (atar) appears eight times in the Gāthās, each time in connection with the 'Selection', except once, when it is the fire which reminds the faithful of Asha at the time of prayer (Y.43.9), and once, when it is fire as the protector against the violence of evil. The most concrete statement is that the 'Selections' will be made 'by the heat of your fire, strong by Asha' (thwahyā garēmā āthrō ashā.aojahvā, Y.43.4); but suxra- (red or blazing) is the most frequently used epithet (Y.31.19, Y.51.9), apart from thwa- 'your', that is, Ahura Mazda's. This epithet suitably describes real fire. It is possible to say that ēmavant 'strong' (Y.34.4) and aojahvant- 'powerful' (ibid.) appear to describe the force of the fire, but they may also imply an allusion to Asha, as there is another epithet asha.aojah- 'strong by Asha' (Y.43.4). Asishta- 'swift' or 'promised' (Y.34.4) may suggest the image of the fire at the time of the 'Selection'.

But it is sometimes misleading to interpret the words of Zoroaster literally, because he was a prophet and he sometimes preached through metaphor, as G. G. Cameron has demonstrated.<sup>9</sup> In the following verses fire is perhaps to be understood as a sort of moral power to oppose the wickedness of the Drug and the drugvant:

'Whom, Oh Mazdā! should one appoint as a protector to one like me, when a follower of the Drug seeks to lay hold on me for violence, (none) other than your fire and mind? By the deeds of the two, Asha will come to maturity, Oh Ahura!'

(kəm nā mazdā mavaitē pāyūm dadāt  
hyat nā drəgvā dīdarəshatā aēnanghē  
anyām thwahrāt +āthrascā mananghascā  
yayā shyaothanaīsh ashəm thraoshtā ahurā, Y.46.7).

Here Zoroaster may be emphasising that moral power and a good mind are indeed the real support given by Asha, together with Vohu Manah, against evil. In this way, the epithet suxra- 'red' or 'blazing', may be taken as implying the energy of righteousness - that is, as suggesting visually vital power or powerful energy.

Zoroaster's descriptions of fire presumably have their basis in Indo-Iranian traditions of veneration of fire - a veneration which has parallels almost everywhere in the world. This phenomenon is due mainly to the importance for fire in human life. The functions of fire in daily life may range as follows: as a house fire, it cooks food and provides warmth and light for the family. It can also be used as a weapon against physical enemies, such as wolves, and was thought to drive off supernatural evil beings in the same way. Further, the beauty of its burning flame can give



delight. In sacrifice, fire fills a very important role, for the offering of the sacrificial victim is usually connected in some way with fire. Fire's use as a destroyer of impurity was also widespread.

In the case of the Indo-Iranians, veneration of fire was ardently practised towards the actual house fire, that is, the fire on the hearth. As A. B. Keith said: 'The burning flame is the present deity',<sup>10</sup> and the anthropomorphization of the fire was hardly seen among Indo-Europeans in early times. The hearth fire, perpetually burning, was considered to be a centre of the house, and offerings were made to it daily, with special rites monthly, seasonally and yearly.

In India Agni, the fire god, was considered to be the god of the house, the guest and the head of the house. Of the three fires, Gārhapatya (belonging to the house head), Āhavanīya (eastern) and Daksina (western), which were essential for special sacrifices, only the Gārhapatya was continually maintained even while there was no sacrifice. Hestia, goddess of the Hearth, was also the centre of daily life in Greece.<sup>11</sup> When a wedding was held, the bride's mother carried embers from her own hearth fire to her daughter's new home.<sup>12</sup> Further, on a larger scale, the altar for Hestia was placed in the Prytaneum (the city hall or palace) in all Greek cities, and was considered to be the city centre. When the Greeks colonized a new town, the fire of Hestia of their mother-city was divided and a part carried to their new home.<sup>13</sup>

In India Agni was particularly venerated because of the importance of his role at the sacrifice. In the Rg Veda, about one fifth of all the hymns are dedicated to Agni, and only Indra receives more. Agni carried the essence of the offering to the gods and through

this function he was regarded as a priest or messenger. In Iran, fire had not the obviously twofold aspects of fire in the Indian cult, that is, fire as an object to be venerated for itself, and fire as a means of conveying offerings to other divinities, by consuming them. In the Iranian tradition, as far as it is known, nothing is ever placed on fire that does not contribute to its own maintenance and worship. The function of fire at the sacrifice is not to consume a part of the flesh on behalf of the gods, but, by cooking it (without direct contact) to release its odour for them to enjoy. This was essentially a task of the hearth fire in Indo-Iranian tradition, a tradition which survives in Zoroastrianism, as is evident from the passage in the prayer to fire, which states that 'the fire of Ahura Mazda... cooks the day meal and the night meal' (ātarsh mazdā ahurahe.... <sup>V</sup>ham.pacaiti xshāfnīmca <sup>V</sup>sūirīmca, A.N.13).

As a physical phenomenon, the fire was also related to the sun. And since the sun's movement is in accord with universal order, that is, asha, the link between the fire and asha is thus reaffirmed. This connection is vividly expressed in Yasna Haptanghaiti (Y.35-41) which is linguistically almost as old as the Gāthas:

'Then we devote to you, the most beautiful shape of shapes, Oh Mazda Ahura! these lights (here, and) that highest of the high ones, which is called the sun'  
(staēshtam at tōi kəhrpēm kəhrpam āvaēdayamahī,  
mazdā ahurā, imā raočā <sup>V</sup>barəzishtəm barəzimanam  
avat, yāt hvarə <sup>V</sup>avācī, Y.36.6).

The expression 'these lights here' can be interpreted as fires on

the earth, and thus makes the parallel with the sun, the fire in the sky.

To return to Zoroaster's own thoughts, although it is obvious that fire had an unique position in his doctrine and observance, nevertheless it was only one of the things which he venerated, and Asha was only one of the great Aməsha Spəntas. In the confession, the Fravarānē (Y.12), there is no word referring to fire. Furthermore, there is no reference to the existence of a fire temple or to a consecrated fire in his Gāthās. Therefore, the 'fire-worshipping religion' is not an adequate definition of the faith preached by Zoroaster.

## Chapter I. Notes

1. Y.27.13. This is one of the three most sacred prayers, and 'belongs to the vaça<sup>V</sup> cathrushāmṛūta<sup>V</sup> (words that are to be spoken four times)'. See H. Reichelt, Avesta Reader, texts, notes, glossary and index, Strassburg, 1911, 98. This prayer was believed to have been recited by Ahura Mazdā himself before the Creation of the material world (Y.19.8-9).
2. See Boyce, History, 190; A. S. Shahbazi, 'The "traditional Date of Zoroaster" explained', BSOAS 40, 1977, 25-35.
3. They are Y.28-34, 43-51, 53.
4. GBd. I.54.
5. In the Vedas it is called rta, and means mainly 'order' (of the universe and the sacrifice).
6. Boyce, History, 199.
7. Ashavan, 'possessor of asha' and drugvant, 'he who has the Drug's nature' are opposed.
8. Apām Napāt was closely linked with Agni in the Vedas, see L. H. Gray, 'The Indo-Iranian deity Apām Napāt', ARW 3, 1900, 18-51, and further, Boyce, History, 40-52.
9. G. G. Cameron, 'Zoroaster the herdsman', IIJ 10, 1967-68, 261-281.
10. A. B. Keith, The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanishad, Harvard, 1925, 625.
11. E. A. Gardner, 'Altar' ERE I, 343.
12. ibid.
13. E. E. Sikes, 'Hearth, Hearth-Gods (Greek)', ERE VI, 563.

Chapter 2. Development of the temple cult  
under the Achaemenians and a consideration  
of the material remains

Information about the Achaemenians in history is not abundant, and what there is does not include any detailed statements about the religion and customs of those days. Therefore if we want to know about the nature of the fire cult then, and how it was performed, we have to search through the scanty sources very carefully. Firstly, there are several significant figures carved on seals, and on royal tombs and monuments. Secondly, we can consider what is reported of Persian customs by classical writers. Thirdly, we have excavations, some of which have yielded relevant remains.

Originally, it is evident, the Indo-Iranian peoples had no temples or fixed places of worship, and, as we have seen, Zoroaster himself said nothing in his Gāthās about fire in temples. Nor is there any clear reference to the existence of temples even in the later Avesta. Herodotus, who was a contemporary of the early Achaemenians, said of the Persians in his Histories (I.131): 'It is not their custom to make and set up statues and temples and altars'. Strabo made a similar observation, though he wrote about five centuries later. 'The Persians do not erect statues or altars, but offer sacrifice on a high place, regarding the heavens as Zeus' (Strabo, 15.3.13).

According to Cicero, Xerxes (486-465 B.C.), the fourth Achaemenian king 'thought it sacrilege to keep the gods whose home is the whole universe shut up within walls', and 'ordered the Athenian temples to be burned' (De Republica, 3.9.14). Cicero referred also to 'sacred statues in human form; a custom which the Persians consid-

ered wicked' (ibid.). Xerxes faithfully followed his father, Darius I (522-486 B.C.) in his manner of rule, and made his tomb beside his father's in the rocks of Naqsh-i Rostam, and had engraved above it the same reliefs as Darius. Therefore it is unlikely that he had a different religion or different observances, from his father.

Cyrus the Great, the actual founder of the dynasty, built his palace at Pasargadae. This site has been excavated since 1928, but no remains have been identified with certainty as temples, although there is a heavily damaged building, now known as the Zindan-i Suleiman, which some scholars have considered to be a religious one. The characteristics of the Zindan, together with its counterpart at Naqsh-i Rostam, the Ka'ba-i Zardusht, are; one, that both are massive stone constructions without windows; two, that they have only one room, with one entrance; three, that they have similar tent-shaped roofs.<sup>1</sup> D. Stronach, the excavator of the Zindan, considers them as religious buildings, on the basis of their likeness to the Urartian tower temple.<sup>2</sup> Some others have identified them as tombs, recalling the similarity in construction with the tomb of Cyrus in Pasargadae, and this seems more likely. Besides, these buildings seem quite unpractical as temples, and even D. Stronach admitted that the Zindan cannot be considered as an āyadan, a type of religious construction said to have been destroyed by Gaumata,<sup>3</sup> because the Zindan 'remained substantially intact after 522 B.C.'. <sup>4</sup>

During the Achaemenian period, according to Herodotus, sacrifices to Yazatas (divine beings)<sup>5</sup> were performed very simply.

'When about to sacrifice they neither build altars nor kindle fire, ... to whomsoever of the gods a man will sacrifice, he leads the beast to an open space and then calls on the god, himself wearing a crown on his cap, of myrtle for choice. ... He then cuts the victim limb from limb into portions, and having boiled the flesh spreads the softest grass, trefoil by choice, and places all of it on this. When he has so disposed it a Magian comes near and chants over it the song of the birth of the gods, as the Persian tradition relates it; for no sacrifice can be offered without a Magian. Then after a little while the sacrificer carries away the flesh and uses it as he pleases' (Herodotus, I. 132).

Fire was obviously used to cook the flesh on these occasions,<sup>6</sup> but was not necessarily ignited for each sacrifice. It is more likely that each fire was made from embers brought from a house-fire, such as was maintained perpetually in each house. The setting for the sacrifice was evidently very simple, as Herodotus describes it. Therefore there was no need of a specially appointed place, nor of an altar to hold ever-burning fire. To sacrifice in the open was probably traditional for the Indo-Iranians, who were originally nomads. In India also the sacrifice usually took place in the open.

However, at the beginning of the Achaemenian period when several centuries had already passed since Iranians had settled in Persia, a few fixed sanctuaries are known to have existed. For example, it is reported of the sanctuary at Zela<sup>7</sup> that in the sixth century B.C., 'heaping up a mound of earth over a certain rock in the plain, (the Persian generals) completed it in the form of a hill, and erected on it a wall, and established the temple of Anaitis and the gods

who share her altar - Omanus and Anadatus, Persian deities' (Strabo, 11.8.4). It does not appear from this passage that there were buildings at this sanctuary, but at least there was a fixed place dedicated to the cult.

Furthermore, two stone plinths (Pl.1) were found at the western end of the enclosure at Pasargadae, the palace of Cyrus the Great (fig.1). These are isolated from the other buildings of the site, and are placed in the open.<sup>8</sup> They are similar in size<sup>9</sup> and material (limestone), but are not so alike in shape that they can be called twins. The southern one is set on two steps on the top of a large square base, which makes it a three-stepped structure. This plinth is attached to an eight-stepped stair (fig.2). The northern one is a more simple cubic shape, and appears never to have had steps up to it like the southern one (fig.3). The plinths must surely have been used for religious ceremonies, although we do not know of what kind.<sup>10</sup>

D. Stronach, the excavator of these remains, considers them to be fire altars, and to demonstrate 'the high antiquity of the fire altar plinth and the equally long tradition behind the use of twin altars'.<sup>11</sup> The word 'fire altar' is, however, misleading in this case. We may be able to accept the idea that at least one of the plinths bore fire at the time of a particular ceremony, as we can see on the rock-reliefs on the tombs in Naqsh-i Rostam and Persepolis. We also know that the Persians sacrificed in the open air, from the information of Herodotus,<sup>12</sup> but we do not know which of the monuments actually bore the fire, or both, or if they were really altars or just plinths, to bear another portable altar. Certainly they could not have held ever-burning fire, because it would have been unsafe and impractical to maintain ever-burning fires in the



open. Therefore these plinths do not prove that Herodotus was wrong when he wrote about the Persian practice not 'to make and set up statues and temples and altars'.<sup>13</sup> We can only assume from these monuments that the kings appointed this special place for their occasional sacrifices in order to make the cult more dignified, and it seems likely that the practice of having an ever-burning fire in a consecrated place was not yet known to the early Achaemenians, and that they still restricted the fire cult to the simple Indo-Iranian custom of maintaining an ever-burning hearth fire in each house.

The cult of the hearth fire must have been universal. Xenophon, a Greek general, who was employed by Cyrus the Younger († 401 B.C.) when he revolted against his brother Artaxerxes II (404-359 B.C.), was fairly well acquainted with Persian customs, and wrote of them in the Cyropaedia. In this he said that 'when Cyrus (the Great) had gone home and prayed to ancestral Hestia, ancestral Zeus, and the rest of the gods, he set out upon his expedition' (1.6.1.). Further, 'Cyrus sacrificed first to Hestia, then to sovereign Zeus, and then to any other god that the magi suggested' (3.5.57). The reason why Xenophon spoke of the Hearth instead of the fire upon it would be the similarity of the Persian cult of the house fire to the Greek cult of Hestia, goddess of the Hearth.<sup>14</sup>

An ever-burning fire in a temple is different from a domestic fire in four respects. Firstly, it is never put out. Secondly, it is kept in an especially appointed and consecrated place. Thirdly, it is itself consecrated and never used for practical purposes. Lastly, it is tended by a priest or priests.

The fire temple seems to have existed from the time of the later

Achaemenians; but before we go into this matter, we need to consider the fire altar. Several fire altars are featured on seals of the period. The seals of those days were either cylinder seals or stamp seals; and their main function, according to P. Hekerman,<sup>15</sup> was to 'protect either the object or document sealed, or the owner, from malign supernatural influences', and, besides, to 'identify ownership' or 'to verify authenticity as a substitute for, or supplement to a signature'. The altars shown on seals may be classified in three groups. Those of the first group resemble a sort of plinth (Pl. 2-6), rectangular in shape, and with panels cut in the side. Those of the second group are pillar-shaped, with two or three symmetrical steps at top and base (Pl. 7-13). Those of the third group consist of a slender shaft (Pl. 14). We shall examine them one by one.

The first type of altar seems to have been made of stone or brick. On the top of the plinth there is an ornament like battlements in step shape. The fire is shown between these battlements. The plinth reaches in height to about the human waist. No actual altars of this shape have been found. Their distinctive feature is the 'battlement' on the top. This is too big and impressive to be just an ornament, and perhaps represents a large stylised bowl which accommodated the fire and ash, and was placed temporarily or permanently in position. It is very important to have a sufficient amount of hot ash beneath a fire in order to sustain it and prevent it being extinguished. The apparent flame on altars of the plinth type is very narrow and small compared with the massiveness of the altar itself.

It is worth noting here that this type of altar is seen only on seals. For most seals of this period, the owner and find-place

cannot be identified. But those seals discovered at Persepolis (Pl. 4-6) were owned by kings or their ministers and officials, and were used on official documents. As has been noted above, seals used on official documents may be assumed to have declared the authority of the royal family, or that delegated by the king. Therefore the altars engraved on seals may well have been closely connected with the royal family. If this is so, their size may be to confer dignity, and the flame could be that of the zaothra (fat-offering) burning on the fire for kings could afford to offer the zaothra every day and claim special merit from it.<sup>16</sup>

In continuing this examination, we find that this type of fire altar is always shown flanked by two men on the court style seals.<sup>17</sup> Both wear Persian-style clothes with wide sleeves and long skirts, and a tiara of fluted cylinder shape which looks like a crown, and was worn by kings and nobles.<sup>18</sup> This is very similar to the garb of Darius I, as he is shown in the relief above his tomb at Naqsh-e Rostam (Pl. 15). The men on the seals carry bows and an arrow-case, but not a sword or the barəsmān (sacred twigs)<sup>19</sup>, which are indispensable for the cult. They do not cover their mouths. Both raise their right hands in respect or prayer, and sometimes they are shown with lotus flowers in their hands. They may possibly be priests, but we usually see the priests of this period wearing the Median headdress. Besides, the bow and arrow-case are more appropriate to king than priest.

The priesthood in Achaemenian times seems to have been hereditary in the Median tribe of the magi. Certainly 'Median' clothes were the proper garments for the priests (Pl. 16, 17).<sup>20</sup> They also wore a sword at their belts, and the reason for this is easily understood. In Persia priests themselves performed the blood

sacrifice, and Herodotus recorded (l. 140) that 'the Magians kill with their own hand anything but a dog or a man'. It is said also that Cyrus the Great sacrificed a victim to the Hearth, Zeus and then to certain other gods, 'as the magi suggested' (Xenophon, Cyropaedia, 7.57). To divide up the carcass was the duty of the priest, who therefore had to carry a sword or a knife with him for that purpose.

The two men shown on the seals with this type of altar would therefore not be priests. It seems more probable that figures facing each other across the fire altar, wearing the same clothes and performing the same action, were the king and his heir,<sup>21</sup> or the king and his father, thus representing together the line of royal descent. This is the more likely since this type of altar, with its dignified appearance, and for the reasons given above, is probably to be identified as the dynastic one. The size of the **altars shows** that they would not have been moved; but must have been fixed in a certain place, to which the king and other participants would have gone to perform the due rites; and the fire which they bore was probably not used for any practical purposes (such as to give light or warmth, or to cook food). The origin of the dynastic fire was presumably the royal hearth fire; but it came to symbolise the life of the dynasty and then that of the nation represented by the king. So the dynastic fire may be taken as the symbolic centre of the nation, and thus as the representative of the homeland.

There is a seal, found in the surface-layer of the Treasure House of Persepolis, which depicts a man on horse-back facing what appears to be an altar of this type, in simplified shape (Pl. 18); but the expected flame is not depicted between the two projections on its top. However, if the fire on such an altar was considered as

the symbolic representative of the nation, it is possible that the altar itself, as the place on which it was set, could stand for one of the residences of the dynasty. So this seal may perhaps show a warrior or a king returning home, or to his homeland. An altar of this type is also seen later in a temple-relief found at Dura-Europos (Pl. 19).<sup>22</sup> Dura-Europos was a cosmopolitan city which flourished in Seleucid and Arsacid times, where many different cultures and nations co-existed. Neither the temple nor the altar in the relief were Zoroastrian, and fruits are shown being offered beside the fire on the altar. But the design, which shows a god (or man) on camel-back, letting his shoulder-cloth blow in the wind, and advancing towards the altar,<sup>23</sup> is similar to the above-mentioned seal of Persepolis. But except for this, not one trace of this type of altar has been found after Achaemenian times.<sup>24</sup>

Like the hearth fire, which was extinguished on the death of the head of the house, the dynastic fire was put out at the death of the king, and lit again at the time of the next accession. According to Diodorus, at the time of the death of Hephaestion, one of Alexander's favourite friends, Alexander 'proclaimed to all the peoples of Asia that they should sedulously quench what the Persians call the sacred fire, until such time as the funeral should be ended. This was the custom of the Persians when their kings died' (Diodorus Siculus, 17.114.4). Since this proclamation was made to 'all the peoples of Asia', the fire in question was probably the hearth fire in each house; and the custom referred to shows that the royal fire was treated as a leader of all the hearth fires, as the king was of the people. In other words, the royal fire was the symbol of the Achaemenian dynasty and the empire. That is why after the fall of the Achaemenians, each local king maintained a dynastic fire as the

symbol of his authority,<sup>25</sup> and why in Sasanian times the dynastic fire became the main symbol of the Sasanian kings. The royal fire being thus not only a private centre for the royal family, but also a public and symbolic one for their subjects, it resembled in this respect the ever-burning fire consecrated in a temple, which developed later.

Let us then go on to the second type of altar ; the pillar-shaped one with stepped top. The material seems to be stone or brick, as with the first type, but in some examples the slenderness of the centre pillar makes it possible that metal was used. Pillar-altars are to be seen on the tomb-reliefs at Naqsh-i Rostam and Persepolis (Pl. 15, 20, 21);<sup>26</sup> and down to modern times this has remained the usual type of Zoroastrian fire-altar. Therefore it can be called the standard type.

The prototype of this altar seems to have existed in ancient times. A cylinder seal (Pl. 22), found at Persepolis and belonging to the Assyrian era, shows an altar of this type in front of a seated god. The oldest surviving altar of this kind known in Iran is that found in a windowless tower-like ruin at Nūsh-i Jān Tepe, near Hamadan (fig. 4).<sup>27</sup> This building (Pl. 23) was the oldest on the site and has been assigned to the eighth century B.C. In its east corner was found a mud-brick altar covered with fine white plaster (Pl. 24, 25). It had a four-stepped top, in which there was a shallow depression which seemed to have held fire. D. Stronach, the excavator, says that 'it is difficult to imagine that such a shallow bowl was designed to harbour a permanent fire'.<sup>28</sup> Therefore 'the Nūsh-i Jān altar may provide the first evidence that the early fires of Media were not permanent but were rekindled for each ceremony.'<sup>29</sup>

We do not know what D. Stronach meant by 'the early fires of Media', but at least he was not suggesting that this was a Zoroastrian fire-altar, for he then held the time of Zoroaster to have been about 650 B.C. (The time of Zoroaster is not strictly relevant at the moment, but it is likely that it was more ancient, sometime before 1000 B.C.<sup>30</sup> Another reason for not regarding this altar as a fire-altar is that it was surrounded by a protecting wall, which 'would have made obvious difficulties for anyone engaged in tending fire.'<sup>31</sup>

All the characteristics of this altar and the building in which it stood suggest that this ruin cannot be identified as a Zoroastrian fire temple; nor is there anything particular to link it with Zoroastrian traditions except the shape of the altar, and the similarity of the use of a blind window here and in the Zindan at Pasargadae and the Ka'ba at Naqsh-i Rostam. (The actual meaning or importance of this blind window is still not understood.) Consequently all that we can tentatively accept is that in ancient Media there were temples in which some use was made of fire, but that the fire was not ever-burning.

It should also be mentioned here that in Achaemenian times many Elamites and Babylonians, who were not Zoroastrians, are known to have occupied important positions in the government, and they observed their own beliefs. Therefore not all Achaemenian seals are necessarily Zoroastrian in character. And the use of fire in the cult was not exclusive to Zoroastrianism. Many other religions actually made use of fire in some way in their cult. For example, a cylinder seal (Pl. 26) dated to 500-400 B.C., shows a bare-headed worshipper with barəsman or a rod, and a god wearing something similar to Persian clothes with a circular object in his

hand. Behind him there seems to be a fire-altar, with a strange object on the top. W. H. Ward suggests that this 'looks like a great eye',<sup>32</sup> but it is not known what sort of ritual or religion is connected with this particular scene. In any case the rather rough manner in which this seal is engraved shows that this was not produced in the court style,<sup>33</sup> which can be distinguished by the severely mannered treatment of face and dress. So it is very possible that this seal was not that of the king or one of his ministers, but belonged to some non-Zoroastrian official.

In the case of another Babylonian seal (Pl. 27), non-Zoroastrian features are very interestingly represented together with Persian ones. On this we can see both a Babylonian priest performing a ritual act, which is quite similar to that depicted on genuine Babylonian seals, and a king in Persian dress fighting with two lions, which is a characteristic Persian motif. Persians were tolerant not only of the religion of foreigners but also of foreign customs generally. Herodotus commented (I. 135): 'They wear the Median dress, because they think it is finer than their own, and for war they don the Egyptian breastplate'.

Another seal (Pl. 28) in the Ashmolean Museum, also dated to between 500 and 400 B.C., might provoke controversy about the Zoroastrian cult. This shows a fire-altar flanked by two men in Persian clothes, each with something circular in his hand. Moreover, there seems to be a horned animal, perhaps a small deer, hanging head downward in the flame on the altar. Traditionally the Zoroastrians never made burnt offerings, for the defilement of fire with dead bodies was strictly forbidden.<sup>34</sup> If flesh is being burnt on the fire in this ritual, and the animal is not merely symbolic, then this ritual cannot have been Zoroastrian. The circular objects in



the men's hands remind us of a previously mentioned seal (Pl. 26), but their use or meaning in the cult are unknown. As the Ashmolean seal was purchased in Egypt and is not in the court style, it probably represents a local ritual, performed in Persian manner.

Of the third type of altar there is not much to be said. This slender-shafted altar has not been found on any archaeological site, but is greatly in evidence on Babylonian and Assyrian seals (Pl. 29-33). Although this type is not represented in any Zoroastrian scenes, some altars of the standard type (Pl. 7, 11-14), with three-stepped top and base, have a very slender stem, which may have been made of metal, perhaps through the influence of such alien altars. This point is still quite uncertain, but at least a portable metal altar is reported to have been used by Achaemenian Persians. The army of Darius III (335-330 B.C.), in its campaign against Alexander the Great, carried a fire upon 'a silver altar (argenteis altaribus)' (Curtius Rufus, 3.3.9) at the head of its march. As we do not know what this altar looked like, the possibility of the use of a slender-shafted metal altar by Zoroastrians remains uncertain, but such an altar could not have been used to hold ever-burning fire, as the bowl was too small to contain enough ashes to keep the fire burning safely for a long time. In addition Xenophon reported, perhaps anachronistically, that when the fire was carried by the army of Cyrus the Great, it was carried 'in a great esxaras' (Cyropaedia, 8.3.12). The word 'esxaras' means 'brazier' rather than 'altar', so the 'silver altar' of Darius III may in fact have been some sort of brazier or portable vessel.

Now that we have discussed the altars represented on seals, it is possible to state that the second type of altar, having become the standard one, was that used in rituals, because whenever the

figure of a priest with barəsmān, wearing Median clothes and performing rites, is found on a seal, the altar is always of this type (Pl. 7-9). If a man, even not in Median dress, has barəsmān in his hand, he can be identified as a priest performing rituals (Pl. 10, 11). Especially on the Seal of Datam(es) (Pl. 8, 9), known from impressions on clay at Persepolis, it is very clear that two priests were engaged in cultic acts, preparing the haoma-offering with mortar and pestle before fire on such an altar. Therefore, when the temple cult was introduced to Zoroastrianism, this type of altar was probably the one that was used to hold ever-burning fire.

The establishing of the temple-cult of fire was an act which caused people to call Zoroastrians fire-worshippers. In other words, it was not reasonable to characterize Zoroastrians as fire-worshippers only before they adopted the cult of worshipping perpetually burning fires publicly in temples. In the fragment of Xanthus, who was contemporary with Artaxerxes I (465-423 B.C.), we have one of the oldest surviving Greek sources concerning Persia; and he says only that 'the Persians claim that it was from him (Zoroaster) they derived the rule against burning dead bodies or defiling fire in any other way, and that after this rule had been followed for a long time they finally established it as a custom' (Xanthus, in Müller, I. frag. 19). Herodotus referred to fire together with other things such as the sun, the moon, earth, water and winds, as being the object of Persian worship. The first writer who gives Zoroastrians a name which particularly connects them with the cult of fire is Strabo (15.3.15), who calls them 'fire-kindlers (pyraethi)'. This bears out the assumption that there were no fire temples before the time of Herodotus.

There are, however, two reasons for believing that a temple cult was adopted in Zoroastrianism at some time during the Achaemenian period. Firstly, there is the excavation of the remains of a temple at Susa, one of the Achaemenian capitals, which displayed a ground-plan (fig. 5) very similar to those of later fire temples, although there are no remains which indicate that this was itself a fire temple. Secondly, it is known from Strabo and Pausanias that a number of fire temples flourished in Asia Minor in the Parthian period. If the introduction of the temple cult of fire into Zoroastrianism in Persia had taken place after the conquest of Alexander the Great, it could not have been disseminated far into Asia Minor, where the Greeks ruled. In other words, it is more likely that a new movement had begun earlier during the time of the Achaemenians, while that dynasty ruled over Asia Minor. There is also evidence from what had been the east of their dominions, Bactria, that a temple-cult of fire existed there, to be adapted in due course by the Kushans.

When, then, was the temple cult of fire introduced into Zoroastrianism? From early Achaemenian days, the first known occurrence of religious changes was during the reign of Artaxerxes II (404-359 B.C.). He was the first king to add in his inscriptions the names of Mithra and Anāhitā to that of Ahura Mazdā, which alone appears in the inscriptions of previous kings.<sup>35</sup> Mithra, primarily god of the covenant,<sup>36</sup> was associated with the sun and was one of the chief divine beings of the Indo-Iranians. He appears both in the Vedas and the Avesta, and was one of the three Ahuras<sup>37</sup> in the Avesta, together with Mazdā himself, and Apām Napāt (Son of the Waters). Apām Napāt is known as a water god in the Vedas, and is possibly to be identified with Varuna,<sup>38</sup> who formed a pair with Mitra<sup>39</sup>; but in Iran his position seems to have been taken over in Achaemenian

times by Anāhitā. No Yasht (hymn) to Apām Napāt survives, but the yasht to Arədvī sūrā Anāhitā remains and is many verses long. Arədvī Sūrā was the goddess of a mythical river which waters all the earth, and her true name was possibly \*Harahvatī<sup>40</sup> (Sarasvatī in India). Because of her nature as river goddess, she could easily replace a water god. Yet there existed another divinity associated with water, namely Tishtriya (Sirius), the rain-bringer, to whom a yasht is dedicated. Therefore the reason for Arədvī Sūrā's attaining a position of such pre-eminence as one of the main triad of gods is probably to be sought in external influences, that is, her partial identification with an alien divinity, 'Anāhitā'.

When Artaxerxes II adopted 'Anāhitā' as one of the highest gods, mentioning her name in his inscriptions together with those of Ahura Mazdā and Mithra, he appears at the same time to have introduced the foreign cult of image worship; for Berossus, a Babylonian priest who lived in the third century B.C., wrote of the Persians as follows in the surviving part of his chronicle:

'It was not, however, till many ages had passed that they began to worship statues in human form; ... for this custom (to worship statues in human form) was introduced by Artaxerxes the son of Darius and father of Ochus, who was the first to set up the statue of Aphrodite Anaitis in Babylon, Susa and Ecbatana, and to enjoin this worship upon Persians and Bactrians, upon Damascus and Sardis.'<sup>41</sup>

The only temple-ruins remaining from Achaemenian times, those at Susa, were attributed to the reign of Artaxerxes II for architectural reasons by their excavator, M. Dieulafoy.<sup>42</sup>

Anāhitā/Anaitis was identified at times with Ishtar,<sup>43</sup> an old and very popular goddess of water and fertility in Mesopotamia,

whose cult centred on the worship of her idol. She was also identified in Greece with Aphrodite, who was distinctly associated with water. Though Herodotus (1. 131) mentioned that 'Aphrodite... was called by the Persians Mitra', it seems very likely that he made a mistake in using the name 'Mithra' instead of 'Anāhitā'. As far as we can gather, the alien 'Anāhitā' was always represented by the statue of a goddess standing calmly. Once this image-worship was introduced in Iran, the cult of this goddess became very popular. Therefore the reason why, as Diodorus Siculus reports (5.63.1), 'when the Persians were the dominant power in Asia and were plundering all the temples of the Greeks, the precinct of Hemithea<sup>44</sup> was the sole shrine on which they did not lay hands', may have been the similarity of Hemithea as a healing goddess to Anāhitā. (Hemithea is linked with Apollo, as Anāhitā so often is with Mithra.)

The adoption of image-worship and the accompanying building of temples, must have caused strong reactions among orthodox Zoroastrians. Is it not possible to assume that they were led to place fire itself, the symbolic life-force of the creation of Ahura Mazdā, in the sanctuary of other temples, instead of an image, so as to keep its veneration at the centre of the cult, as enjoined by their prophet? Once it was adopted, the temple cult of fire became the focus of Zoroastrian worship. The temple fire was considered to be the most sacred of all, and the priests very carefully avoided any possibility that it should be defiled. The temple fire shared its public nature with the dynastic fire, which symbolized the nation through its ruler. Victory over an enemy, or over social and moral evils, or alien faiths, were all important to the existence of the nation, and the survival of its government and culture.

For this reason, 'it seems likely that the first fires founded were those dedicated to Varəthraghna, yazata of victory',<sup>45</sup> and that the highest rank of temple fire was then that which is called Fire of Varəthraghna.

To sum up, the fire cults in Achaemenian times can be classified as follows: firstly, there was the cult of the house fire, which was wholly private and was performed by the head of the house, or his wife. Secondly, there was the cult of the dynastic fire, which probably developed from that of the royal house fire. Here the fire was probably no longer used for practical purposes, but was placed upon an altar, symbolizing the life of the dynasty and nation. Thirdly, there came into existence the temple cult of fire, which was possibly evolved under external influence, following the introduction of the image cult of Anāhitā by Artaxerxes II.

We should also make mention here of the open-air cult of fire. Herodotus' report makes it very probable that the fire was kindled or brought out into the open for sacrificial purposes. And the scenes, possibly showing the cult of dynastic fire, on the reliefs of the tombs of Naqsh-e Rostam (Pl. 19-20) depicts the presence of the sun or the moon or both. Unless these are merely symbols, these rituals must have been held in the open. The solid materials of the fire altar and the plinths in Pasargadae suggest that some particular places were permanently appointed for special observances. At least there seems not to have existed yet the prohibition against allowing the sun's rays to fall upon fire.<sup>46</sup> Further, Curtius Rufus spoke of the army of Darius III advancing against Alexander the Great preceded by fire, saying also that 'it was an ancestral custom of the Persians not to begin a march before sunrise.' (Curtius Rufus, III. 3.8). No one knows how the silver altar, which he says

held the fire, looked, but it is difficult to think of this as a closed vessel, since this fire must have been blazing high, so that the whole army could see it. The co-existence of fire and the sun is also referred to in Yasna Haptanghāiti.<sup>47</sup> Therefore the cult of fire in the open air need not be thought of as taking place only at night.

## Chapter 2. Notes

1. For details, see E. F. Schmidt, Persepolis III, Chicago, 1970, 'The tower', 34-49, and for the Zindan, Persepolis I, 1953, 23-24.
2. D. Stronach, 'Urartian and Achaemenian Tower Temple', JNES, 1967, 278-288.
3. Darius, Behistun I. 63, see R. G. Kent, Old Persian Grammar, Texts, Lexicon, New Haven, 2nd ed., 1953, 116, 120.
4. D. Stronach, art. cit., 287.
5. 'one worthy of worship', see Boyce, History, 194-196.
6. The Greeks and Persians alike stewed the meat of the sacrifice, which might be performed in the open, far from ovens.
7. Zela is the place in Cappadocia where Cyrus' famous victory over the Sacæ took place in the sixth century B.C. Although Strabo says that 'Pompey added considerable territory to it' and 'made it one of the cities which he organised after his overthrow of Mithridates' (Strabo, ll. 8.4.), Zela had an earlier existence.
8. Although they are situated within the oddly aligned enclosure wall, next to the Terraced Mound, both these are considered to be later constructions than the two plinths, see D. Stronach 'Excavations at Pasargadae : Third Preliminary Report', Iran III, 1965, 28.
9. The southern one is 2.16 m. high and 2.43 m. square, the northern one 2.10 m. high and 2.80 m. square.
10. As altars, several suggestions have been made as to the divinities to whom they were dedicated. A. T. Olmstead, History of the Persian Empire, Chicago, 1948, 61, regards them as twin altars 'to the tribal divinities Anahita and Ahuramazda'.



- R. Ghirshman, Persia, from the origins to Alexander the Great, tr. by S. Gilbert and J. Emmons, London, 1964, 228, assumes three altars to Ahuramazda, Mithra and Anahita, with another undiscovered altar elsewhere. A. Godard, 'Les Monuments du Feu', Athār-e Irān III, 1938, 67, considers them as altars to fire and water.
11. D. Stronach, art. cit., 24.
  12. Loc. cit.
  13. ibid.
  14. Hestia was goddess of the Hearth and was usually not anthropomorphized in the Greek pantheon. In her temple fire was placed on a hearth in the centre instead of an image, see E. E. Sikes, art. cit., 562-3.
  15. 'Sāsānian Seals', in SPA I, 784.
  16. Thus in Sasanian times, Shapuhr I (A.D. 241-272) stated that he established fires at which sheep were to be sacrificed every day.
  17. For definition of 'the court style', see J. Boardman, Greek gems and finger rings, early Bronze Age to late classical, London, 1970, 305.
  18. Georgina Thompson, 'Iranian dress in the Achaemenian Period', Iran III, 1965, 125.
  19. Barəsman (barsom in Pahlavi) could mean a bunch of twigs held by the priest, or the grass which was spread on the place for the sacrificial ritual.
  20. 'Median' clothes consisted of a loose tunic, tied round the waist, and trousers, and occasionally a mantle with long sleeves, worn loose upon the shoulders and also a felt hood which had long side-pieces that could cover the mouth. It is not certain

who the figures shown here represent. As they hold barāsmān and cover their mouths, they are presumably performing some ritual act; but as long as the cult object is not seen, this is only speculative.

21. In some Sasanian coins the king and his heir, known by characteristic insignia, were depicted one on each side of the fire altar. See Chapter 4.
22. Dura-Europos was situated to the north-west of Baghdad on the right bank of the Euphrates. The site has been excavated by Yale University and the French Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres from 1922 onwards.
23. Ann Perkins, The Art of Dura Europos, Oxford, 1973, 98-100, interprets this scene as a god on a camel receiving the offerings on the altar.
24. E. Akurgal, Die Kunst Anatoliens von Homer bis Alexander, Berlin, 1961, 173-4, suggests that the remains from Bünyan (Pl. 16) is the one of a fire altar; but unfortunately the top part has been destroyed, so that this is uncertain.
25. M. Boyce, The Letter of Tansar, Rome, 1968, 47.
26. For more examples see Schmidt, op.cit., III.
27. D. Stronach, 'Tepe Nūsh-i Jān, 1970 : Second Interim Report', Iran XI, 1973, 129-138.
28. *ibid.*, 137.
29. *ibid.*
30. Boyce, History, 190-191; A. Shapur Shahbazi, art. cit.
31. D. Stronach, art. cit., 136, n.18.
32. W. H. Ward, Cylinders and other Ancient Oriental Seals in the library of J. Pierpont Morgan, New Haven, 1920, 118.
33. J. Boardman, op.cit., 305.

34. Xanthus, in C. Muller, Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum, I, Paris, 1885, 42, frag. 19. For the translation, W. S. Fox and R. E. K. Pemberton, Passages in Greek and Latin Literature relating to Zoroaster and Zoroastrianism, K. R. Cama Oriental Institute Publication 4, Bombay, 1928, 1.
35. See R. C. Kent, op.cit., 154-155.
36. Boyce, History, 24-27; Gershevitch, AHM, 26 ff.
37. ahura is equivalent to Vedic asura, and means 'lord'. In the Vedas, the term asuras also became used of a group of demonic spirits, but in the Avesta it continued to be used only for the highest divinities. See Boyce, History, 23-24.
38. ibid., 40-52.
39. ibid., 24-38.
40. ibid., 71.
41. Berossus, Chronicon Chaldaea, 3, quoted by Clement of Alexandria, Protrepticus, V.
42. Schippmann, Feuerheiligtümer, 273-274.
43. Ishtar was identified with many goddesses in the Middle East in ancient times. Her characters are also numerous, but primarily she was a water goddess and giver of life. See E. Dhorme, Les Religions de Babylonie et d'Assyrie, Paris, 1945.
44. Hemitheia ('Half-goddess') was a daughter of Staphylus and Chrysothemis. On her origin see Diodorus Siculus, 5. 62-63. Her worship flourished in Cheronesus.
45. M. Boyce, 'On the Zoroastrian Temple Cult of Fire', JAOS, 1973, 459.
46. Dhabhar, Rivāyats, 56.
47. See Chapter 1.

### Chapter 3. Evidence for the fire-cult from the Arsacid period

The conquest of Iran by Alexander the Great in 331 B.C. brought a new element into the cultural life of the country, mainly through the founding of Hellenic cities. The settlers - Macedonians and Greeks - introduced their own customs and practiced their own art and techniques, which greatly attracted Iranians as well as other conquered peoples. The tendency of the Greeks and Macedonians to identify their own gods with local gods provided the Iranians with a new iconography.

The fire temples of Iran, as well as the temples of Anāhitā, were evidently looted and damaged in the war of conquest by Alexander, and also by individual Seleucid kings. But the temple cult was by then firmly enough established to survive. There is a reference by Isidor of Charax to an eternal fire maintained in the town of Asaak in Khorasan, where 'Arsaces' ascended the throne.<sup>1</sup> The Parthians were devoted to the house of Arsaces,<sup>2</sup> and 'Arsaces' was adopted as a throne name by all the kings of this line.<sup>3</sup> Therefore this eternal fire was probably none other than their dynastic fire, maintained at the birthplace of the dynasty. It is also noteworthy that even local princes under the suzerainty of the Arsacids maintained their own royal fires.<sup>4</sup> This must have meant a considerable increase in the number of sacred fires in the Parthian period. A general veneration of fire is moreover attested in the Arsacid era. At the terrace of the ruin of Masjid-i Sulaiman in Khuzistan, where there is burning of natural gas, many Arsacid coins were found, together with Sasanian ones. This suggests that 'it was visited as a place of pilgrimage already in Parthian times'.<sup>5</sup>

In Persian literature the romantic epic Vīs and Rāmīn, which was composed originally in the 'Pahlavi' language, according to its author, Fakhr ud-dīn Gurgānī,<sup>6</sup> is held to reflect the history of a branch of the Parthian ruling house.<sup>7</sup> In one incident in this epic, Moubad, king of Marv, before making a huge fire in front of which his queen, Vīs, had to swear her innocence, 'presented innumerable gifts to the fire temple, such that one cannot number them one by one. Coin, royal gems, land, mills, and numerous gardens: fleet steeds of Tukhār, uncountable sheep and oxen. He brought some fire from the temple and heaped up a fire like a mountain on the field. He fed it generously with sandalwood and aloe, nursed it with camphor and musk'.<sup>8</sup> Later in the poem, when finally Vīs and Rāmīn decided to rebel against the king, Vīs asked Zard, the king's half-brother who was guarding her, on a pretext about a dream, to go 'to the fire temple, to light a fire to celebrate the happy turn of events'. And she said that 'by my presents I shall increase the fuel of the Fire, in nobility, purity, and peace'.<sup>9</sup> These remarks reflect the existence of the fire temple and its importance as a religious institution in Parthian times.

Moreover, according to Greek and Roman writers many fire temples existed and flourished in this period. Strabo wrote about fire temples in Cappadocia. He reports that he himself had seen the 'Pyraetheia, noteworthy enclosures' there. 'In the midst of these there is an altar (bōmos), on which there is a large quantity of ashes and where the Magi keep the fire ever burning. And there, entering daily, they make incantations for about an hour, holding before the fire their bundle of rods and wearing round their heads high turbans of felt, which reach down over their cheeks far enough

to cover their lips' (15.3.15). Similar observations are reported by Pausanias in the city of Hierocaesareia and Hypaepa in Lydia. 'In each sanctuary (hieros) is a chamber, and in the chamber are ashes upon an altar. But the colour of these ashes is not the usual colour of ashes. Entering the chamber a magus piles dry wood upon the altar; he first places a tiara upon his head and then sings to some god or other an invocation in a foreign tongue unintelligible to Greeks, reciting the invocation from a book' (5.27. 5-6). The cult as described by these two authors is very similar to the present day ceremony of (esm)-bōy- dādan, although the detail given by Pausanias of the reading of the prayers 'from a book' is of doubtful validity.

Strabo also spoke of 'the fountain of naphtha, and the fires and the temple of Anea' on the road between the city Demetrias and Sandracae in Mesopotamia (16.1.4). Isidor of Charax referred to the eternal fire in Asaak, as mentioned above. Furthermore, there were three most sacred fires burning in the Sasanian period, which were believed to have existed since very ancient times, and this means that they must have been at least as old as the Arsacid period. They were Ādur Burzēn Mihr, Ādur Farnbāg, and Ādur Gushnasp.

I shall examine here the tradition concerning the first of these three fires, Ādur Burzēn-Mihr, because this fire belonged to Parthia proper. It was believed to have existed since the Creation by Ohrmazd, in order to give help to the world,<sup>10</sup> and to have been established in its 'abode' (mān), or 'appointed place' (dād-gāh), on Mount Rēvand by King Vishtāsp in Zoroaster's life-time.<sup>11</sup> Though this legend cannot be taken literally, it suggests at least the very high antiquity of this fire. Rēvand (Av. Raēvant) appears to have been a name for the mountain range to the north of the

Nishapur plain, for Rēvand still remains as a district name there; but the actual site of this sacred fire is not identified yet. There are two possible sites: one is near a village called Burzīnān, in the district of Rēvand, which may have taken its name from Burzēn-Mihr. The other is the ruins on Mt. Mihr, five miles north from the village Mihr, to the west of Shāhrūd. The fire presumably flourished even after the invasion of the Muslims, for it is referred to often in the Shāhnāme; but when it was extinguished is not yet known.

There was also a sacred fire in Tūs in Khorasan, which was believed to have been established by Farēdūn (Av. Thraētaona).<sup>13</sup> Another fire in the west of Parthia was that at Qūmis. Mas<sup>c</sup>ūdī says that 'on raconte qu'Alexandre, s'en empara, conserva ce feu et ne l'éteignit pas'.<sup>14</sup> Therefore this fire must have existed before the conquest by Alexander. Thus we know that there were several sacred fires of the first rank established in Parthia proper during the Arsacid period, and that at least one of them, and probably more, existed there before that epoch. As these fires had been greatly venerated, even the anti-Parthian campaign by the early Sasanians could not bring about their neglect.

The only remains of a Parthian fire temple as yet identified with fair certainty are those of one on the Kūh-i Khwāja, a flat-topped hill rising by the Hāmūn lake in Seistan.<sup>15</sup> The Hāmūn lake has been identified with the Lake Kāsaoya, referred to several times in the Avesta.<sup>16</sup> The region of Seistan seems to occupy a special position in the history of Zoroastrianism, and particular claims were made to link it with Zoroaster<sup>17</sup>. In Parthian times Seistan was under the suzerainty of the Arsacids, and was governed by the Sūrēn, one of the great Parthian families.<sup>18</sup>

The earliest temple on the Kūh-i Khwāja appears to belong to the second-first centuries B.C., but this seems to have been rebuilt and extended later in the Parthian period. The ground-plan of the first temple (fig. 6) appears to have been similar to that of the Achaemenian temple excavated at Susa (fig. 5), shows the temple to have consisted of a large square hall with a smaller antechamber, in which were four free-standing columns, making a square. A stone fire altar of a standard type, having three steps above and below its shaft, was found in the Sasanian ruins (Pl.34). It is dated in the first century B.C. by E. Herzfeld,<sup>19</sup> and is probably the oldest surviving Zoroastrian altar.

There are several other temple remains, among which the ruins of site IV in Shahr-i Qūmis in Parthia are interesting. Shahr-i Qūmis has been identified by J. Hansman with Hecatompylos, once a capital of the Arsacids.<sup>20</sup> The ground plan of site IV (fig. 7) is similar to that of the temple of Tepe Nūsh-i Jān, discussed in the previous chapter, and the building was carefully filled with shale and sealed and abandoned in the first century B.C., though we do not know the reason for this action. (The temple at Nūsh-i Jān was treated in the same way.) In one of its rooms 'a small plinth of plastered mud bricks supports a shallow fire bowl, 13 cm in diameter', and 'the walls behind and above the bowl show signs of burning'.<sup>21</sup> 'The situation of the altar or fire bowl, in one of the corners of Room 5 at Site IV, hardly accords, however, with what we should expect for a sacred fire, for, while priests would surely need to have unimpaired access to such a fire, the bowl at Site IV could be reached only by climbing through a metre-high window set within the secondary wall there'.<sup>22</sup> However, the resemblance of the plan and situation to that of the Tepe Nūsh-i Jān



temple shows the strong continuity of old Iranian tradition in the Parthian period.

Of a similar date, and comparable as a large religious shrine, the Kushān remains at Surkh Kotal in Afghanistan (fig. 7) display an artistic blend which D. Schlumberger, their excavator, has called 'Graeco-Iranian', and which has evident connections with the 'art of Gandhara'.<sup>23</sup> In the small sanctuary attached to the main temple was found a great bench-altar (Pl. 35), a sort of platform with figures of two large birds on the front. Because of the destruction of the upper part, the birds' heads are missing. As the sanctuary contained a large amount of ashes, this altar may well have borne an ever-burning fire. However, both the ground plan of the building and the shape of the altar differ from known Zoroastrian examples, therefore it is not safe to assume that this was a Zoroastrian temple. Nevertheless, it seems to show the influence of the Zoroastrian temple cult of fire, established under the Achaemenians, on the eclectic faith of the Kushans.

The influence of the fire cult can also be seen on the plinths of statues of the Buddha or Bodhisattva in Gandhara art. There the people pray before a fire altar which appears to be of a Zoroastrian type (Pl. 36-41). These altars were probably made of stone, and had a large bowl to hold the fire. The same type of altar is also shown in front of a venerated person in carvings (Pl. 42-43); and it is depicted on a Kushan seal (Pl. 44) which has four faces showing Shiva, two unidentified figures, Heracles, and 'a prince in Indo-Scythian dress with forward-pointing helmet, sacrificing over altar'.<sup>24</sup> This latter scene is a very popular design on the obverse of Kushan coins (Pl. 45-46). The similarity of these fire altars to Zoroastrian ones sheds light on the influence of the Zoroastrian temple cult of fire in these areas during the Arsacid period.

Pars, the homeland of the Achaemenians, was governed in this period by vassals first of the Seleucids and then the Arsacids, who issued coins with Aramaic legends, and who are known only by these, so that their origins and history remain obscure. There are four series of such coins, three of which bear designs which are of interest for the fire cult.

The first set of coins were issued in a period covering the third century to the middle of the second century B.C.; and in this period rulers bearing the title fratarāka (governor)<sup>25</sup> are known, named Bagadates I, Oborzos, Artaxerzes I and Autophradates. The obverse of the coins shows the profile of the king, wearing a 'Median' hood and diadem.<sup>26</sup> On the reverse of the first issue of Bagadates I (Pl. 47), the 'fratarāka' himself is shown seated on a chair with a long stick in his right hand, wearing a Median gown. In front of him is a standard with four tassels. On the next issue by the same governor (Pl. 48), he appears standing in front of a tower-like object, very similar to the Ka<sup>c</sup>ba-i Zardusht at Naqsh-i Rostam,<sup>27</sup> below the Achaemenian royal tombs. This object has, however, three small projections on its top. On later issues it is surmounted by a pair of horn-like or stepped projections, something like battlements (Pl. 49-50). The governor wears 'Median' clothes, as he did on the previous one, and raises his right hand in a gesture of respect.

The problem lies in the nature of the object before which he stands. This is usually considered to be either a fire altar or a fire temple.<sup>28</sup> Firstly we shall examine whether it can be identified as a fire altar. The object appears to be taller than the king and this is abnormally large for an altar. It is true that a huge fire altar appears on the reverse of coins in the middle of the

reign of Ardashir I, the founder of the Sasanian dynasty (+ A.D. 240), but the nature of the two dynasties is very different. The Sasanians possessed a vast empire and sought to unite its peoples under their single authority, both in politics and religion. However, it is improbable that the 'Fratarākas', who bore the title 'governor' only, ever hoped to re-unite the whole of Iran under Persian rule, and so they are unlikely to have laid visual claim to great political authority or religious leadership. Even if each of the three battlement-like projections on the object in question were an altar, one would further have to explain why three small altars should be set upon a huge one. In addition, and more cogently, there seems to be no fire upon this object. The top part cannot itself represent the natural shape of a flame. It is improbable that a fire altar would be venerated without the fire, for the object of Zoroastrian cult is the fire itself, and not the altar.<sup>29</sup> Thus it is unlikely on every count that this object is a fire altar.

The other suggestion is that it is a fire temple. According to Strabo, the fire temples of Parthian days were forms of enclosure (sēkos),<sup>30</sup> and it is likely therefore that they had a flat plan, rather than being tall tower-like buildings. Moreover, the objects depicted on the coins seem to have a huge heavy door and blank sides without anything which could represent windows. Further, even if this were a fire temple, there would be no reason for the king to do homage to it from outside, and not to go in to pray. A fire temple cannot itself be an object of worship. Therefore the identification of the object as a fire temple is also unlikely.

The question then remains, what could it be? That the king raises his hand in respect suggests the possibility that this was in some way at least the source of his authority, secular or religious. The justification for a king's authority in that period probably depended mainly on a link with the Achaemenians, either by blood or by the orthodoxy of his faith. It is known that Persian princes named their sons with Achaemenian kings' names, that is Darius or Artaxerxes, and maintained their own royal fire. The relief on the tomb of Qiz-qapan in Kurdistan<sup>31</sup> is an instance of the upholding of the Zoroastrian tradition by local princes (fig. 9). Here are depicted two men, wearing 'Median' clothes and flanking the fire altar. Both have bows in their left hands and are raising their right hands upward. Their mouths are covered in a similar manner to figures depicted on the gold fragments of the Oxus Treasure (Pl. 17) and the relief from Būnyan (Pl. 16).

In the light of these considerations the object on the coins may represent the Ka<sup>c</sup>ba-i Zardusht, which seems to have been accepted generally as the symbol of the Achaemenians at Naqsh-i Rostam (as would be the probable reason for Shāpur I later setting his inscription on its base). This building may have been connected with the Fravashi cult. The fravashi was the immortal element of living things, and the soul of the dead was also called fravashi. To make statues of their ancestors and relatives, and to keep them in a special place, was a part of general Zoroastrian observance under the Arsacids.<sup>32</sup> Buildings such as the 'Square Hall' at Nisa<sup>33</sup>, and the shrine at Shami<sup>34</sup>, were presumably devoted to the Fravashi cult. The Fratarākās may have placed the Ka<sup>c</sup>ba-i Zardusht

on their coins so as to claim the fravashis of the Achaemenian kings as those of their own ancestors. This seems to be the most plausible explanation at the moment.

The second series of the coins of Pars was issued around 150 to 100 B.C., in the reigns of Darius I and Autophradates II. One characteristic of this period is that these local rulers then called themselves 'shāh' (MLK'), but this cannot mean that they were independent. 'Shāh' was a general term used both for absolute rulers and for vassal-monarchs; and it is likely that these Persian princes were under Arsacid suzerainty by then. The main change in the coin design is the appearance of a bird upon the standard beside the main object - the putative Ka<sup>c</sup>ba<sup>35</sup>; and after one issue by Darius I (Pl. 50), the standard appears as a mere pedestal, and the object is small and simplified (Pl. 51-52). There is a winged figure above the projections of this building, which is similar to, but not so clearly drawn as, the Achaemenian winged disc. There is still no sign of fire upon the object.

The period of the third series of coins is around 100 B.C., and the names of Darius II, Oxathres and Artaxerxes II appear on them. The rulers are shown in profile on the obverse of the coins, wearing Parthian headdress. On the reverse there is a fire altar. This fire altar is of a standard type, and comparatively narrow and small. There is a semicircular shape upon the fire altar which may be the mound of ashes, and there is a fire blazing above it (Pl. 53). Before it stands a king, wearing a long gown with the skirt tightened around the waist, and with the barsom in his hand. There is no information to explain this change of design upon the reverse of the coin. Parthia itself was on the move under and

after Mithradates II (c. 124 - 89/87 B.C.), but the effect of this is likely to have been comparatively small upon the province of Pars, as far as can be determined. A possible explanation is rather that, as the memory of the Achaemenians faded, and the political force of their fravashi-cult diminished, the fire altar, more plainly a religious symbol, was used instead to represent the royal house.

But the fire altar disappeared again after a short time. In the fourth period of the coinage of Pars, from the first century B.C. to the rise of the Sasanians, the names of only eight kings are known and the designs of their coins were all different. On the obverse of the coins there was always the profile of the king, but on the reverse were such designs as the king's face, or bust, or a flying bird, or a design such as the moon, stars and diadem.

In addition to those coins of the provincial rulers of Pars, there are many coins issued by the Arsacids themselves. The most general design was the king's face on the obverse and a male or female god's statue on the reverse, with a Greek legend. The practice of depicting a god's figure on the coin, and hence invoking the god's protection for the king, and asserting the king's religious authority, was evidently due to Greek influence, since the mints of the period were almost all in Greek cities.

Arsaces, the founder of the Arsacid dynasty, appears among the figures of gods, and this is interesting because it reflects the custom of venerating the ancestors of the Arsacids. But the interpretation of the god's figures needs some consideration. One problem is presented by the nature of Hellenic culture. The Macedonians and Greeks, as they colonised, tended to identify the local

gods with their own gods, and so, among Zoroastrian yazatas, they identified Ahura Mazdā with Zeus, Mithra with Apollo-Helios-Hermes, and Vərəθragna with Heracles-Ares.<sup>36</sup> Conversely, the Iranians presumably regarded the representation of gods on the coins as those of Zoroastrian yazatas in Greek guise. That is, in Arsacid times, when Iranians saw Aphrodite they presumably thought of Anāhitā, when Zeus, of Ahura Mazdā. Once in the Arsacid period a king, Vologeses I (c. 50-76), set a fire altar on some of his bronze coin-issues (Pl. 54-55), possibly to invoke the protection of fire instead of that of a yazata. Vologeses I also introduced the Aramaic legends instead of Greek ones on his coins. Moreover, the name Vologeses is remembered as that of a king who initiated the compilation of the Avesta and the secondary religious works in Arsacid times,<sup>37</sup> though we do not know whether that Vologeses was Vologeses I or one of the other kings of the same name.

Finally, we have to mention a passage in the Vendidād, the Avestan nask, which was probably compiled in Parthian times. There (Vd. 8.81 ff.) the expression dāityā- gātu- ('appointed place') is first used for a fire sanctuary. All this cumulative evidence indicates that the temple cult of fire was firmly established in Parthian times.

## Chapter 3. Notes

1. Parthian Stations, tr. by W. H. Schoff, Philadelphia, 1914,  
11. See further Schippmann, Feuerheiligtümer, 33-34.
2. Strabo, 16.1.28.
3. *ibid.*, 15.1.36.
4. M. Boyce, tr., The Letter of Tansar, Roma, 1968, 47.
5. M. A. Stein, Old Routes of Western Iran, London, 1940, 162.
6. Fakhr ud-Dīn Gurgānī, Vīs u Rāmīn, tr. by G. Morrison, New York/London, 1972, xi.
7. 'In fact, at no period of the long history of Iran did the material, and especially geographical conditions, correspond to those described in Vīs u Rāmīn, except at the time of Parthian dominion, under the rule of the Arsacid dynasty.'  
V. F. Minorsky, 'Vīs-u-Rāmīn, a Parthian romance', Iranica, Tehran, 1964, 178.
8. Gurgānī, *op.cit.*, 134.
9. *ibid.*, 337.
10. GBd., 18.8.
11. *ibid.*, 18.14.
12. A. V. W. Jackson, From Constantinople to the Home of Omar Khayyam, New York, 1911, 211-217. Schippmann, Feuerheiligtümer, 23-30.
13. Mas'ūdī, Les prairies d'or, ed. by B. de Meynard and P. de Courteille, vol. I, Paris, 1962, 1400. This fire was called 'Azar Khirad (the fire of intellect)' in the Dabistān or School of Manners, Paris, 1843, vol. I, 52.
14. *ibid.*, 1401.
15. See E. Herzfeld, Iran in the Ancient East - archaeological studies presented in the Lowell Lectures at Boston, London, 1941; Schippmann, Feuerheiligtümer, 57-70.



16. This lake is believed to hold the seed of Zoroaster, from which are to be born the three Saoshyants, Saviours.
17. See 'Wonders of Seistan', The Pahlavi Texts, ed. by Jamasp-Asana, Bombay, 1897, 25-26. For other allusions see A. V. W. Jackson, Zoroaster, the prophet of ancient Iran, New York, 1898, 45.
18. See Christensen, L'Iran, 103.
19. *Op.cit.*, 301.
20. 'The Problems of Qūmis', JRAS, 1968, 110-139.
21. J. Hansman and D. Stronach, 'Excavations at Shahr-e Qūmis, 1971', JRAS, 1974, 10.
22. *ibid.*, 17.
23. See his article, 'The Excavations at Surkh Kotal and the Problem of Hellenism in Bactria and India', Proceedings of the British Academy 47, 1963, 77-95.
24. J. M. Rosenfield, The Dynastic Arts of the Kushans, Los Angeles, 1967, 103.
25. This title is known from the Aramaic legend prtrk'.
26. Wearing a diadem as a symbol of kingship is presumably due to Greek influence. This custom continued to be practiced in Sasanian times as well. 'Median' clothes consisted of a loose tunic, tied round the waist, and trousers, and occasionally a mantle with long sleeves, worn loose upon the shoulders and also a felt hood which had long side-pieces that could cover the mouth.
27. See Chapter 2, above.
28. See G. F. Hill, Catalogue of Greek Coins in British Museum 28, Arabia Mesopotamia Persia, London, 1922, 195-215; E. C. F. Babélon, Traité de Monnaies Grecques et Romaines, II-2, Paris, 1901, 33-71.

29. According to modern custom in Persia, when a new fire temple is built and the fire is moved to it, the old one is simply abandoned.
30. 15.3.15.
31. See C. J. Edmonds, 'A tomb in Kurdistan', Iraq I, 1934, 183-192.
32. See M. Boyce, 'Iconoclasm among the Zoroastrians', in Christianity, Judaism and other Greco-Roman cults, Studies for Morton Smith at sixty, ed. by J. Neusner, Part 4, Leiden, 1975, 101-103.
33. See G. A. Pugachenkova, 'Architectural Monuments of Nisa', Vestnik Drevnei Istorii, 1951, 4, 185-199; cited in M. A. R. Colledge, The Parthians, ancient peoples and places, London, 1967, 109.
34. See A. Stein, op. cit., 325-326.
35. Birds were important in Zoroastrian mythology (for instance the Saēna bird in the Avesta and Pahlavi texts).
36. See H. Waldman, Die Kommagenischen Kultreformen unter König Mithradates I Kallinikos und seinem Sohne Antiochos I, Leiden, 1973, 161-164; M. A. R. Colledge, Parthian Art, London, 1977, 83.
37. DkM. 412.3 - 415.3, transl. by R. C. Zaehner, Zurvan, 8.

## Chapter 4. Remains concerning fire in Sasanian times

Ardashīr was a son of Pāpak<sup>1</sup>, who was, or had made himself, vassal-ruler of Istaxr near Persepolis in Pars, where there was a great temple of Anāhīd (Anāhitā). After Ardashīr succeeded his father, he extended his territory by defeating Shādhshāpur, vassal-ruler of Isfahān, and thereafter he defied and defeated his overlord, the Arsacid King of kings, Ardashān (Artabanus) at the battle of Hormuzd in A.D.224.<sup>2</sup> He then entered the Parthian capital of Ctesiphon and was possibly crowned there as King of kings in 226.<sup>3</sup> According to one tradition, he took a princess of the house of Arsaces as his wife<sup>4</sup> and thus secured the legitimacy of his kingship. His kingdom extended from the Oxus to Azerbaijān and Armenia; and in order to unite these far-flung countries, none of which had submitted easily to him, he seems to have used a great deal of propaganda, which included giving prominence to his dynastic fire.

Tōsar,<sup>5</sup> Chief Hērbēd,<sup>6</sup> was the religious counsellor of Ardashīr I, and also had evidently some authority in political matters. He wrote a letter, now known as the Tansār Nāme,<sup>7</sup> in reply to one from Gushnasp, King of Parishwār and Tabaristān, in which he admitted that Ardāshīr 'has taken away fires from the fire temples and extinguished them and blotted them out'.<sup>8</sup> He justified this action with the following words: 'After Darius each of the "kings of the peoples" built his own fire-temple. This was pure innovation, introduced by them without the authority of kings of old'. In reversal of this act the new King of Kings, he wrote, 'has razed the temples, and confiscated the endowments, and had the fires carried back to their place of origin'.<sup>9</sup> Other sources tell us that in Armenia Ardashīr destroyed idols and established sacred

fires instead.<sup>10</sup> Ardashīr seems thus to have refused to admit the existence of any dynastic fires but his own, as part of establishing sole dominion over a unified empire.

On the positive side, Ardashīr seems to have established many Ātaxsh ī Wahrāms ('fires of Victory') in places which were somehow memorable to him. According to the Kārnāmag ī Artaxshīr ī Pāpakān, he ordered the establishment of ten Ātaxsh ī Wahrāms on the coast at Bōxt-Ardashīr (KnA. 4. 7), several in Ardashīr-Xwarrah (KnA. 7. 9), seven in Kūlān (KnA. 8. 18), and ten in Warāxsh-Shāpur (KnA. 15. 21). Although this work, compiled probably around the fifth century, cannot be regarded as an accurate history, these statements may reliably indicate Ardashīr's religious zeal. The king declared himself as Mazda-worshipper (māzdayasn) on his coins,<sup>11</sup> and also brought back trophies of war to his own fire temples, according to Tabarī.<sup>12</sup> Similar deeds were carried out by his son Shāpur I (A.D. 241-272). The latter said in his inscription on the Ka<sup>c</sup>ba-i Zardusht at Naqsh-i Rostam that he 'in land upon land has established many Wahrām fires and has conferred benefices upon many magi-men and has made great the gods' worship (SKZ, Parthian, 1.17).<sup>13</sup>

The rock-sculpture near the bridge at Fīrūzābād shows Ardashīr receiving the diadem of kingship from Ohrmazd (Ahura Mazdā) (Pl.56). Between him and Ohrmazd there is a small fire altar standing knee-high. This altar is shaped like a pillar on a square platform, and its top part is like a large bowl. The scene itself was evidently depicted in order to declare that Ardashīr's victory and kingship originated in Ohrmazd; therefore this fire altar may be similar to ones established in the Firss of Wahrām of his foundation.

In addition to the above mentioned evidence, Sasanian coins supply solid ground for the belief that the dynastic fire was con-

sidered to be a main symbol of the unity of the empire. Although the earlier coin-issues of Ardashīr I bear his face on the obverse and Pāpak's on the reverse, on later issues, from the middle of his reign, a fire altar is depicted on the reverse (Pl.57). This altar was of the standard shape, that is, a pillar set on a three-stepped base, with three parallel steps at the top. The flame shown upon it is large and vigorous. The top of the altar is supported with props in the shape of an animal's legs, (possibly a lion's), an elaboration which had not been seen before. The basic shape reminds us of the Achaemenian fire altar shown in the tomb reliefs at Naqsh-e Rostam (Pl.15, 20-21), but is somewhat different from the altars depicted in Arsacid times on Vologeses' coins (Pl. 54-55) and the coins of Persis (Pl.53). Since a diadem is tied to the props, and the legend on the reverse is read as 'the fire of Ardashīr', the fire must be the dynastic one, which was kept burning during the reign of each king. To depict the dynastic fire altar on the reverse of his coins in such a dignified manner must have been a very effective means for Ardashīr to disseminate his claim to sole dominion.

This custom, of showing the dynastic fire altar on the reverse of their coins, was continued by the following Sasanian kings; but an altar shaped like Ardashīr's can be seen on only few issues thereafter. The commonest shape of altar (see Pl.58-64) is slightly different, in that instead of having props to support the large top part, the pillar in the middle becomes very thick. The base has usually two steps, but at the top there are still three, which seem to support a large bowl. The flame is huge, and a diadem is usually tied around the pillar or placed above the whole scene - 'scene' because the altar is almost always flanked by two figures, shorter than the altar itself.

One of these figures, on the left side of the altar in each case, is presumably the king himself, for whom this particular fire was established, for his crown is usually similar to that of the king on the obverse.<sup>14</sup> The figure on the right, however, varies from time to time, and is usually considered as a priestly one.<sup>15</sup> But on some of the coins of Hormuzd I and Wahrām II, the right-hand figure appears to be female (Pl. 59, 61). C. Trever considers this female figure to be a queen, from the resemblance of her headdress to that of the queen depicted on the obverse;<sup>16</sup> but the similarity in her style of presentation to that of the Goddess Anāhīd suggests more that this figure is Anāhīd. This is particularly striking on a coin of Wahrām II (Pl. 61), where she holds a diadem in her hand in the same manner as Anāhīd is shown in the rock-relief of the investiture of Narseh at Naqsh-i Rostam (Pl. 65). Therefore it seems likely that in general the figure on the right of the altar is the yazad who guards the fire of the reigning king, though the identification of each yazad is difficult. In some cases the two figures are very similar, so in these instances the figure on the right-hand side might be the heir of the king, since the heir is sometimes depicted on the obverse beside the bust of the king.<sup>17</sup>

After the later issues of Shāpur II (A.D. 309-79), a human bust occasionally appears in the flames upon the top of the altar, or is set against the pillar part of the altar itself (Pl. 66-68). Apart from a similarity of shape, the altars on such issues have two characteristics in common with the earlier ones: one is that they carry a diadem, and the other is that they are guarded by two figures. Therefore, these altars, too, must bear the dynastic fire; but the problem is, who the busts are supposed to represent.

Several suggestions have been made for the identification, ranging from Ohrmazd himself,<sup>18</sup> or Ādur, the fire yazad,<sup>19</sup> to the image of a Frawahr (Fravashī),<sup>20</sup> but none of them is wholly convincing.

Firstly, in the case of Ohrmazd, there seems no reason for the supreme Lord to be shown in the flames of the fire, fire being only a part of his sevenfold creation. Though Ohrmazd was often depicted on rock-reliefs in anthropomorphized form in Sasanian times, he never otherwise appears among flames. As for Ādur, he was represented by the flames themselves. He was in general the least anthropomorphized of the yazads, and is not known, moreover, to have any particular link with the Sasanian royal house. In the case of a Frawahr, this is most likely to have been particularly the Frawahr of Ardashīr I, for he was highly venerated throughout the Sasanian era as the founder of the dynasty. In Istaxt, the birth-place of the Sasanian dynasty, there was a fire called 'the Fire of Anāhīd-Ardashīr', which was still burning in the time of Wahrām II (A.D. 276-293) (KNR. 1.25).<sup>21</sup> Hence the fire of Ardashīr may have been maintained, exceptionally, in perpetuity, as the fire of Arsaces had apparently been maintained throughout the Arsacid period. Yet if the bust were that of his Frawahr, one would expect the flames in which it is depicted on the reverse of the coins to be those of the original dynastic fire, not that of the actual king on the obverse. This interpretation seems unacceptable, however, for the legend on the reverse always tells us that the fire is in fact that of the reigning king.

Consequently, yet another possibility exists, that the bust actually represents the reigning king. Although there is no other evidence for any king's bust being placed on an altar in Iran, it was a popular custom among Greeks and Romans to make busts of eminent

persons and set them in public places or temples. If a bust of its founder were shown on its altar, this would have established the identity of the fire in question. Especially on the coins of Wāhrām V (A.D. 421-39), the head on the altar is very similar to that of the king on its obverse, and wears the same crown (Pl. 68). Therefore it would seem that it must represent the same person, though it must be admitted that in most cases this is not easy to determine.

By the end of the reign of Vologeses (A.D. 484-88), the human bust on the altar disappears again, and after the issue of Khusrow I (A.D. 531-579) the shape of the altar becomes more slender (Pl. 69-71). Nevertheless, the altar must still be that of the dynastic fire, for the diadem is tied around it. The slender altar-shape lasts until the end of the Sasanian period. There is one unusual issue of Khusrow II (A.D. 591-628), which does not have the fire altar on its reverse. Instead it shows a human figure with a diadem (Pl. 72). Although it is not very clear, this figure's crown looks similar to that worn by Khusrow II on the obverse, therefore this is apparently a standing figure of Khusrow II.

As far as the coins are concerned, the dynastic fire was certainly used as the main symbol of the dynasty throughout the era. The year was counted as such-and-such a year 'of the fire of' the reigning king.<sup>22</sup> The circulation of these coins must have served as an efficient means of convincing the people of the legitimacy of Sasanian rule, and of declaring the state of political and religious unity under them.

Let us now examine the fire altars found on seals. Since the use of cylinder seals had almost finished before Parthian times, many Parthian and Sasanian seals are undistinguishable, although a



number bear the portrait of the owner in the Parthian period, and his name in the Sasanian epoch.<sup>23</sup> The use of seals was necessary for certain legal documents and for religious affairs, therefore to have a seal was not only common to the kings, kings' officials and priests, but was necessary also for many ordinary people.<sup>24</sup> Since seals were used to crave 'for the divine protection',<sup>25</sup> (as their legends show), they tend to display religious subjects. The fire altar was one of the most popular designs. Its shape is of the standard type with a rather slender pillar and one or two steps on top and base.

In the engravings of these fire altars, the altar either stands alone or is attended by one or two men. Where the fire altar is depicted alone, it is usually supported by two props (Pl. 73-76), as on the early coins of Ardashīr I, but more simply conveyed. In some cases there are other cross-pieces to support the pillar-part (Pl. 77-78). These cross-pieces sometimes appear, not as if they are supporting the altar, but as if they are hanging from it (Pl. 79-80). There are also some altars with no props (Pl. 81-82). In all cases the flame upon the altar is very large and vigorous. Only one such seal has an inscription on it (Pl. 82), and on this the word 'fire ('[d]wr)' can be read; but it is not certain if this is part of the title of a priest of a fire temple, or simply of a proper name. There is one altar on which no flame is seen, but on which there appears to be a mound of ash (Pl. 83).<sup>26</sup> This probably represents the fire altar in stylized manner.

Another seal shows a human bust in the flames on the same type of altar (Pl. 84). The inscription on this was read by E. E.

Herzfeld as 'priest of a fire called "Shāpur's fire" '.<sup>27</sup> This might therefore be the official seal of the priest in charge of that particular fire, and the face on the altar might be that of its founder.

Now we proceed to the case of seals on which is depicted a fire altar attended by one or two men (Pl. 85-90). These men wear a tunic, knee-length, and tied round the waist with a belt. They carry a straight knife on their belts, and wear a hood and seemingly a mouth-veil (padām), although sometimes these details are not recognizable. They hold something like the barsom in their hands. Judging from these characteristics, they must be priests, performing the ritual in front of the fire. The fire altar stands without props and is of a convenient height for serving the fire, that is knee- or waist-high. Where the altar is set under a dome or an arch (Pl. 89), this apparently represents an altar in a temple. According to the Pahlavī books, 'the fire is enthroned upon the throne in the dome (ātaxsh ī andar gumbad abar gāh nishānēnd) (WZ. 29.3); and many temple remains of this period show in fact the traces of a four-arched structure over the altar-place. Plate 90 shows an impression of a cylinder seal, unusual in this period,<sup>28</sup> depicting a slightly different scene from that described above. Here a human figure, wearing a similar tunic and a sword, stands in front of the standard type of fire-altar, which is rather tall but not higher than his breast. At the other side of the altar two smaller figures approach in a respectful attitude. This scene may be interpreted as showing the cult of the house fire, apparently of the house of one of the high - perhaps princely - ranks, being performed by its head, and the smaller figures may possibly be his children.

Apart from the above-mentioned seals, there are some seals which presumably represent the ritual of sacrifice, since they show not only the altar and priest, but also a sheep or a goat (Pl. 91-93). In these cases, the altars appear to be of the same shape and scale as the fire altars, but no flame is depicted on them.<sup>29</sup> The priests wear the same tunic, and, in the case of the seal on Plate 92, even the mouth-veil. They hold in their hands something looking like either the barsom or a straight sword, both of which are necessary for the sacrifice. In each case a priest stands between the altar and the animal. His body turns towards the altar but his face looks back at the sheep or goat. It is known both from the writings of Herodotus and Strabo, and from the evidence of later times, that the Persians did not place the whole body of the victim on the fire at the sacrifice, but only a portion of the fat.<sup>30</sup> Therefore it is unlikely that they placed the body on the fire in Sasanian times only. The altar depicted on these seals may accordingly be the sacrificial altar for devoting offerings to other yazads, and so be different in purpose from the fire altar, although it looks similar. Further, some seals bear an altar in a similar setting on which the dead victim is already placed (Pl. 84-95). Other seals show something like the crescent moon and stars (Pl. 96-98), or a bird (Pl. 99) on the altar, or just an empty altar (Pl. 100-102) similarly shaped to the fire altar. These were presumably altars dedicated to other yazads.

Since in Sasanian times the dynastic fire seems always to have carried a diadem, the fire altars depicted on seals are probably those of fire temples or religious sanctuaries, especially

in the case of those showing priests performing rituals, or depicting the altar under a gumbad (dome). Each fire temple was usually, it seems, named after its founder, therefore such seals might have been used by members of the founder's house as well as by the priests in charge of the fire in question. Actually it is known that there were many fires founded at an individual's expense and named after him in Sasanian times. Shāpur I declared that he had set up 'named fires (pad nām ādur)' for himself and each important member of his family, 'for our souls (pad amāh ruwān)' (SKZ Parthian ll. 17-19).<sup>31</sup> Not only the king, but also a powerful commoner such as Kirdēr<sup>32</sup> stated: 'and also by means of my estate, I have founded many Wahrām fires from place to place' (u-m pad xwēsh-iz xānag gyāg ō gyāg was ādur ī wahrām nishāst) (KNR. l. 47). Kirdēr was given the title 'Hērbed' under Ardashīr (see SKZ. Parthian. l. 34), and under Shāpur he claimed that of 'mowbed', then under Hormizd I (A.D. 272-273) he attained the title of 'Ohrmazd-mowbed' and then by Wahram II, the honorific title Bōxtruwān-Wahrām, '(by whom) the soul of Wahrām has been saved', was given to him. He was in charge of the fires called 'The Fire of Anāhīd-Ardashīr and Anāhīd, the Lady' at Istaxr (KNR. l. 25). His power, which seems to have lasted at least until the reign of Narseh (A.D. 293-302), was particularly great under Wahram II, and he managed to check the growth of Manichaeism by having Mani executed (c. A.D. 277).<sup>33</sup>

Later Mihr-Narseh, who was the wuzurg-framādār (chief minister) of Yazdagird I (A.D. 399-421) and of the following kings, Wahram V (A.D. 421-439) and Yazdagird II (A.D. 439-457), is said to have built village fire temples in the names of himself and his three sons.<sup>34</sup> Therefore to build a named fire must have been a wide-

spread custom in Sasanian times. Some fifty ruins have been identified as fire-temples of this period, almost all of which are located in the area of Pars and the neighbouring provinces. This evidence may indicate that the founding of named fires was not as popular in other regions of the empire. In fact the Parsis, who emigrated to Gujarāt in India from Khorasān at the beginning of the tenth century, were satisfied with only one Ātash Bahrām for nearly eight hundred years.<sup>35</sup>

Before we go on to examine the actual ruins of fire temples, mention must be made of the three most sacred fires, repeatedly spoken of with veneration in the later Pahlavi books, namely Ādur Farnbāg, Ādur Gushnasp and Ādur Burzēn-Mihr. The names of all three appear to be proper names, and so are likely to be their founders' names (on the basis of the above evidence). One reason for their veneration must be that they were in existence since very ancient, probably Parthian, times or even before. All three were believed to have been established by ancient or legendary figures: Ādur Burzēn-Mihr (as we have seen) by Vishtāsp, Ādur Farnbāg by Jam (Yima), and Ādur Gushnasp by Kai Khusrow. Each was situated in the homeland of one of the leading Iranian peoples: Ādur Farnbāg in Pars, Ādur Gushnasp in Media and Ādur Burzēn-Mihr in Parthia. Since Ādur Burzēn-Mihr has already been considered in the previous chapter, we shall study here the other two.

Ādur Farnbāg was said first to have been founded on the Xwarrahōmand Mountain in Khwārezm (GBd. 18.10), and then to have been transferred to a certain Mount Roshn in the region of 'Kāvulistān', which must, however, be a region in Pars, for the fire 'remains there even now' according to the Bundahishn (18.11).

Because of the ambiguity of the Pahlavi spelling, the word read as 'k...stān' can be interpreted in one manuscript as 'Karnikān',<sup>36</sup> that is present Kāriyān, a place renowned for its famous fire temple.<sup>37</sup> Though the actual site has not yet been excavated, the identification is very likely. This fire may be still in existence in the village of Sharifabad on the Yazdī plain.<sup>38</sup> According to Ibn al-Faḡih al-Hamadānī, after the conquest by the Arabs, 'Āzarxurra' (Ādur Farnbāg) was divided in two for safety, one part being kept in Kāriyān and the other in Fasā;<sup>39</sup> and the fire brought by the Dastūr dastūrān (the chief of the priests) to Sharifabad, perhaps in the eleventh or twelfth century, appears to be one of those two fires; for it is still known to the villagers as an Ātash Bahrām, with the special name of Ādor Xarā (a dialect form of Ādur Farnbāg).

In the case of Ādur Gushnasp, the circumstances are different. The greatest fire-temple ruins discovered until now in Iran are the ruins on Taxt-i Suleimān in Azerbaijān, and these have been identified as those of Ādur Gushnasp. The identification was made certain by the discovery of bullae from a store-room there, which bear the words 'High-priest of the house of the fire of Gushnasp (mowbed ī xānag ī Ādur ī Gushnasp)'.<sup>40</sup> According to legend, Ādur Gushnasp was established on Mount Asnavand (Av. Asnavant) in place of an idol-temple at Lake Čēcast (Av. Caēcasta) (GBd. 18.12). Lake Čēcast was identified with Lake Urmiya, some 200 Km west of the site. Therefore it is still doubtful if Taxt-i Suleimān was the original site for Ādur Gushnasp. The temple of Ādur Gushnasp was pillaged by the Byzantine emperor Heraclius in 623 or 624.<sup>41</sup> This suggests the enormous wealth of the temple, which attracted his attack, and explains why this site was so well fortified thereafter by an immensely strong wall.<sup>42</sup>

The temple, enclosed by this and an earlier wall, is found to the north of a small circular lake on the hill (fig. 10). One large complex consists of about thirty rooms, some of them domed (fig. 11). In a separate complex to the west of these there seems to be the real sanctuary of Ādur Gushnasp, well protected by long corridors and pillared halls, before access can be gained to it.<sup>43</sup> This sanctuary originally had a flat roof and was made of mud-brick, but later was converted to a stone structure with a dome.<sup>44</sup> Under the dome is a great three-stepped pedestal, probably that of the altar of Ādur Gushnasp itself (Pl. 103). There are also several fragmented pillar-altars found in the pillared halls (Pl. 104), similar in shape to those depicted on the reverse of many coins of the period. It is recorded that several royal visits were made to Ādur Gushnasp, including those by Wahrām V (A.D. 421-439),<sup>45</sup> Khusrow Anōshirvān (A.D. 531-579)<sup>46</sup> and Khusrow Parwēz (A.D. 591-628)<sup>47</sup>. These visits were usually accompanied by huge presents or endowments to the temple, so famed for its enormous richness among Byzantine and Islamic writers. Ādur Gushnasp seems to have continued to burn down to at least the eleventh century.<sup>48</sup>

Apart from these three most sacred fires, there are some particularly venerated fires referred to by name in the Pahlavi books. In the Bundahishn these are Ādur ī Wartastar in Bakhlān in the Pisa district (GBd. 18. 19) in Khorasān, Ādur ī Kātakan (GBd. 18. 20) and the fire Karkōy in Seistan (GBd. 18. 21). The first two are not known from any other source, but the Karkōy fire must be identical with the 'miraculous fire of Karkōg' (warzāwand ātaxsh ī karkōg) (ShE. 38). This fire was said to have first been established by Frāsiyāb, the Tuirya king, in the capital of Zarang

district, and to have been re-established by Kai Khusrow. These are the names of rather legendary figures, hence this fire may be one of those which had existed and been venerated before Sasanian times. The place of this fire may be identified with the Kōruk mentioned by Isidor of Charax in his Parthian Stations (§ 17). Even though he did not mention any fire there, Karkōy fire was reported by several Muslim writers and continued in existence for centuries after the fall of the Sasanian dynasty.<sup>49</sup> In Seistan the temple on the Kūh-i Xwāja was enlarged under the Sasanians from the original plan (fig. 12). The fire 'Paramkar' and the fire in Komis, which were said to burn without fuel (and which are identified by some scholars), are also mentioned in the Bundahishn (GBd. 18. 23-24). There are other fire temples mentioned by Muslim writers, for example one in Fīrūzābād<sup>50</sup> and one in Bīshāpūr.<sup>51</sup>

Although actual sites are still difficult to identify, the characteristic structural feature of the ruins of religious buildings from this period is noteworthy. This is generally called Ṣahār tāq ('four arches'), and consists of four corner-pillars supporting a dome (gumbad) over a square room (for example, see Pl. 105-107).<sup>52</sup> This was presumably the actual fire-sanctuary, as mentioned above. As some of the Ṣahār tāqs are located in high, remote places, A. Godard proposed the idea of 'signal fires', to which the priests supposedly carried the fire at night to be a signal.<sup>53</sup> But this theory is improbable, for the practice is not known in Zoroastrian tradition, and also carrying sacred fires by night to isolated places of difficult access would hardly have been possible. D. Huff suggests that 'all ruins for which a Zoroastrian origin may further be considered, have a square, domed, central



room which is sheltered against the outside by walls, corridors or adjoining room'.<sup>54</sup> Further he says that 'a certain number of cahār tāqs have to be dated into the Islamic period'.<sup>55</sup> Therefore all cahār tāqs are not necessarily of Zoroastrian construction, since this type of structure continued in use for religious buildings even into the Islamic period.

Lastly we should discuss the problem of altars standing in the open. At Naqsh-i Rostam there are twin altars decorated with four arched domes on their pedestals<sup>56</sup> (Pl. 108). This decoration must be imitated from the real cahār tāq construction used in religious buildings. The two altars together remind us of those at Pasargadae (Pl. 1), but in both cases their precise purpose is unknown. Single altars of similar character are found at Kūh-i Shahrak, with a simplified decoration of four arches (Pl. 109), and at Bāgh-i Būdrah with no decoration (Pl. 110).<sup>57</sup> Each of these stone structures has a rather large, deep hollow in its top; but the places where they are set are usually among rocks and difficult of access. Since they stand thus in the open, it is unlikely that they bore ever-burning fires; they were more probably used for some open-air cult, as at Pasargadae in ancient times.

In conclusion, it can be said that fire was very much venerated throughout the Sasanian era. In the dynastic fire, the Sasanian rulers found an effective means of propagating their claim to a unique, legitimate authority over the Iranian peoples. The fire altars depicted on the reverse of their coins served well for this purpose, together with the imposing rock reliefs and inscriptions in which their claims were clearly set out. The temple cult of fire flourished, as the number of ruins of this period attest.

## Chapter 4. Notes

1. SKZ. Parthian, 1. 20. On the romantic legend of his lineage, see Christensen, L'Iran, 88.
2. The geographical place is not yet identified.
3. Tabari, 813; Nöldeke, 1.
4. She may have been a daughter or cousin of Ardawān, or a niece of Farrukhān, son of Ardawān. See Christensen, *op.cit.*, and E. E. Herzfeld, Paikuli, monument and inscription of the early history of the Sasanian empire, Berlin, 1924, vol. 1, 40.
5. On the spelling of the name, see M. Boyce, The Letter of Tansar, Roma, 1968, 3.
6. The Pahlavī form of Avestan aēthra.pati- ('teacher, spiritual leader').
7. Only a Persian translation survives, made from an Arabic rendering of the original Middle Persian, see Boyce, *op.cit.*, 11-21.
8. *ibid.*, 47.
9. *ibid.*
10. See R. N. Frye, The Heritage of Persia, London, 2nd ed., 1976, 249.
11. J. de Morgan, Numismatique de la perse antique, Traité des monnaies grecques et romains, by E. Babélon, tome I, Paris, 1933, 657-664.
12. Nöldeke, Tabari, 12. 17.
13. M. Sprengling, Third Century Iran, Chicago, 1953, 17.

14. Each Sasanian king can be recognised by his distinctive crown. The shape of the crowns is discussed in a full list by H. Goetz, 'The History of Persian Costume' in Pope, SPA, III, 2227-2256.
15. J. de Morgan, op.cit., 646-649. John Allans considers both figures to be priests. See 'The Coinage of the Sāsānians (A) Types', Pope, SPA, I, 816. See also F. D. J. Paruck, Sasanian coins, Bombay, 1924.
16. C. Trevor, 'The Coinage of the Sāsānians, (B) The Artistic Character', Pope, SPA, I, 827.
17. In the case of rare coins of Ardashīr, shown together with Shāpur I, and of Wahrām II, depicted with his son, see Morgan, op.cit., 657-664 and 670-675.
18. Allans, art.cit., 818.
19. Christensen, L'Iran, 162.
20. Paruck, op.cit., 27.
21. J. Brunner, 'The Middle Persian Inscription of the Priest Kirdēr at Naqsh-i Rostam', in D. K. Konymjian, ed., Near Eastern Numismatics, Iconography, Epigraphy and History, Studies in honour of George C. Miles, Beirut, 1974, 105. KKZ, 1. 8. See also P. Gignoux, 'L'inscription de Kartīr à Sar Mashad', JA, 1968, 387-418.
22. Cf. the inscription on a pillar in Bishapur, see R. Ghirshman, 'Inscription du monument de Chāpour I<sup>er</sup> à Chāpour', Revue des Arts Asiatiques, 10, 1937, 123-129.
23. See further P. Ackerman, 'Sāsānian Seals', SPA I, 784-815.
24. See R. N. Frye, The Heritage of Persia, London, 2nd ed., 1976, 246.

25. Ackerman, art.cit., 785.
26. See also fig. 9.
27. Herzfeld, Paikuli, I, 82.
28. As this object is not perforated, it may perhaps not be a seal, but an amulet, as suggested by H. H. von der Osten, Ancient Oriental Seals in the Collection of Mr. Edward T. Newell, Chicago, 1934, 79.
29. In the case of Pl. 94, there seems to be a flame on the altar, but it is more likely that it is in fact a sword.
30. See Strabo, 15. 3. 14.
31. For details see Sprengling, op.cit., 17.
32. Kirdēr left four inscriptions, at Naqsh-i Rostam (KNR), Ka<sup>c</sup>ba-i Zardusht (KKZ), Sar-Mashhad (KSM), and Naqsh-i Rajab (KNRb), which have been conflated by J. Brunner, art.cit.
33. Kirdēr appears in a Manichaean text, M 6031, 11-13, see W. B. Henning, 'Mani's Last Journey', BSOAS, 1942, 948-949.
34. Nöldeke, Tabari, 109.
35. See F. M. Kotwal, 'Some Observations on the History of the Parsi Dar-i Mihrs', BSOAS, 1974, 664-669.
36. See W. B. Henning, 'Ein persischen Titel im Altaramäischen', Festschrift Paul Kahle, In Memoriam Paul Kahle, Berlin, 1968, 143.
37. About the details of information given by Arab and Persian writers, see Schippmann, Feuerheiligtümer, 86-94. See also A. V. W. Jackson, 'The Location of the Farnbāg Fire, the most ancient of the Zoroastrian Fires', JAOS, 1921, 81-106.
38. See Boyce, Stronghold, Oxford, 1977, 2-3.

39. Kitāb al-Buldān, ed. by M. J. de Goeje, Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum V, Leiden, 1939, 246, cited by Jackson, art.cit.
40. See R. Naumann, 'A Fire Temple of the Magians in N.W. Persia', Illustrated London News, 16, 1, 1965, 23-25.
41. See Christensen, L'Iran, 448.
42. About various royal gifts to the shrine, see *ibid.*, 166.
43. See M. Boyce, 'On the Zoroastrian Temple Cult of Fire,' JAOS, 1975, 465.
44. For a description of the buildings, see Schippmann, Feuerheiligtümer, 329-338 (with further references).
45. Shāhnāme, Warner, 7. 94.
46. *ibid.*, 7. 250.
47. *ibid.*, 8. 283-284.
48. See Schippmann, Feuerheiligtümer, 321-322.
49. For full references concerning this site, see *ibid.*, 37-45.
50. *ibid.*, 455-458.
51. *ibid.*, 142-153.
52. See *ibid.*, 499 ff., on this construction.
53. A Godard, 'Les monuments du feu', Athār-e Īrān III, Paris, 1938, 71.
54. D. Huff, '"Sasanian" Čahār Tāqs in Fars', F. Bagherzadeh ed., Proceedings of the third annual symposium on archaeological research in Iran, Tehran, 1975, 247.
55. *ibid.*
56. D. Stronach, 'The Kūh-i-Shahrak Fire Altar', JNES, 1966, 217-227.
57. *ibid.*

Chapter 5. The concept of fire and its  
cult in literature

Even though fire is referred to frequently throughout the later Avesta, which was finally compiled in its surviving form in the Sasanian epoch, it is mainly mentioned there as one of the seven Creations of Ahura Mazda. It is mostly spoken of as the 'Fire of Ahura Mazda' (ātrēm ahurahe mazdā, Y.13.2, et passim), or invoked as 'Fire, son of Ahura Mazda' (ātarsh puthra ahurahe mazdā, Y.62.1, et passim), and is venerated as worthy of sacrifice and worship. Far from there being clear references to a temple cult of fire, there is not even plain evidence to be found in the Avesta for the existence of temples; and only a few passages may be taken to reflect the cult of fire in ancient days.

However, despite the lack of detailed textual evidence from the earliest times, there is no question but that fire was venerated continuously throughout the history of Zoroastrianism, and that it was offered many prayers and sacrifices. Fire, when satisfied, it was said, is a giver of these boons: 'swift bliss, swift protection and swift life, much bliss, much protection, much life, knowledge, holiness, a ready tongue, understanding for the soul and then great enormous undismayed wisdom' (āsu x<sup>v</sup>āthrēm āsu thraēitīm āsu jītīm pouru x<sup>v</sup>āthrēm pouru thraēitīm pouru jītīm mastīm spānō xshviwrēm hizvam urune ushi xratūm pas<sup>v</sup>caēta masitām mazāntām apairi.āthrēm, Y.62.4). Moreover, fire will give 'manly courage' (nairyam... ham.varaitīm, Y.62.5), and 'fully grown, free-born offspring' (tuthrusham āsna<sup>+</sup>m frazaintīm, ibid.) with all good qualities, 'who will further house, village, tribe, country

and empire' (yā... frādayāt nmānəm<sup>V</sup>ca vīsam<sup>V</sup>ca zantūm<sup>V</sup>ca dahyūm<sup>V</sup>ca dainghusastīm<sup>V</sup>ca, *ibid.*). These passages praise the productive and furthering qualities of fire, which may have originated in the concept of fire as life-force. Further, the image of fire as giving 'the best life, righteous, shining, having all bliss, so as to be achieving the good reward, good fame and long life for the soul' (vahishtəm ahūm ashaonam raocanghəm vīspō.xvāthrəm, zazəbuye vanghāu<sup>V</sup>ca mīzde vanghāu<sup>V</sup>ca +sravahe urunaē<sup>V</sup>ca darəghe havanghe, *Y.62.6*), may reflect the role of fire at the Last Judgment, which is prominently referred to in the Gāthās.<sup>1</sup>

In another passage, fire is venerated as 'the house-head of all houses created by Mazdā, the son of Ahura Mazdā, the righteous, the judge of asha together with all fires' (vīspanam nmānanam nmānō.paitīm mazdadātəm ahurahe mazdā puthrəm ashavanəm ashahe ratūm... mat vispaeibyō ātərəbyō, *Y.17.11*). In the same passage fire is invoked with five distinctive epithets, which were later developed by scholastics into five categories of fire, which we shall discuss later on. These epithets are bərəzsavah- 'of high benefit', vohu.fryāna- 'being a good friend', urvāzishta- 'most joyful', vāzishta- 'most useful', and spēnishta- 'holiest'. All five seem to be fit adjectives to describe fire as conceived in Zoroastrianism. As the object of worship, fire is holy, and as the helper and leader in life, morally and physically, it is a good friend for a righteous man. In the centre of a house, fire can be the symbol of a joyful, happy home-life. The usefulness and benefit of fire can be without doubt recognised by everyone. Urvāzishta is also used as an epithet for the fire whose fravashī is worshipped (*Yt. 13.85*). Ātar vāzishta is the fire which kills

Daēva Spənjaghrya, demon of drought (Vd.19.40), that is, it is the lightning-fire which is connected with rain-storms. Worshipping fire by these five different epithets seems to be a way of expressing the fundamental unity of all fires.

Yasna 62.1-10 is the main Avestan source for the cult of fire, and is largely identical with the Ātash Nyāish, the prayer addressed to fire.<sup>2</sup> Here it is said that the fire 'should be attended by a fully-aged man<sup>3</sup> as a protector, (and) an instructed man as a protector' (pərənāyush.harəthri.buyā dahmāyush.harəthri.buyā, Y.62.2). Further, the fire is 'to be given proper fuel, proper incense, proper nourishment and a proper abode' (dāityō. aēsmi.buyā dāityō.baoidi.buyā dāityō.pithwi.buyā dāityō.upasayeni.buyā, ibid.). It is also said that to the fire are to be brought 'fuel, brought according to asha, and barəsmān, spread according to asha and plant haḍānaēpatā' (aēsmām vā ashaya bəratəm barəsma vā ashaya frastarətam urvarəm vā haḍānaēpatam, Y.62.9).

In the phrase 'proper fuel' or 'fuel brought according to asha' the kind of wood is not specified. As long as it is 'dry, selected for burning, and purified' (hikūsh +raočas.pairištam... +yaozdatam, Y.62.10), it is acceptable. 'To purify the fire-wood' means to take off the bark, as the Pahlavi commentator says (Phl. Vd. 5.4).<sup>4</sup> As for 'proper incense', this is traditionally made from fragrant plants, but their species are unknown except for haḍānaēpatā- 'pomegranate'. Other named incenses are the sweet-smelling plants urvāsna-, vohu.gaona- and vohu.kərati- (Vd.18.71), which unfortunately have not been identified.<sup>5</sup>

'Proper nourishment' means the fat of animals, pithwi- being derived from pitu 'meat'. This offering was considered very



meritorious. The fat could be from any beneficent animal as long as it was full-grown and healthy; but no other part of the animal should be offered to fire. Concerning fat, Catullus said: 'their (the Persians') child may worship the gods with acceptable hymns, whilst melting the fat caul (omentum) in the altar flame' (90). The same observance is reported by Strabo, namely that the Persians believed 'that the good requires only the soul of the victim and nothing else... they place a small portion of the caul (epiploos) upon the fire' (15.3.13). In later times, the fat offering was often taken from the tail of a fat-tailed sheep.

The man who makes these offerings to the fire, it is said, has 'fire-wood, barəsmān, milk and mortar in his hand' (āesmə. zastō barəsmō. zastō gao. zastō hāvanō. zastō, Y.62.1). Milk and haoma were essential for the Yasna ceremony,<sup>6</sup> but this high ritual is by no means essential for offerings to the fire. Therefore the description in Y.62 is considered to refer specifically to the yasna. (The mortar is for crushing haoma. Many remains of mortars have been found in Persepolis, and the seal of Datam(es), discovered there (see Pl.8, 9), shows the scene described in the Avestan words just quoted.)

These sections of Y.62 can apply both to the fire in the temple and to the fire in an ordinary house, which has to be kept burning during the householder's life-time; for fire is 'worthy of sacrifice and prayer in the houses of men' (yesnyō buyā vahmyō nmānahu mashyākanam, Y.62.1). Even the expression dāityō. upasayeni. bay- 'being with a proper abode', does not necessarily apply to a fire temple or altar only. It simply indicates a fixed, suitable

place which may also be the hearth in an ordinary house. Therefore the words in Y.62 cannot be taken as a certain allusion to the temple cult of fire.

However, in the Vendidad, whose final compilation must have taken place after Seleucid times, a specially established sanctuary for fire appears to be referred to as dāityō.gātū- 'appointed place', as mentioned above.<sup>7</sup> In the Pahlavi translation this is rendered as dād.gāh, and this term is generally used to mean a fire temple in Sasanian times. The Pahlavi commentary on the Vendidad passage glosses dāityō.gātū- as Ātaxsh ī Wahrām (Phl.Vd. 8.81), though the term is also used for a water sanctuary in the same text (13.17). As the Avestan equivalent of Ātaxsh ī Wahrām, that is \*Ātar Vərəthrəghnahe, is not attested, and the yazatas Ātar and Vərəthrəghna have no particular link with one another, except as having occasionally the same epithet, Mazda-ḍāta- 'created by Mazda', the reason is not certain for calling the greatest temple fire Ātaxsh ī Wahrām in Sasanian times.

Compared to these sparse Avestan references to fire, there are more elaborate statements and scholastic developments in the Pahlavi literature, as well as some detailed explanations of the cult. For example, the Bundahishn, 'Original Creation', whose final compilation belongs to the ninth century A.D., represents a Zoroastrian theology which must have been current in Sasanian times. The creation myth is vividly expounded there as follows:

First, Ohrmazd (Av. Ahura Mazda) and the Infinite Light (asar-rōshnīh), and Ahreman or Gannāg Mēnōg (Av. Angra Mainyu) and the Infinite Darkness (asar-tārīgīh) existed independently. 'Between them there was emptiness' (u-shān miyān tuhīgīh, GBd.1.5). Ohrmazd,

knowing through his omniscience that battle against Ahreman was inevitable, created the first Creation. This Creation was wholly spiritual (mēnōgihā) and everything was 'unthinking, unmoving and intangible' (amenīdār ud arawāg ud agriftār, *ibid.* 1.14). After 3000 years Ahreman became aware of the existence of Ohrmazd and his Creation, and tried to destroy them. Ohrmazd made a treaty (paymān) of war, limited to 9000 years, with Ahreman, because Ohrmazd knew he could win the war in this fixed time.

The Creation of the material world was carried out in order to settle the time and place for that war, and the manner in which it would be fought. Therefore each individual act of Creation by Ohrmazd was followed by an act of Counter-Creation by Ahreman. 'Ohrmazd created the body of his Creation in the form of fire, bright, white, round and seen from afar, from his own selfhood, from the substance of light' (Ohrmazd az ān ī xwēsh xwadih az gētīg-rōshnīh kirb ī dāmān ī xwēsh frāz brēhēnīd pad ātaxsh kirb ī rōshn ī spēd ud gird frāz paydāg, *ibid.* 1.44). 'Fire was created in the form of live embers, and its brightness was derived from the Infinite Light' (ātaxsh dād xwarg u-sh brāh az asar-rōshnīh awish paywast, *ibid.* 1a.4). The close relationship between fire and the Creation, as seen in the thought of Zoroaster, was obvious still in Sasanian theology. In another Pahlavi book, the Wizīdāgihā ī Zādspram 'Selections of Zādspram', composed about fifty years before the final redaction of the Bundahishn, it is said that 'Fire was diffused in all, entirely in the six elements' (ātaxsh andar wisp būd pargandag, hammis pad shish gōhrag, WZ, I.25). These six 'elements' (in Zādspram's Hellenized terminology) are the creations of sky, water, earth, plants, animals and man, as found in the Avesta.

There were five classifications of fire, the Berezi-savang, Vohufryān, Urvāzist, Vāzist and Spēnist, based on the five epithets of fire set out in Y.17.11. According to the Zand of Y.17.11, Berezi-savang is the fire which is destined for use in the material world, which includes the 'fire of Wahrām'. Vohufryān is that in the body of man and animals, Urvāzist is in plants,<sup>8</sup> Vāzist is in the clouds, and Spēnist is the fire which blazes before Ohrmazd the Lord.<sup>9</sup>

Of actual fires, the three most sacred, Ādur Farnbāg, Ādur Gushnasp, and Ādur Burzēn Mihr, were held to have been created at the original Creation, for the protection of the world, in the shape of three Glories (GBd. 18.8). In the reign of Taxmūraf (Av. Taxma Urupa), the tradition was, when men crossed the sea on the back of the mythical Gav Srīsōk, from Xwanirah (the central clime) to other climes, the fire which they had with them on the Bull's back fell into the sea, blown by the wind. Then these three fires took its place, blazing like three Glories in the ādur-gāh ('brazier' or 'fire-container'), and giving light so that they could cross safely (GBd. 18.9). In the time of Jam (Av. Yima), it is said, all this hero's works were performed with the help of these three fires (GBd. 18.10). Then Ādur Farnbāg was established in a fixed abode by Jam, and Ādur Gushnasp by Kai Khusrow (as mentioned above in the previous chapter). Ādur Burzēn Mihr was said to be still moving about then, and protecting the world. This fire, according to tradition, appeared in a vision to Vishtāsp, together with Wahman (Av. Vohu Manah) and Ardwhisht (Av. Asha Vahishta).<sup>10</sup> Vishtāsp was held to be the person who established Ādur Burzēn Mihr in a fixed 'proper' place. However, legends still continued about these three fires, and it

is said that they will accompany and help illustrious Peshōtan future son of Vishtāsp, when he goes to destroy image-shrines (ZVY. 7.26, 37).

These legends must reflect the great popularity of the veneration of the three fires in Sasanian times. Each of them was said to have a particular link with the three classes of society, that is, Ādur Farnbāg with the priestly class (āsrōn), Ādur Gushnasp with the warrior class (artēshtār), and Ādur Burzēn Mihr with the agricultural class (wāstriyōsh) (GBd. 18.17). These fires are frequently mentioned in connection with the taking of oaths by kings and heroes,<sup>11</sup> and visits by such persons to their shrines. Thus Ardashīr is said to have visited Ādur Farnbāg in order to pray for victory before the battle of Hormizd (KnA. 7.1). According to the Shāhnāme, Rustam held a feast at Ādur Barzīn, that is, Burzēn Mihr (Warner, II.107), and Ādur Gushnasp received royal visits from Kai Khusrow (op.cit. III.20), Kai Kaus (op.cit., IV. 258), Wahrām V (op.cit., VII. 139), Khusrow I (op.cit., VII. 250, 363), and Khusrow II (op.cit., VIII. 283, 307, 312). In Sasanian times such pilgrimages brought money to the shrines and their priests, and were considered greatly meritorious.

Ordinary believers also ardently visited and gave money to these great fires.<sup>12</sup> But to take care of one's own fire properly was a more basic and essential duty. It is said that 'if anyone does not maintain the fire-place (ātash-gāh) properly, (even) if he gives a hundred dinars to the fire Gushasp (Gushnasp), it is not accepted, and that sin does not depart from him'.<sup>13</sup> Proper care meant the due supplying of clean fire-wood and incense,<sup>14</sup> and maintaining the fire in purity. The presentation of zōhr, the

fat offering, is also mentioned.<sup>15</sup> For safety, the use of last year's fire-wood is recommended.<sup>16</sup>

'If someone were to extinguish a fire', it was a great sin, therefore, for recompense for this act, he must undertake 'collecting ten fires, and enduring ten punishments, and killing ten ants<sup>17</sup> and giving the fat-offering (zōhr) to the Ātaxsh ī Wahrām' (Kē ātaxsh-ēw bē ōzanēd, ā-sh dah ātaxsh bē ǀīnīshn u-sh dah pādīfrāh bē barīshn u-sh \*mōrzak dah bē ōzanīshn u-sh zōhr ō ātaxsh ī Wahrām dahīshn, SnS. 7.9). In the case of Karshāsp, who was a great Iranian hero, his soul was rejected from heaven by Fire in spite of his many great achievements, because he committed an involuntary sin against fire. The cauldron in which he was cooking meat was overturned and extinguished the fire beneath it, as the result of a sudden movement by Az ī Sruwar.<sup>18</sup> His soul was at last forgiven only through the intercession of Zoroaster.

Especially to extinguish the Ātaxsh ī Wahrām, which should be ever-burning in purity and holiness, was a great sin (MX, 36.9). Therefore it was very proper to appoint a person to be in charge of a sacred fire, and to give him maintenance and salary.<sup>19</sup> In the Pahlavi books, a fire temple was generally called xānag ī ātaxsh or mān ī ātaxsh, or kadag ī ātaxsh, all meaning the 'house of fire', and an 'altar' or stand on which the actual fire was kept was ādur (ātaxsh)-gāh (-dān).<sup>20</sup> The fire in it might be one of three grades, namely Ātaxsh ī Wahrām, Ātaxsh ī Ādarān and Ādurōg, though the distinction or difference between these is never systematically explained in the Pahlavi books.

The 'Fire of Wahrām' described not as Ātaxsh ī Wahrām but as Ādur Warahrām, presumably the Parthian term (Ādur ī Wahrām in the

Pahlavi rendering), is the earliest known category, being found in the inscription of Shāpur I (SKZ. Parthian, 1.17, see above p.55). As Wahrām is the yazad of victory, it would not be surprising if many Wahrām fires were founded at memorable sites or places of victory by both Ardashīr and Shāpur.<sup>21</sup> However, the reason why fire of the highest rank came to be called the 'fire of victory' is not certain, unless 'victory' symbolized the victory of Zoroastrianism over evil or 'heresy'. This interpretation may be supported by the inscription of Kirdēr, which calimed that Kirdēr founded many Ādur ī Wahrāms (KKZ. 1.15), for his 'victories' were more likely to have been over 'heresy' and alien religions than by force of arms.<sup>22</sup>

According to the Pahlavi Vendidad (8. 81-96), sixteen kinds of fires are named to be purified and brought to the dād-gāh, which according to the Middle Persian commentary is to be understood as the Ātaxsh ī Wahrām. These fires are one, the fire which cooked nasā 'dead matter' (ātaxsh-nasāpāk, Av. ātrəm nasupākəm); two, that which cooked liquid impurities (rūd-pāk, Av. uruzdipākəm); three, that which cooked dung (sargēn, Av. saire.hyat); four, that from potters' ovens (xumb zamīpačān, Av. xumbat zəmaini.pačikāt); five, that from glass-makers' ovens (xumb jāmpačān, Av. xumbat yāmō.pačikāt); six, that from ōnay ārzūrītān, Av. aonyat parō.bərəjyāt (the meaning is obscure); seven, that from goldsmiths (pitar zarrēn-patkarān, Av. pisrat zaranyō.saēpāt); eight, that from silversmiths (pitar asēmēnpatkarān, Av. pisrat arəzatō.saēpāt); nine, that from iron-mongers (pitar ayēn patkarān, Av. pisrat ayō.saēpāt); ten, that from iron-manufacturers (pitar pālāftayēn patkarān, Av. pisrat haosafnaēnō.saēpāt); eleven, that from bakers' ovens (tanūr, Av. tanurat); twelve, that from a cooking cauldron (dēg, Av. dishtat);

thirteen, that from ōnay takīān, Av. aonyat taxairyāt (obscure); fourteen, that from the way of shepherds (rāh stōrbān, Av. pantat staorō.payāt); fifteen, that from the (army) camp (?) (skarya, Av. skairyāt); and sixteen, from the nearest fire (nazdik, Av. nazdishtat), presumably, that is, the hearth fire. These sixteen different sorts of fires held to need purification probably gave rise to the original idea that sixteen different fires had to be collected and purified separately so as to unite in one strong fire, the Ātaxsh ī Wahrām, which was then to be enthroned in its 'proper' place. Once installed, an Ātaxsh ī Wahrām is said to be so powerful that it can kill a thousand demons (Phl. Vd. 8.80).

The fire of the second grade, Ātaxsh ī Ādarān, is not referred to in Pahlavi by this term. There the second category of fire appears to be mentioned only as unspecified Ātaxsh 'fire'.<sup>23</sup> Later literature tells us that this grade of fire was to be formed from fires of the four social classes, priests (āsrōn, Av. āthravan.), warriors (artēshtār, Av. rathaēshtar-), farmers (vāstaryōsh, Av. vāstryōfshuyant-) and artisans (hutuxsh, Av. hūti-). This fire seems to have been regarded as being the local community fire, since it was enjoined in later times that 'when ten Zoroastrian families (behdin) are gathered together, they must build an Ātaxsh-ī Ādarān.'<sup>24</sup>

In the case of an Ādurōg, this was even more simple to establish. Embers from an ordinary house fire (which is always carefully kept pure) are enough for this purpose, and though the site must be consecrated, it need not necessarily be a temple. Thus, for example, an Ādurōg (or Dādghā fire) is usually maintained in what the Iranis call an ādash-sūz, the Parsis a sagri, a small room near the daxma



(tower of silence).<sup>25</sup> An Ādurōg could also be placed in a former image-shrine in consequence of the iconoclastic movement in Sasanian times. This movement seems to have been in progress throughout the era, as several passages in the Pahlavi books reflect it. 'Ātaxsh ī Wahrām is goodness and the image is (its) adversary', (ātaxsh ī warahrān wehīh, ud uzdēs pityārag, DkM 551. 13-15); and also 'when image-worship is destroyed, little departs with it of belief in the spiritual beings' ([ka] uzdēs parastishnīh be absihēd, mēnōg wurrōyishnīh andak abāg be shawēd, DkM 553, 16-17).<sup>26</sup> Although the Sasanians' iconoclasm was not as strict as Muslim iconomachy, Zoroastrians seem to have managed so far to clear up image-worship by the end of the epoch. Judging from cases found in the Pahlavi law book,<sup>27</sup> iconoclasm was pursued on the initiative of the Government and Zoroastrian priests (mohed).

An Ādurōg may also be kept burning in the precincts of an Ātash Bahrām, and might there receive the embers of an Ādarān fire, which are carried to an Ātash Bahrām once a year. An Ātash Ādarān itself received the embers of house fires once a month, according to the Irani tradition recorded in the Rivāyats.<sup>28</sup> The Ādurōg ī dādghāh, now termed simply a Dādghāh fire, may be served even by a layman, and, in its simplicity, its cult must reflect strongly the traditional one of the house fire. No persons other than the priests in charge are allowed to enter the sanctuaries of Ādarān and Ātash-ī Bahrām. The three classes of fire are distinct, and in principle individual fires are never united. According to cases recorded in the MHD, fire temples could be built firstly by individuals (mard tanihā, MHD. 27. 9-11), secondly by communities (anjomani), and thirdly by those (presumably priests)

who would become beneficiaries of that fire temple (ham-bāragān xwēsh, *ibid.* 78.12).<sup>29</sup> Priests were appointed to be in charge of the fire and rituals, and their office was often inherited.

Besides the regular prayers and rituals, ātash zōhr (offering of fat) seems to have been practiced on special occasions such as the Čahārōm (fourth day after death, when in the morning the dead person was to cross the Činvat bridge),<sup>30</sup> hamāg-dēn ceremony,<sup>31</sup> dwāzdah hōmast (recital of 12 kinds of prayers),<sup>32</sup> or at the time of repentance over a serious sin such as extinguishing the fire, or at a ceremony of thanksgiving to Mihr for the birth of a son,<sup>33</sup> or at each of the six Gāhānbārs,<sup>34</sup> or at the time of enthronement of an Ātash Bahrām.

The veneration of fire was prominent in the lives of Zoroastrians at all epochs. Not only did they take oaths by fire,<sup>35</sup> they considered the ordeal by fire as effective and decisive. The famous ordeal by Siyāwush by fire was held to prove his innocence,<sup>36</sup> and the Parthian princess Vīs (or her lover Rāmin) was to swear her/his innocence by passing through fire.<sup>37</sup> Both tales were enormously popular and enjoyed by the Sasanians. Moreover, the famous Sasanian priest Ādurbād ī Māraspandān, in the reign of Shāpur II, went through the ordeal by molten metal to prove the orthodoxy of his beliefs.<sup>38</sup> The temple cult of fire, originating under the Achaemenians, seems to have developed greatly in Sasanian times, and it survived unimpaired even after the Zoroastrians had lost their political power and, gradually, their numerical superiority.

## Chapter 5. Notes

1. See Chapter 1.
2. This prayer consists of the sections identical with Y.33.12-14, Sīrōza 1.9., Y. 62.1-10, Y.34.4.
3. 'Full age' in Zoroastrianism meant 15 years old (Yt. 8.13).
4. This is also what Strabo noticed in his time (15.13.732), and remains the practice down to modern times.
5. Vohu.kərəti- is translated as 'sulphur' in the Pahlavī Vendidad, but this rendering is doubtful, as sulphur cannot be classified as a plant. In modern usage, sandalwood and frankincense are generally offered, when means permit.
6. That is the ceremony in which the 72 hā's are recited by two priests.
7. See p.50, above.
8. Probably this connection is made up simply because of a similarity between urvāzista- and urvar.
9. Y.17.11, also WZ. 3.77-82. In GBd. 18. 1-6, the explanation of Bərəzi-savang and Spēnist is reversed
10. WZ 24.6; see also DK, VII, 4.74, transl. by West, SBE XLVII 67.
11. For example, Manushchihhr took an oath by Barzin (Burzēn) Mihr, Shāhnāme, Warner, I. 237.
12. See Dd. 89. 1; West, SBE XVIII, 254.
13. Sad Dar, 11.4; West, SBE XXIV, 271.
14. Dd. 48.15, West, SBE XVIII, 164.
15. Dd. 78.19, West, SBE XVIII, 232.
16. Sad Dar, 92. 2, West, SBE XXIV, 355.
17. Ants for Zoroastrians are noxious creatures (xrafstar), created by Ahreman.

18. 'The Legend of Keresāspa', The Pahlavi Rivāyat Accompanying The Dādīstān-ī Dīnīk, ed. by Bamanji Nasarvanji Dhabhar, Bombay, 1913, 65-74.
19. Sad Dar, 39.4, West, SBE XXIV, 301.
20. Later the term Dār-i Mihr came to be a standard one for a fire temple. See further M. Boyce, 'On the Sacred Fires of the Zoroastrians', BSOAS 31, 1968, 68. On the usage of -gāh and -dān see W. Eilers, 'Herd und Feuerstätte in Iran', Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Sprachwissenschaft 12, 1974, 312-313.
21. In the KnA (a later work, probably of the 5th century A.D.), the expression Ātaxsh ī Wahrām is used for the foundations of Ardashir.
22. See p.63.
23. See M. Boyce, art.cit., 67.
24. Rivāyats, Unvala, I.72; Dhabhar, 60.
25. Sagri means 'brazier' or 'fire-place'. For Iranian ādash-sūz see M. Boyce, 'An old village dakhma of Iran', Ph. Gignoux and A. Tafazzoli (ed.), Mémorial Jean de Menasce, Louvain, 1974, 8.
26. See M. Boyce, 'Iconoclasm among the Zoroastrians', J. Neusner (ed.), Christianity, Judaism and other Greco-Roman cults, Studies for Morton Smith at sixty, Pt. IV, Leiden, 1975, 106, 108.
27. MHD. T. 37. 2-8 (cited in J. P. de Menasce, Feux et fondations pieuses dans le droit sassanid, Paris, 1964, 25); MHD. 94. 3-6 (de M. 31), see M. Boyce, 'On the sacred fires of the Zoroastrians', BSOAS 31, 1968, 63-64.
28. Rivāyats, Unvala I, 67; Dhabhar, 56.
29. See M. Boyce, art.cit., 58.

30. Rivāyats, Unvala I, 75; Dhabhar, 70.
31. Ibid., Unvala I. 161; Dhabhar, 175.
32. Ibid., Unvala I. 307; Dhabhar, 291.
33. Ibid., Unvala, I. 701; Dhabhar, 436.
34. See M. Boyce, 'Ātash- Zōhr and Āb-Zōhr', JRAS, 1966, 100.
35. Rivāyats, Unvala, I. 45; Dhabhar, 39.
36. Shāhnāme, Warner, 2. 218-221.
37. Fakhr ud-dīn Gurgānī, Vīs u Rāmīn, tr. by G. Morrison,  
London, 1972, 134.
38. F. M. Kotwal (ed.), The Supplementary texts to the Shāyest nē-  
Shāyest', Copenhagen, 1969, 62-3. For further examples of  
ordeal by fire, see M. Boyce, 'On Mithra, Lord of Fire',  
Monumentum H. S. Nyberg, Leiden, 1975, 69-76.

## Chapter 6. The living cult of Fire

After the last flowering of the composition of Pahlavi works during the ninth and tenth centuries A.D., the Zoroastrians composed only a few texts in New Persian; their numbers dwindled, and many of their temples were replaced by mosques. The history of the Great Fires and the priests who guarded them was transmitted only orally around Yazd and Kerman, which became the last areas where Irani Zoroastrians survived until this century. Zoroastrians who emigrated in the ninth century to Gujarāt in India later sought to fill gaps in their knowledge of the observances of their religion by corresponding with their Irani co-religionists. The answers to their questions, sent by Irani priests, are called the Rivāyats; and these inform us of the continuity of religious practices and Zoroastrian laws among the Irani Zoroastrians even after the fall of the Zoroastrian state.

The cult of fire both in temples and in each house remained the main feature of their religious observance; but there appear to have been several changes in temple usages, mostly on account of precautions taken to preserve the fire among hostile neighbours. The fear of an attack on the sacred fire by unbelievers led in time to the concealment of the fire sanctuary within the temple.<sup>1</sup> The temple fire had already been established in the gumbad in safety and purity in Sasanian times, but still stricter seclusion was introduced now in order to avoid the danger of a holy fire being extinguished. A restriction such as that of allowing no other persons except full-fledged priests to see an

Ātash Bahrām<sup>2</sup> appears an extreme one, which has no support from the Pahlavi books, and is not practiced among the Parsis. Another restriction, that 'the light of the sun should not be allowed to fall on fire',<sup>3</sup> which is observed even now, may also reflect the harsh circumstances in which the Zoroastrians desperately tried to keep their faith and sanctity pure and holy.

The division of the temple fires into three grades is apparent all the time. It is enjoined in the Rivāyats that 'wherever the Behdīns (Zoroastrians) make their abode, it is necessary that an Ātash Bahrām should be established in that place'.<sup>4</sup> However, it is an expensive matter to establish and maintain an Ātash Bahrām, for at least two priests, fully qualified, are necessary to observe the rituals due to it, the highest grade of fire.<sup>5</sup> Therefore an Ātash Ādarān may be established instead,<sup>6</sup> which may be tended by a priest, not necessarily fully qualified. Among the Parsis Ātash Ādarāns began to be established from the seventeenth century. (Till then they had had only one ever-burning sacred fire, their Ātash Bahrām.)<sup>7</sup> The basic cult was similarly observed by both the Irani Zoroastrians and the Parsis, in the Ātash Bahrām and the Ātash Ādarān; but fullest details of rituals have been recorded in recent times among the Parsis, with their Ātash Bahrāms. In the case of the lesser fire, the Ādurōg-i Dādgāh, now called simply Dādgāh, even a layman may serve it, and the observance is quite simple.

Many of the existing fire temples in Iran and India have been newly re-built according to the Parsi temple-plan (fig. 13), as the result of financial support from wealthy Parsis, and migrant Iranis, since the nineteenth century. This plan consists

essentially of a square or rectangular hall with an inner chamber, the fire sanctuary, in the centre, and the Dar-i Mihr where the 'inner' liturgical services (Yasna, Visperad, Vendidād and Drōn or Bāj<sup>8</sup>) are performed. The term Dar-i Mihr is sometimes used for the whole fire temple (this is in fact the standard usage in Iran), but is never applied particularly to the fire sanctuary.<sup>9</sup> Among the Parsis a Dar-i Mihr now always contains a Dādgāh fire; and with them a Dar-i Mihr consists of several Yazishn-gāhs, in each of which the 'inner' liturgical services can be performed. In each temple the sacred fire itself is placed on the Ātash-gāh in the sanctuary, and can be seen by all its worshippers through windows in the sanctuary walls.

The ritual for establishing a sacred fire differs according to its grade. However, for those of the two higher grades it always consists basically of the acts of collecting, purification, consecration and unification. In the case of an Ātash Bahrām, it is enjoined that 1001 fires of 16 kinds should be collected.<sup>10</sup> These are 91 from corpse-burning fires, 80 fires from dyers, 70 from hot baths (of a king or ruling authority), 60 (or 61) from potters, 60 from goldsmiths, 55 from silversmiths, 50 (or 61) from carpenters (or weapon makers), 75 from burnt bricks, 61 from Bakers' ovens, 61 from cauldrons (or from ironsmiths), 61 from muleteers of the village (or brewers), 40 from the Mazdayasnians (or 50 from ascetics), 35 from cavaliers on the march, 30 from watch-keepers (or 33 from shepherds), 90 from lightning in the sky,<sup>11</sup> 40 from the hērbad (priest), and 143 (or 144) fires from laymen (behdīns) made by the friction both of pieces of wood, and of flints.

The act of collecting is performed thus: a fire is taken from



a prescribed place by a layman, for whom it is considered to be a meritorious act. In the case of a corpse-burning fire, which is heavily polluted, the collection must be made with the help of a non-Zoroastrian, or by two Zoroastrians, using a perforated ladle in which powdered sandalwood or other fuel is placed. When this is held over that defiled fire at a little distance, the fuel catches the flame easily without touching it. Then some fuel is added to the new fire, and this fire is placed on the ground. A heap of fuel is placed in a trench one span down-wind, so as to catch its flame. This process is to be repeated nine times. (Among the Parsis this process is performed for the same number of times as the number of fires collected from a particular group - for example, 91 times for a corpse-burning fire. This appears to be an elaboration of older practice.<sup>12)</sup>

The purification is performed by priests. Each collected fire is placed in a pit or a vessel, and a perforated ladle full of ignitable stuff is held over it to catch the flame, and then this new fire is placed beside the original fire. This process is repeated seven<sup>13</sup> or nine times<sup>14</sup>, or again, more elaborately, for the same number of times as fires are collected.<sup>15</sup>

The purification of fire seems to reflect a very old ritual; for it was in general meritorious to redeem defiled fire, that which had been wrongly used and had suffered contamination, as is enjoined in the Vendidad (8.81-96) with regard to bringing such fires to the dāityā-gātu.<sup>16</sup> The custom in Iran, which is recorded in the Rivāyats, that the embers of each household fire must be taken to the Ātash Ādarān after the fire has been used more than

three times,<sup>17</sup> or every three or seven days,<sup>18</sup> is also the reflection of the same concept. Even the embers from the Ātash Ādarān must themselves be carried to the Ātash Bahrām after four months, or one year, or three years.<sup>19</sup> An awareness of fire suffering in this world from contamination is expressed also in the lost Sūdgar Nask, summarised in the Denkard.<sup>20</sup>

The rite of ātash buzorg kardan 'exalting the fire', which is still observed in the Yazdi area, is clearly one of expiation, for sins committed, perhaps unknowingly, by an individual against fire. Fires used daily by non-Zoroastrians, particularly those in trade, are believed to be in need of redemption, and to purify them by this ritual is considered to be highly meritorious. Therefore, the rite is often performed on behalf of the dead by the living members of the family. Embers are collected from nine fires to which the greatest possible pollution happens, that is, from the fires of nine Muslim traders, a coppersmith, a blacksmith, a locksmith, a baker, a confectioner, a man who makes sugar-loaves, a dyer, a turner, and a bath-attendant. All the embers are placed in an āfrīnagān (a metal or clay vessel to hold fire for rituals), and are consecrated by prayer for three days and nights. Then the āfrīnagān is carried to the fire temple for the public ceremony, and after purification by means of kindling nine successive fires from this consecrated one, the ninth fire is united to the sacred fire itself.<sup>21</sup>

The consecration ceremony for establishing an Ātash Bahrām consists of performing a Yasna ceremony in the morning (Hāvan Gāh) in honour of the yazad of the day, and a Vendidād from midnight (Ushahin Gāh) over each purified fire. One such act of conse-

cration is performed each day by two priests, and the fire thus consecrated is then united to those already consecrated. Accordingly the consecration of all 1001 (or 1128) fires collected and purified would take more than two years if it was performed by only two priests. So in order to complete these essential rituals for establishing an Ātash Bahrām in less than a year, it is usual to engage several pairs of priests. After the completion of the consecration, only 16 different fires remain, which are kept tended separately in 16 vases.

The final unification of these fires should take place on the first of the Gāthā days at the end of the year.<sup>22</sup> Two priests, who have undergone barashnom-i nō-shwa and khūb (purification ceremonies),<sup>23</sup> place all 16 fires in a large bowl which is to become the abode of this Ātash Bahrām. The unified fire is then carried to the Yazishn-gāh, and is finally consecrated by the recital of the Yasna each morning, and the Vendidād each night for 33 days. Before the consecration is over, the fire-sanctuary must be consecrated separately by the recital of the Yasna and Vendidād for three days. Then the fire, carried by priests who are surrounded all the time by lines drawn to form pāvis,<sup>24</sup> is moved into the fire-sanctuary and placed on the ātash-gāh, which too stands in a pāvi. Then the fire is fed with sandalwood and frankincense, and the first Ātash Nyāish (prayer to the fire) is recited to it. Thereafter the Ātash Bahrām does not have any other ritual performed in its presence except those addressed to it itself.<sup>25</sup>

In the case of an Ātash Ādarān, these processes are simpler. The initial collection is made from the fires of four different

classes of society, that is, priests, soldiers, farmers and artisans. The purification process for each fire is repeated only three times; and then the consecration is performed for three days, and on the fourth day the Ātash Ādarān is established on its Ātash-gāh.

For a Dādgāh fire, hardly any ritual is performed except the consecration of the place where the fire is to be placed. After a preliminary cleaning and washing of the building with water,<sup>26</sup> embers from a household fire are brought to be present for the Yasna ceremony and the Vendidād which are performed for three days, morning and night, and thus the building is consecrated. On the fourth morning, after a Yasna ceremony, the fire which was used at these services of consecration is established as the Dādgāh fire.

These sacred fires, once established, are maintained on their Ātash-gāhs and should never be extinguished nor divided or united. The offerings to the fire are restricted to fuel and incense and fat (or its modern substitutes). Until the late 19th century the fat-offering (ātash-zōhr) was performed on special occasions, such as on the fourth day after a death, when the soul of the dead person passes the Chinvat bridge, or at Mihragān, when the sacrifice of animals usually took place in Zoroastrian houses.<sup>27</sup>

The daily service to the fire includes ritual offering of incense, and so is called the bōy dādan ceremony. This should be ideally performed five times a day at the commencement of each Gāh (division of the day). The bōy or incense is usually sandalwood or frankincense, but if these are not available, any clean

and dry fragrant substance may be offered instead. At the commencement of each Gāh, a priest performs the kusti-pādyāb, that is the kusti prayers with ablutions. First he recites xshnaothrā ahurahe mazdā ('with the pleasure of Ahura Mazdā'), and the sacred prayer ashēm vohū vahishtəm asti ushtā asti ushtā ahmāi hyat ashāi vahishtāi ashēm. Then he washes his face, hands and feet, and wipes them. He unties his kusti<sup>28</sup> and re-ties it, reciting the prayers of Nīrang-i Kusti (kusti-ritual).<sup>29</sup>

After the kusti-pādyāb, he goes into the sacred chamber, and recites the Ātash Nyāish, standing in front of the fire. In the case of the Ātash Bahrām, the priest engaged must be a martab (one who has passed the second degree for the priesthood),<sup>30</sup> who has gone through the barashnom and khūb ceremonies. The barashnom-i nō-shwa ('ablution of the nine nights') is the highest form of purification,<sup>31</sup> and once a person undergoes it, the effect lasts as long as he observes certain restrictions in order to keep its purifying effect. That is, he must not eat 'unclean' food, which means either food cooked by non-Zoroastrians, or coming from the 'unclean' parts of an animal. He has to drink 'clean' water, which is brought from a distant stream every morning at dawn, or drawn from a clean well. He must abstain from speaking with unclean people, particularly non-Zoroastrians, or women in their periods. He must always wash his hands and say an Avestan prayer before eating. While he eats he keeps silence, covers his head and uses his own clean utensils, separate from others.<sup>32</sup> If a priest breaks one of these rules, he has to undertake another barashnom in order to become ritually qualified again.

The khūb ceremony, on the other hand, retains its effectiveness only for four days; and even during these days, if the priest has a bath, or a wet dream, or partakes of food without the regular observance of taking the Bāj,<sup>33</sup> or comes into contact with a non-Zoroastrian, he must undergo it again. The khūb ceremony consists of the performance of the whole Yasna together with a priest who is already 'with khūb'.<sup>34</sup>

Then at the beginning of each Gāh a priest, qualified as above, performs the kusti-pādyāb and recites Srōsh-bāj and the Gāh-prayer according to the Gāh in which this ceremony is performed. Then he recites Khurshīd-Mihr Nyāish (the prayers to the sun and Mihr) during the three day-time Gāhs (Hāvan, Rapithwin, and Uzērīn). In the night-Gāhs (Aiwisrūthrim and Ushahin) he recites Srōsh Yasht (Y.62) and Srōsh Hādokht instead. After these recitals he enters the sacred chamber, standing at the west front of the fire. He puts on white gloves and first places some frankincense on the sacred fire. Then he arranges six pieces of sandalwood in a 'throne' (Gujarāti māchi). This means that he first puts two pieces of sandalwood on the fire in the direction of west to east, while he himself faces east. Then he moves to the north, facing south, and puts two pieces north to south over the first two. Next he moves through west-south-east and, facing west, places the last two pieces east to west inside and parallel to the first two pieces. After that he comes back to his first position.<sup>35</sup>

He washes with pure water the stone slab (khwān, khān) on which (in Parsi usage) the metal vessel stands, holding the fire.<sup>36</sup> Then he offers a little sandalwood and frankincense to the fire three times with the words, Humata, huxta, hvarshta ('good thought,

good word, good deed'). He has a metallic ladel (bara) in his hand and makes a circle round the fire in the following manner: his first position is at the west side of the fire, facing east, and he says ā thwā ātarəm gārayēmi ('I praise your fire', AN. 1). Then he moves to the north-east corner and recites vanghēush mananghō zaotrābyō yazamaide ('we worship good mind with libations', ibid.). The third position is the south-east corner, where he repeats the first words. The fourth is at the east corner, and he makes a second recital of the second phrase having uxōahe ('word') instead of mananghō. Next is the south-west corner, with again a recital of the first words. The sixth is the north-west corner, where he repeats the second formula with shyaothnahe ('deed') instead of mananghō. The seventh is north, where he says saokāi mananghe ('for the advantage of mind'); the eighth is at the south, with the words saokāi vacanghe ('for the advantage of word'), and finally he takes the original position again, reciting saokāi shyaothne ('for the advantage of deed'), and then places a little sandalwood and frankincense upon the fire.<sup>37</sup>

Then he recites the Ātash Nyāish eleven times in Hāvan Gāh, nine times in Rapithvin Gāh, seven times in Uzerin and Aiwisrūthrim, and six times in Ushahin.<sup>38</sup> During the first Nyāish recital, at intervals of a few words, the priest offers bits of sandalwood and frankincense. Also during the recital of the first Nyāish and during the recital of the first Pāzand portion, when he utters the words dushmata, dushuxta, duzvarshta ('bad thought, bad word, bad deed'), he rings a bell three times. Some priests ring the bell three times at each word, making nine bell-rings all together.

At the end of the recital of the two yathā ahū vairyōs after the first Ātash Nyāish, he draws two circles, the second outside the first, in the ash with the ladle in his right hand, he himself walking right round the fire altar from north-east through south back to north-east as he does so; and at the end of the third recital of the Ātash Nyāish he obliterates these circles, first the outer, and then the inner one, during the two yathā ahū vairyōs. In the first and fifth Gāhs (Hāvan and Ushahin) the priest recites the Ātash Nyāishes facing east, but during the other three Gāhs he faces west.

For a lesser fire, which need not be flaming brightly all the time, and is therefore usually covered with hot ashes to keep the embers alive, the servitor first makes a hollow in the hot ash, with a metal bara (ladle), and places a new piece of wood in it.<sup>39</sup> (In Iran the wood preferred for fuel is pomegranate, and also the wood from apricot and pistachio trees. In every case all the bark must be thoroughly removed.) Then he pushes the warm ash back around the new piece of wood and, in Iran, places kūzēr (chopped cornstalks) on top of the fire so that it blazes up. Over this he scatters a little frankincense (or sandalwood). Even for the lesser fires, the offering of a 'throne' to the fire is performed at high festivals. In the case of Dādghāh fires in the Yazdi area, the number of bōy dādan varies from three times a day to (exceptionally) once in two days.<sup>40</sup>

Apart from the sacred fire in the temple, fire is evidently present at every phase of Zoroastrian life. When, for instance, a baby is born, fire, or a lamp, is kept burning for at least three days and nights in the room, in order to prevent attacks of evil.<sup>41</sup>



At a betrothal, an oil lamp is lit in each of the two houses and a silver coin is placed before it by women who are visiting from the partner's house.<sup>42</sup> At weddings, which among the Iranis usually take place at midnight, the ceremony is completed by the bride and groom, hand in hand, led by dahmobed (assistant to the priest), circling fire burning in a brazier placed in the courtyard.<sup>43</sup> When a person dies, a lamp is lit and kept burning for three days in the room, or on a place near where the corpse's head had been.<sup>44</sup> When the corpse is carried to the daxma, a fire is kindled for three days in the ātash-sūz (sagdi in Parsi usage), built near the daxma.<sup>45</sup>

Moreover, fire must be present for the ceremony of hamāzōr (ritual for brotherly unity)<sup>46</sup>, at tan-dorostī (for the sick),<sup>47</sup> and at Panji (the festival of the five 'Gāthā' days at the end of the year).<sup>48</sup> A fire is also lit on the roof in farewell to the fravashis, who have been visiting their former abodes for the last days of the year.<sup>49</sup>

On Rūz Ādur of Māh Ādur, the ninth day of the ninth month of the Zoroastrian calendar, Ādurgān festival is celebrated in honour of Ādur, the yazad of fire. On that day people go to the fire temples and recite the Ātash Nyāish.<sup>50</sup> This festival is very popular among the Parsis.

Another, older, festival of fire is Sada, the 'Hundredth-day feast', held a hundred days before Nō Rūz (new year), which means that, originally, it was a midwinter feast. The Parsis, who have no real winter in Gujarat, have abandoned this festival; and because of calendar confusions, the feast does not currently take place in winter in the most traditionalist of the Irani villages.

Nevertheless, making a great fire in the open at sunset, with wood collected by the faithful, must be a visible affirmation of the power of Zoroastrianism over evil, in the shape of the darkness of night, which is driven back by the bright flames.

## Chapter 6. Notes

1. See M. Boyce, 'The Fire-Temples of Kerman', Acta Orientalia, 1966, 51-52.
2. I.e. priests who were initiated navazud (who had undergone Navar and Marātib), and who wore the padam (penom, mouth-veil), see Rivāyats, Unvala, I. 76; Dhabhar, 72-73.
3. Ibid., I. 65 and 67; ibid., 56 and 57.
4. Ibid., I. 73; ibid., 62.
5. See Modi, CC, 219.
6. Rivāyats, Unvala I. 73; Dhabhar, 62.
7. See F. M. Kotwal, 'Some observations on the history of the 'Parsi Dar-i Mihr', BSOAS, 1974, 667.
8. For drōn or bāj as liturgical services, see M. Boyce and F. Kotwal, 'Zoroastrian bāj and drōn-I', BSOAS, 1971, 58-60.
9. See also Chapter 5, note 20.
10. See Rivāyats, Unvala, I. 74; Dhabhar, 63-64. Yet the numbers vary even according to Kamdin Shāpur himself, who gave the list published there. He stated that the number was 1001, but the total amount of fires which he gave adds up to 1103. According to Parsi usage, there are 1128 fires, see Modi, CC, 210. The following list is according to Kamdin Shāpur and Modi, loc.cit., with the differences between Persian and Parsi usage being shown by the Parsi usage in brackets.
11. On the use of lightning, see Rivāyats, Unvala, I. 74; Dhabhar, 62-63.
12. Modi, CC, 201-204.
13. Rivāyats, Unvala, I. 75; Dhabhar, 69.

14. Modi, CC, 204-205.
15. Ibid., 205-206.
16. See Chapter 5 above, p.77.
17. Rivāyats, Unvala, I. 67; Dhabhar, 56.
18. Ibid., I. 72; *ibid.*, 61.
19. Ibid.
20. Dk. 9. 12. 1-3; West, SBE XXXVII, 189-190.
21. See M. Boyce, Stronghold, 186-189.
22. Modi, CC, 212.
23. Details are given below.
24. An area enclosed by a line ritually drawn to ward off evil influences.
25. These rituals described here are according to Modi's account (CC, 201-214), therefore Parsi usage. In Iran, though no new Ātash Bahrām has been established for centuries, according to the Rivāyats the rituals are basically the same, see Unvala, I. 74; Dhabhar, 63-70.
26. Once gōmez (bull's urine) seems to have been used for this purpose, see Modi, CC, 229-230.
27. On the occasions for ātash-zōhr see M. Boyce, 'Ātash-zōhr and āb-zōhr', JRAS, 1966, 101.
28. The kusti (kōsti<sup>V</sup>) is the sacred cord which all Zoroastrians must wear continually.
29. Modi, CC, 87-88.
30. Ibid., 197-198.
31. Ibid., 102-11.
32. This description is according to M. Boyce, Stronghold, 136. See also Modi, CC, 141.

33. 'Taking the Bāj' means saying an Avestan prayer before performing some acts, such as eating, having a bath, after which silence is kept until the act is completed, and the bāj is 'left' with another Avestan prayer.
34. Modi, CC, 140.
35. Ibid., 221-226.
36. Pure water is prepared thus: two water pots, full to the brim with well-water or river-water, are prepared. The water from the one is poured into the other until the water overflows and cleans the sides of the vessel. This is repeated three times with the recital of the words xshnaothra Ahurahe Mazdā and the ashəm vohū prayer. The water in both the pots is purified thus. See Modi, op.cit., 253-258.
37. Ibid., 221-226.
38. Ibid., 220.
39. See Boyce, Stronghold, 75.
40. Ibid.
41. Some keep the lamp burning for ten, or even for forty days, see Modi, CC, 5.
42. See ibid., 18-19.
43. See Boyce, Stronghold, 173. According to Modi (CC, 31), the Parsi practice is slightly different, but the essential fact, the presence of the fire being requisite, is the same.
44. Boyce, Stronghold, 152; Modi, CC, 59.
45. Rivāyats, Unvala, I. 71; Dhabhar, 58-59, see also Boyce, Stronghold, 194.
46. See Boyce, Stronghold, 43-44.

47. Ibid., 209-210.

48. Ibid., 216-217.

49. Ibid., 225.

50. Modi, CC, 433; see also Boyce, Stronghold, 175.

51. Boyce, Stronghold, 176-182.

## Conclusion

We have been discussing what the temple cult of fire is in Zoroastrianism, and what it means to the Zoroastrians, who are generally called 'fire-worshippers'. Amongst all the customs of fire-worship, or the veneration of fire, which have been practised widely throughout the world, it was the temple cult of fire which singled out Zoroastrians as fire-worshippers. However, no reference to this cult can be traced in the original words of Zoroaster, nor in the older parts of the later Avesta, nor in the early historical period of Zoroastrianism. The older cult of the ever-burning hearth fire is not particularly Zoroastrian nor new. For the Indo-Iranian people, a house fire was to be kept burning continually while the house-head lived; and indeed the cult of the hearth fire had probably been known already to the Indo-Europeans, since it is attested among the Greeks and Indians as well as the ancient Iranians.

A strict prohibition on defilement was applied in the veneration of the hearth fire, which would not always have been easy to observe, particularly for a people who were in a nomadic state and much on the move. The story of Keresāspa,<sup>1</sup> the legendary hero who was accused of having defiled the fire on which he was cooking a meal, seems to illustrate the antiquity of this purity law, as well as showing how it could be accidentally broken.

When Zoroaster reformed the religion of the Iranians, he preached a highly moral doctrine, which embodied its own specific cosmology and eschatology. Fire was conceived of as a vital force which pervades all the Creations of Ahura Mazdā, and animates them.

Without fire there would be no movement or life, which is one reason why fire is closely linked with asha, the principle which regulates movement or the course of life. Fire is a reminder and helper for a good man to be on a right course. Accordingly, at the last Judgment, fire will be present to symbolize righteousness and its victory, through the ordeal of molten metal.<sup>2</sup> In referring to cosmic and symbolic fire, Zoroaster used very vivid images, taken from visible fire, therefore his cosmology and eschatology gave great support to the veneration of actual fire.

However, although fire was particularly important in his thought, it is also true that fire was not the only element which he required to be venerated. Each of the seven creations of Ahura Mazdā was undoubtedly to be worshipped; and among them water appears to have been treated in a manner very similar to fire, both by pagan Iranians and Zoroastrians. To maintain the purity of water and to pray before it with offerings was very important throughout the known history of Zoroastrianism.

In the case of fire, minor contaminations, such as something falling on to the hearth accidentally, must have happened in daily life even among Zoroastrians, who were particularly careful to maintain the purity of fire. (As we know, it was they among the Indo-Europeans who abandoned or prohibited the custom of cremation, for they thought that a dead body would defile the purity of fire.<sup>3</sup>) Rituals for purifying defiled fires were probably therefore evolved in the very early days of Zoroastrianism. When there are fires which should be in a state of purity, but which suffer from defilement or ill-treatment, it is meritorious or even a duty for Zoroastrians to redeem them. The Ātash buzurg



kardan ritual,<sup>4</sup> carried out in expiation of such offences, is still practised in the Yazdi area, apparently as a continuation of ancient observance; for the purification of 16 kinds of contaminated fire is mentioned in the Vendidad.<sup>5</sup>

When the Achaemenians formed their vast empire, the royal hearth fire, besides being a private house fire, seems to have acquired a public character as a sort of symbol of the life and prosperity of the nation, and its unity. The rock-reliefs of the Achaemenian kings show a symbolic presentation of the empire, focused on the king reverencing what is probably the dynastic fire; and this scene is supported by representatives of all the peoples of the empire, while above it are the sun and moon and xvarənah (kingly glory),<sup>6</sup> all of which are taken to be great protectors for the Zoroastrians.

The temple cult of fire was probably introduced into Zoroastrianism in the reign of Artaxerxes II, influenced by the establishment of an image cult in connection with 'Anāhitā'.<sup>7</sup> By the time of Artaxerxes II, the concept of a public fire fostered by the worship of the royal house fire, must have been easy to accept. Therefore the reaction to the introduction of the new temple cult into orthodox Zoroastrianism may well have been simply an increase in the reverence for fire, which had undoubtedly always been a main symbol of Zoroastrianism.

The most important characteristic of a Zoroastrian temple fire is that it is set apart and isolated. Once established in its consecrated sanctuary, the temple fire receives only the three offerings of fuel, incense and zōhr (fat) for its maintenance, and it rests in the 'proper place' in the safest manner,

guarded by qualified priests or at least by adequately instructed, upright men. Treated like this, the temple fire is believed to be purer and more powerful than an ordinary house fire, which is used for practical purposes. Thus it is said that the temple fire, (particularly the Wahrām fire), can kill 1000 demons in the night.<sup>8</sup> Therefore the temple fire served admirably the function of purifying contaminated fires, for its power helps to purify and redeem them, if they are brought to the sanctuary and left within reach of its power.

In Sasanian times, the symbolic use of fire developed seemingly to its height. Fire was established 'victoriously' in conquered lands, and the fires of local princes were replaced by the Sasanian Royal Fire.<sup>9</sup> The dynastic fire was used as a main symbol of the dynasty, by means of being depicted on the reverse of coins, and thus served to propagate the unique authority of Sasanian rule. Many fire temples were established, not only by kings but also by powerful and wealthy priests or noblemen, especially in the area of Pars and its neighbourhood. The flourishing of temple fires, headed by the three greatest ones, Ādur Farnbāg, Ādur Gushnasp and Ādur Burzēn Mihr, was helped by the scholarly development of theology in Sasanian times; and it was the popularity of venerating fire in such a public manner which confirmed unbelievers in the custom of calling the Zoroastrians 'fire-worshippers'.

The grading of temple fires into three; Ātash Bahrām, Ātash Ādarān, and Ādurōg-i Dādghāh, was probably a relatively late development, but the importance of the fire temple in Zoroastrian life became firmly established, and remains until modern times. Thus

the ash from a temple fire has become essential for the vital purificatory rituals, and truly by now Zoroastrians find it difficult to conceive of their religion existing without temple fires. This is all the more strongly felt, since very few Zoroastrians now have a hearth fire, and the modern equivalents cannot really serve the function of a religious symbol. Hence it is said that 'people of the Good Religion (i.e. Zoroastrians) cannot live without the fire (Bahram)'.<sup>10</sup>

## Notes

1. See Chapter 4.
2. See Chapter 1.
3. See Chapter 2.
4. See Chapter 6.
5. Vd. 8. 81-96, see Chapter 3 and Chapter 5.
6. See A. S. Shahbazi, 'An Achaemenian symbol', AMI, 1974, 135-144.
7. See Chapter 2.
8. Phl. Vd. 8. 80.
9. See Chapter 5.
10. Rivāyats, Unvala, I. 75; Dhabhar, 70.

## Abbreviations

- AHM : I. Gershevitch, The Avestan Hymn to Mithra, Cambridge, 1967.
- AMI : Archaeologische Mitteilungen aus Iran
- AN : Ātash Nyāish
- ARW : Archiv für Religionswissenschaft
- Boyce, History : M. Boyce, A History of Zoroastrianism, Leiden/Köln, 1975.
- Boyce, Stronghold : M. Boyce, A Persian Stronghold of Zoroastrianism, Oxford, 1977.
- BSOAS : Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies
- Christensen, L'Iran : A. Christensen, L'Iran sous les Sassanides, 2nd ed., Copenhagen, 1944.
- Dd. : The Dānistan-i Dīnik, Part I, Pūrsishn I-XL, ed. Tahmuras Dīnshāji Anklesaria, Bombay, undated.
- Dk. : Dēnkard
- DkM : The Complete Text of the Pahlavī Dīnkard, under the supervision of Dhanjishah Meherjibhai Madan, Bombay, 1911.
- ERE : Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, ed. J. Hastings, Edinburgh, 1908-1926.
- GBd. : Zand-Ākāsīh, Iranian or Greater Bundahish<sup>V</sup>, ed. and tr., Behramgore T. Anklesaria, Bombay, 1956.
- IIJ : Indo-Iranian Journal
- JA : Journal asiatique
- JAOS : Journal of the American Oriental Society
- JRAS : Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society

- KnA : Kārnāmak-i Artakhshīr Pāpakān. The original Pahlavi text, with transliteration in Avesta characters, translations into English and Gujarati, and selections from the Shāhnāme, Edalji Kersāspji Āntiā, Bombay, 1900.
- Modi, CC : J. J. Modi, The Religious ceremonies and customs of the Parsees, Bombay, 2nd. ed., 1937.
- MHD : Mādigān ī Hazār Dādistan, ed. J. J. Modi, Bombay, 1901.
- MX : The Dīnā ī Mainū ī Khrat, or The Religious Decisions of the Spirit of Wisdom; The Pahlavi Text, ed., Darab Dastur Peshotan Sanjana, Bombay, 1895.
- Phl. Vd. : Behramgore T. Anklesaria, Pahlavi Vendidad, Bombay, 1949.
- Rivāyats : Unvala; M. R. Unvala, Dārāb Hormazyār's Rivāyat, text, Bombay, 1922; Dhabhar; Bamanji N. Dhabhar, The Persian Rivayats of Hormazyar Framarz and others, Their version with introduction and notes, Bombay, 1932.
- SBE : F. Max Müller, ed., The Sacred Books of the East
- Schippmann, Feuerheiligtümer : K. Schippmann, Die iranischen Feuerheiligtümer, Berlin/New York, 1971.
- ShE : 'Shahrihā ī Ērān', Jamaspji Minocheherji Jamaspasana, ed., The Pahlavi Texts, Bombay, 1897.
- Shāhnāme : A. G. Warner and E. Warner, The Shāhnāma of Firdousī, London, 1905.
- SnS : Sāyast la-Sāyast, ed., M. B. Davar, Bombay, 1912.
- SPA : A. U. Pope, ed., A Survey of Persian Art, London, 1938.

- Tabarī, Nöldeke : Geschichte der Perser und Araber zur  
Zeit der Sasaniden aus der arabischen  
Chronik des Tabari, tr. Theodor Nöldeke,  
 Leiden, 1879.
- Vd. : Vendidād
- WZ : Behramgore T. Anklesaria, Vichitakiha-i  
Zatsparam, with text and introduction.  
 Bombay, 1964.
- Y : Yasna
- Yt. : Yasht
- ZVY : Zand-ī Vohūman Yasn, ed. by B. T. Anklesaria,  
 Bombay, 1957.
- Zaehner, Zurvan : R. C. Zaehner, Zurvan, a Zoroastrian dilemma,  
 Oxford, 1955.

N.B. In the transcription of Avestan and other scripts, 'sh'  
 is used for 's<sup>v</sup>', 'ng' is used for 'n', 'th' is used for  
 'e'.



The Zoroastrian Temple Cult of Fire  
in Archaeology and Literature

Part 2 (Illustrations)

by

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5. Clay label of the seal No. 22; *ibid.*, PT4 706, Pl. 7.
6. Clay label of the seal No. 23; *ibid.*, PT4 847, Pl. 7.
7. Cylinder seal, British Museum 89528.
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9. Clay label of the seal No. 20; *ibid.*, PT3 384, Pl. 7.
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15. Tomb relief of Darius I; E. F. Schmidt, Persepolis III, Chicago, 1970, Pl. 19.
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19. Bas-relief of camel-rider; Ann Perkins, The art of Dura-Europos, Oxford, 1973, Pl. 40.
20. Tomb relief of Xerxes; E. F. Schmidt, Persepolis III, op.cit., Pl. 40.
21. Tomb relief of Artaxerxes III; *ibid.*, Pl. 70.
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23. The east end of the fire sanctuary; M. Road and D. Stronach, 'Tepe Nūsh-i Jān, 1970 : Second Interim Report', Iran, XI, 1973, Pl. VII A.
24. The fire altar, *ibid.*, Pl. VII b.
25. The fire altar; *ibid.*, Pl. VII a.
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33. Cylinder seal; L. Speleers, op.cit., vol. I, Bruxelles, 1917, 188, 454.
34. The fire altar from Kūh-i Kwāja; E. E. Herzfeld, Iran in the Ancient East - Archaeological Studies presented in the Lowell Lecture at Boston, London, 1941, Pl. XCIX.
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43. Stone relic; *ibid.*, vol.1, 591, fig. 294.
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61. Silver of Wahrām II; *ibid.*, 254 D.
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84. Stamp seal; Pope, SPA IV, 255 U.
85. Stamp seal; A. D. H. Bivar, *op.cit.*, 5, BD 4.
86. Stamp Seal; R. Göbl, *op.cit.*, Tafel 2, 4b.



87. Stamp seal; A. D. H. Bivar, op.cit., 5, BD 15.
88. Stamp seal; H. H. von der Osten: The Ancient Seals from the Near East in the Metropolitan Museum, Chicago, 1931, 112.
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99. Stamp seal; Pope, SPA IV, 255 T.
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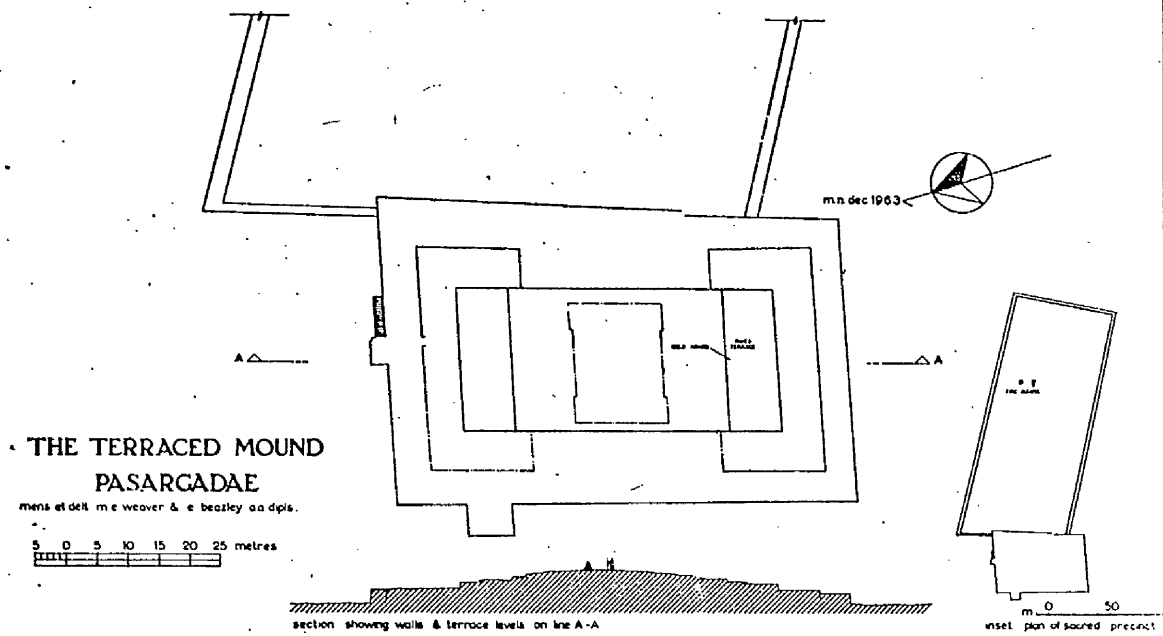
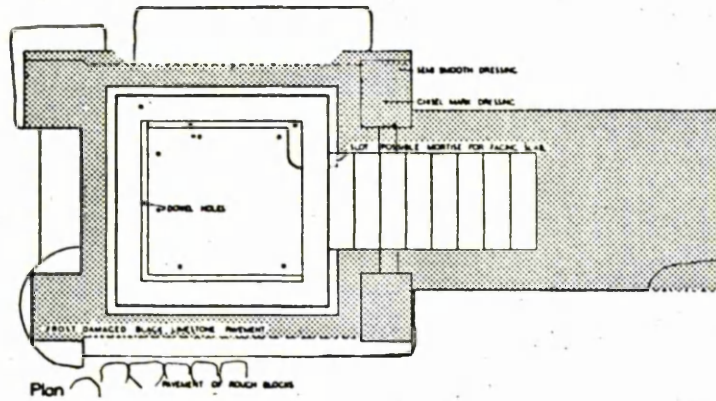
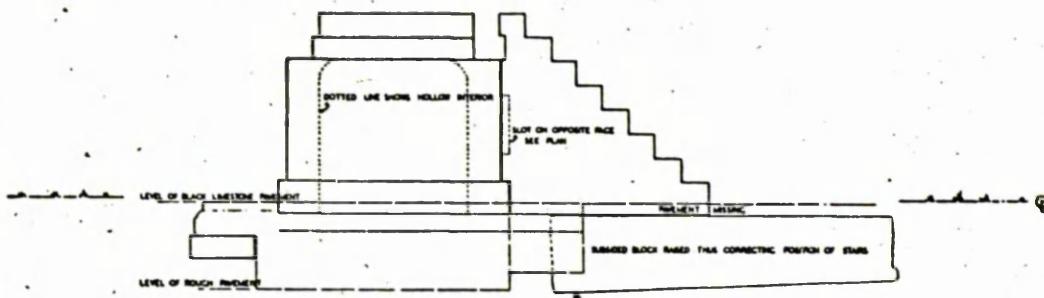


Fig. 1



mn dec 1963

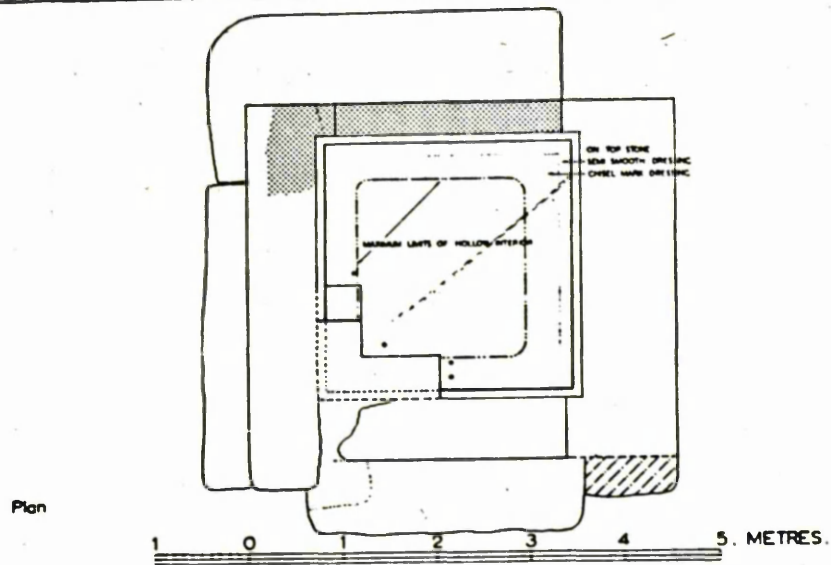
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Side Elevation.

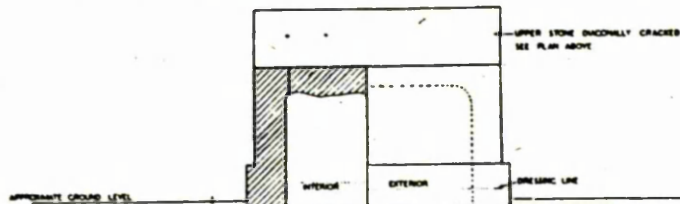
SOUTH PLINTH THE SACRED PRECINCT

Fig. 2



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Side Elevation

NORTH PLINTH THE SACRED PRECINCT

mew e.b. 1963

Fig. 3

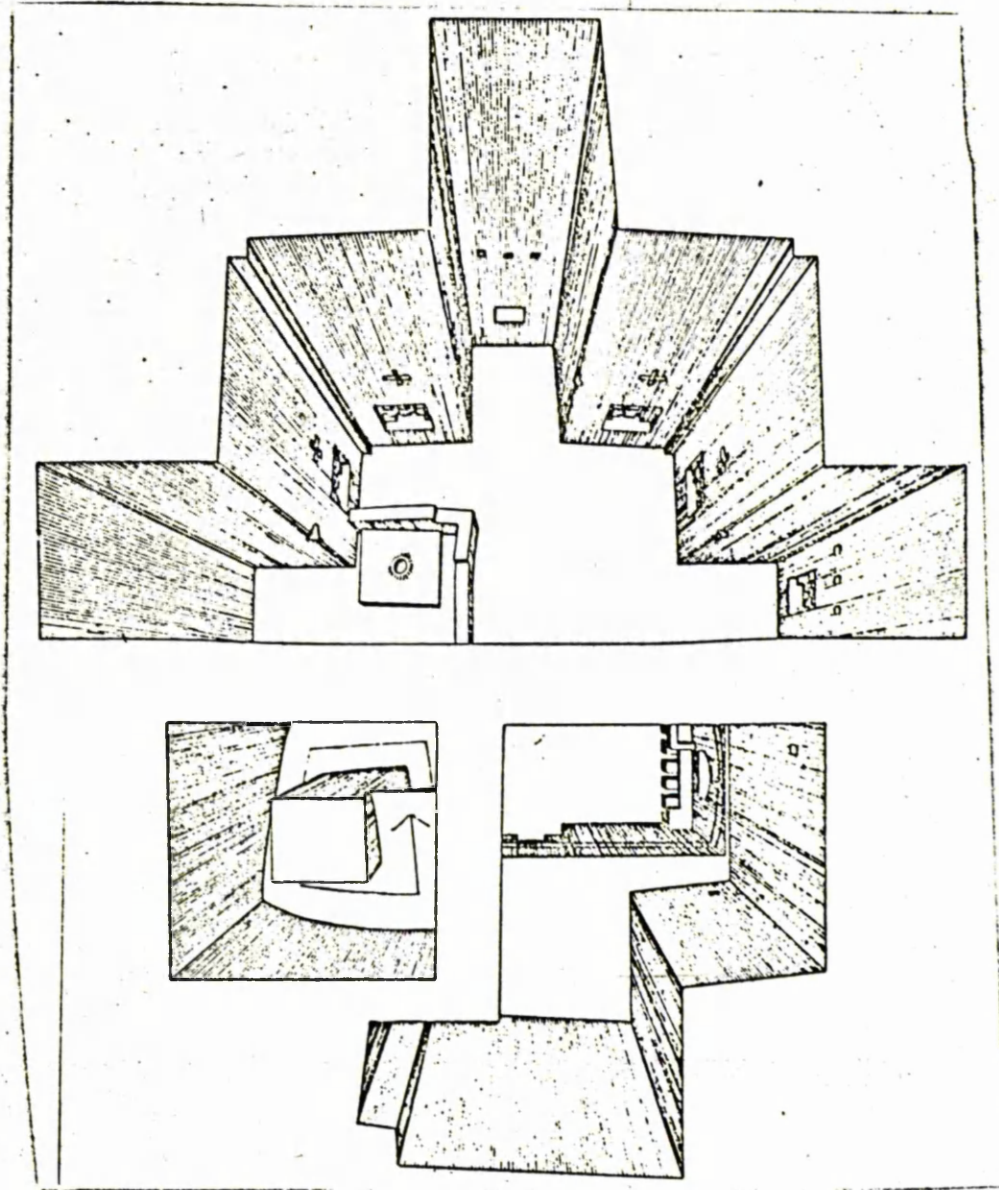


Fig. 4

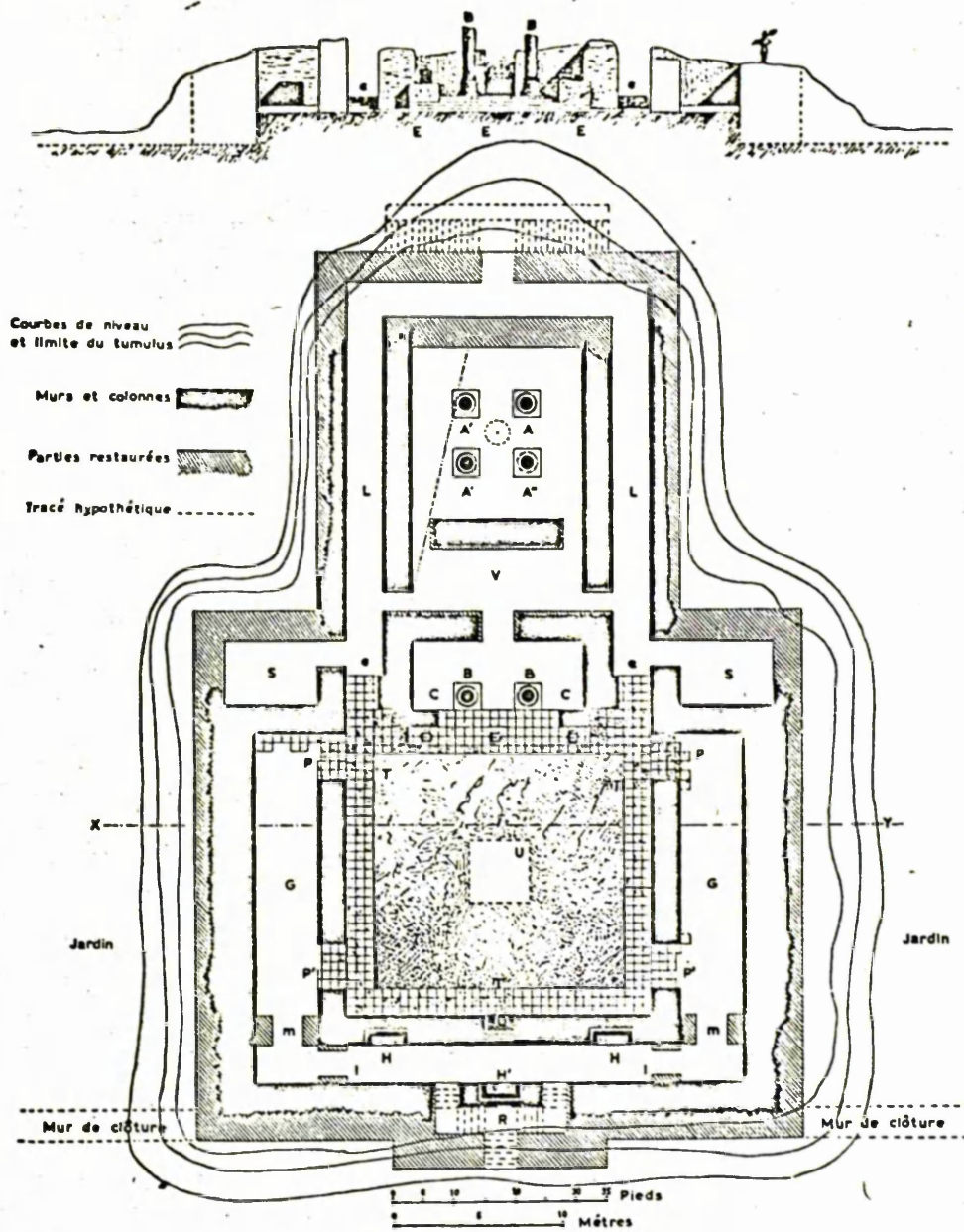


Fig. 5



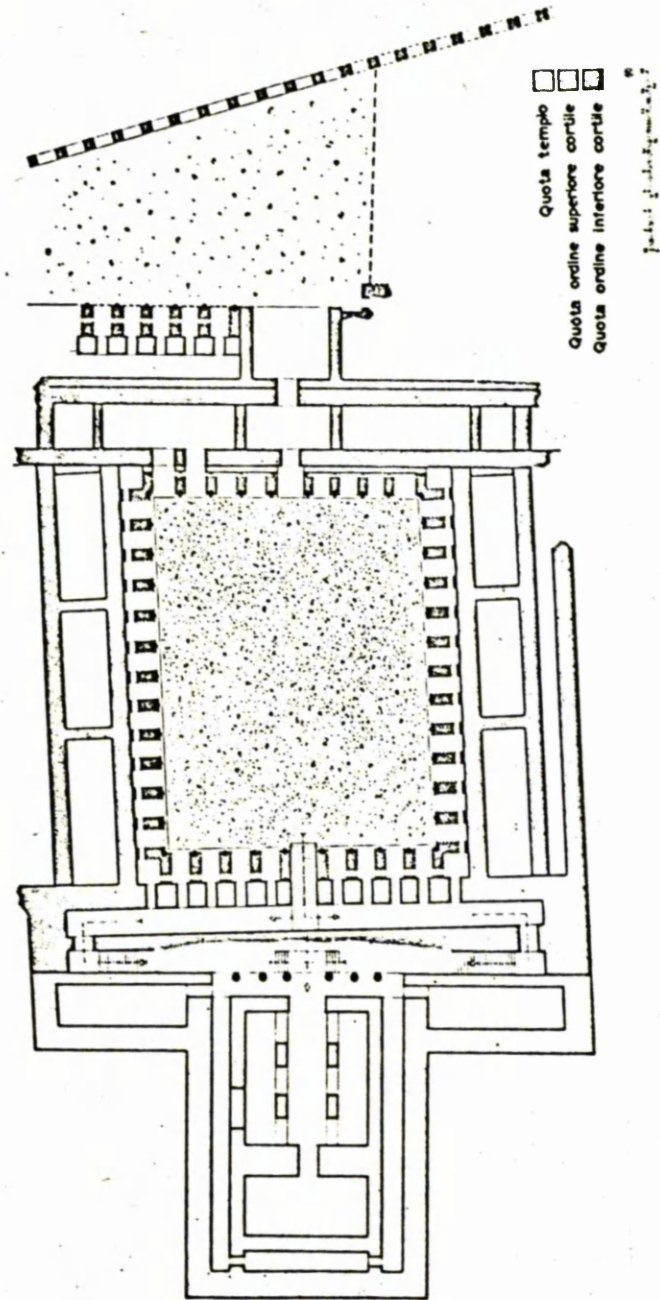
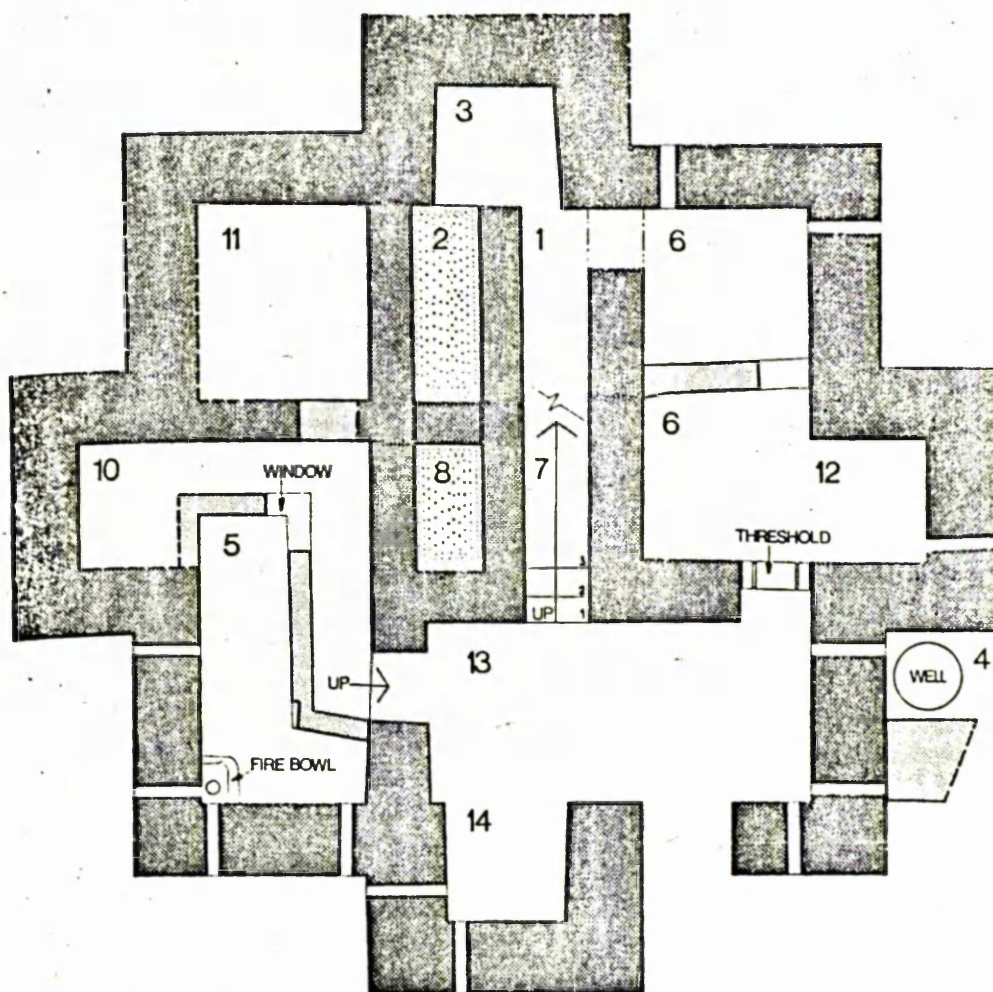


Fig. 6



0 1 2 3 4 5 metres

PERIOD 1  
PERIOD 2

FIG. 1. Ground plan of Site IV.

Fig. 7

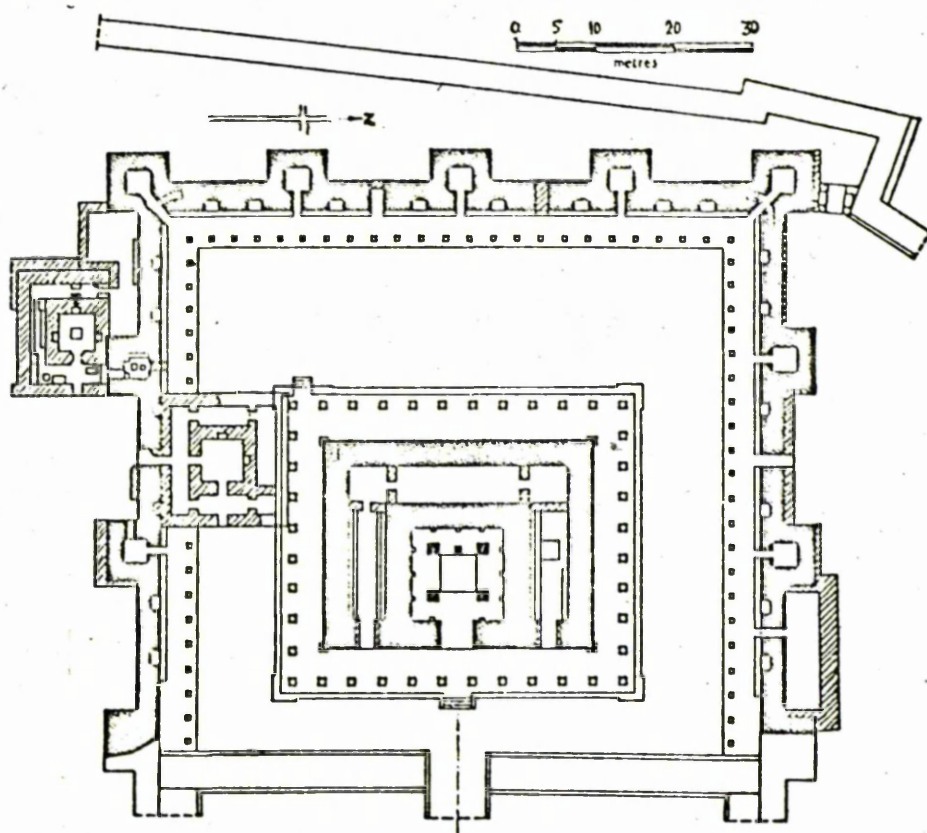


Fig. 8

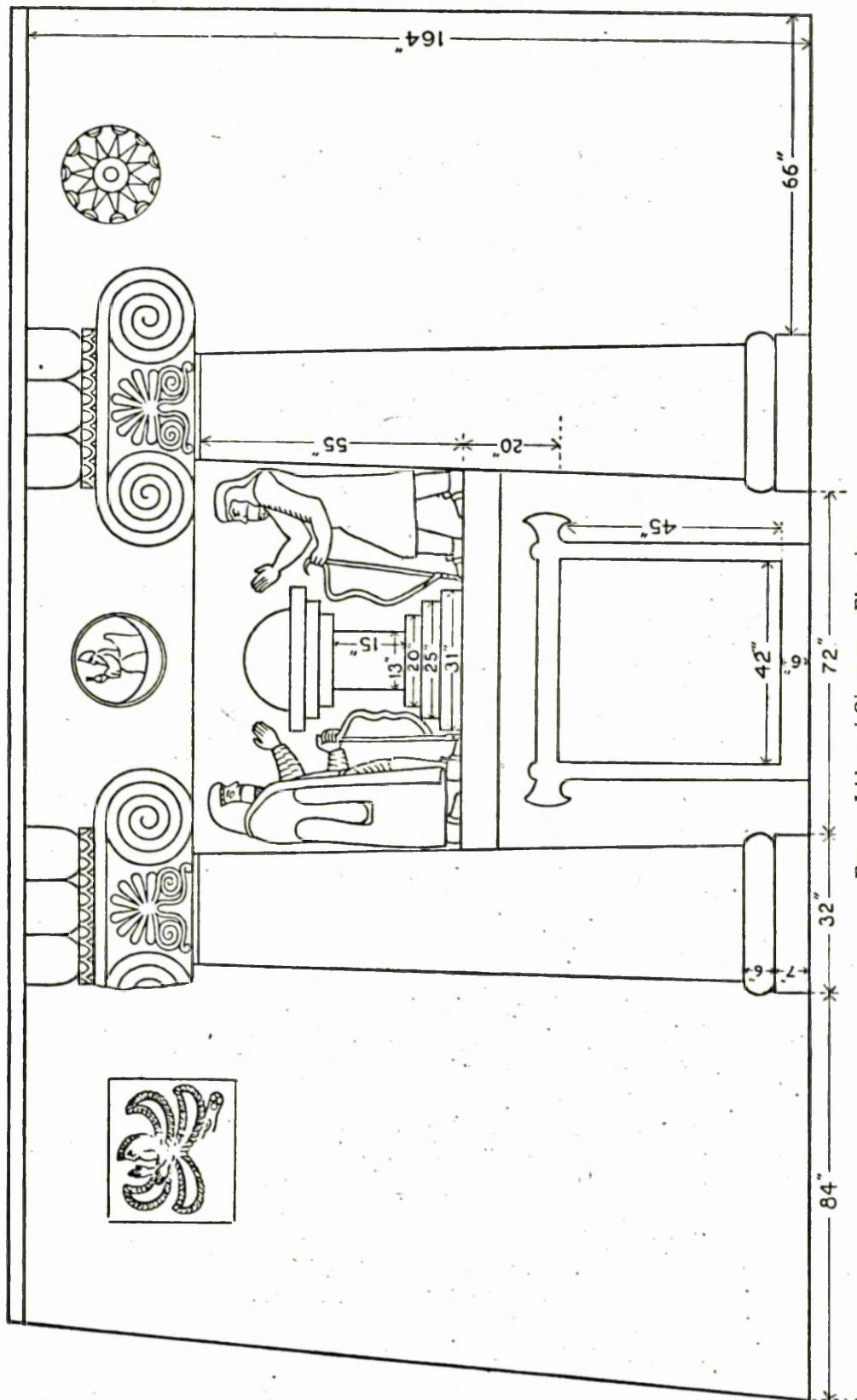


FIG. 2. Ishkewt-i Qizqapan. Elevation



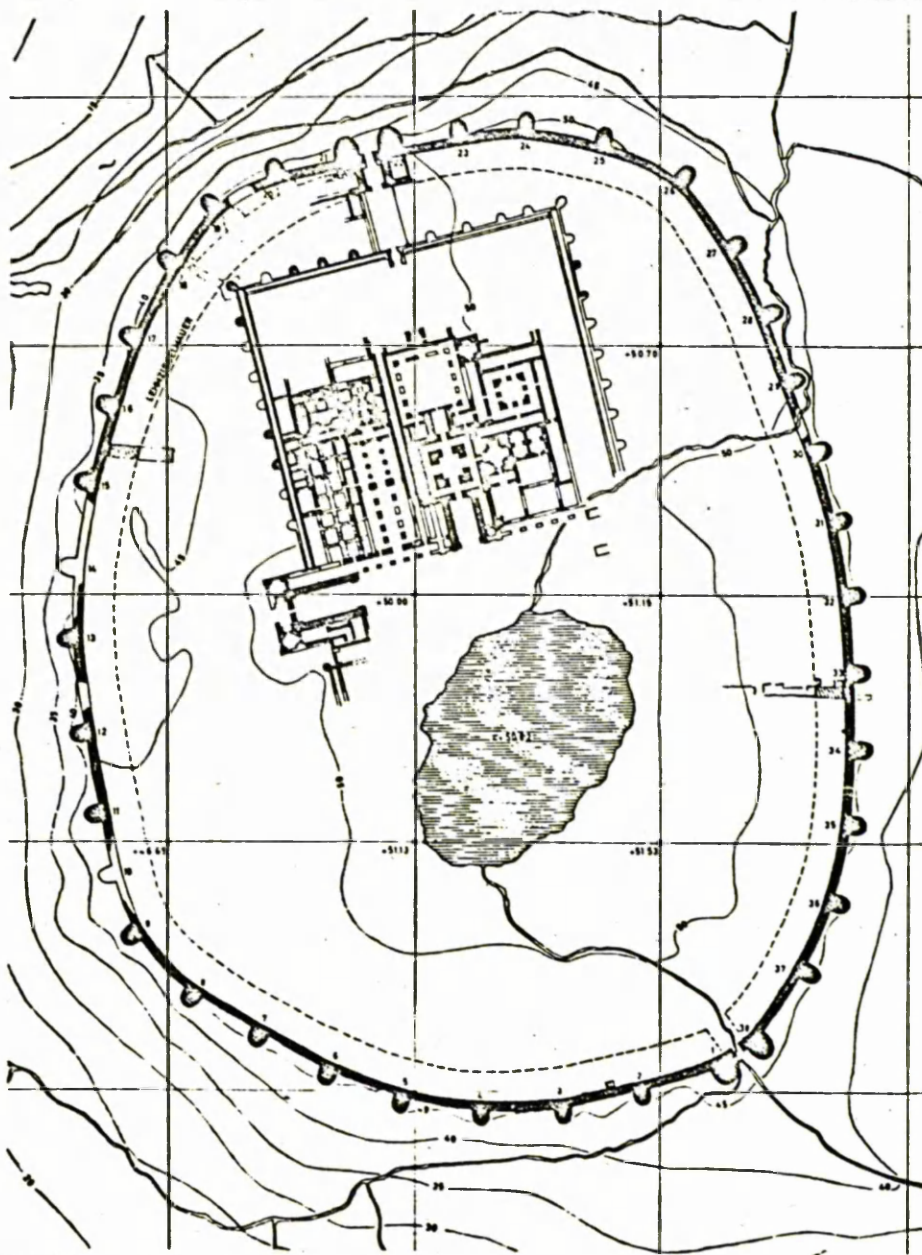


Fig. 10

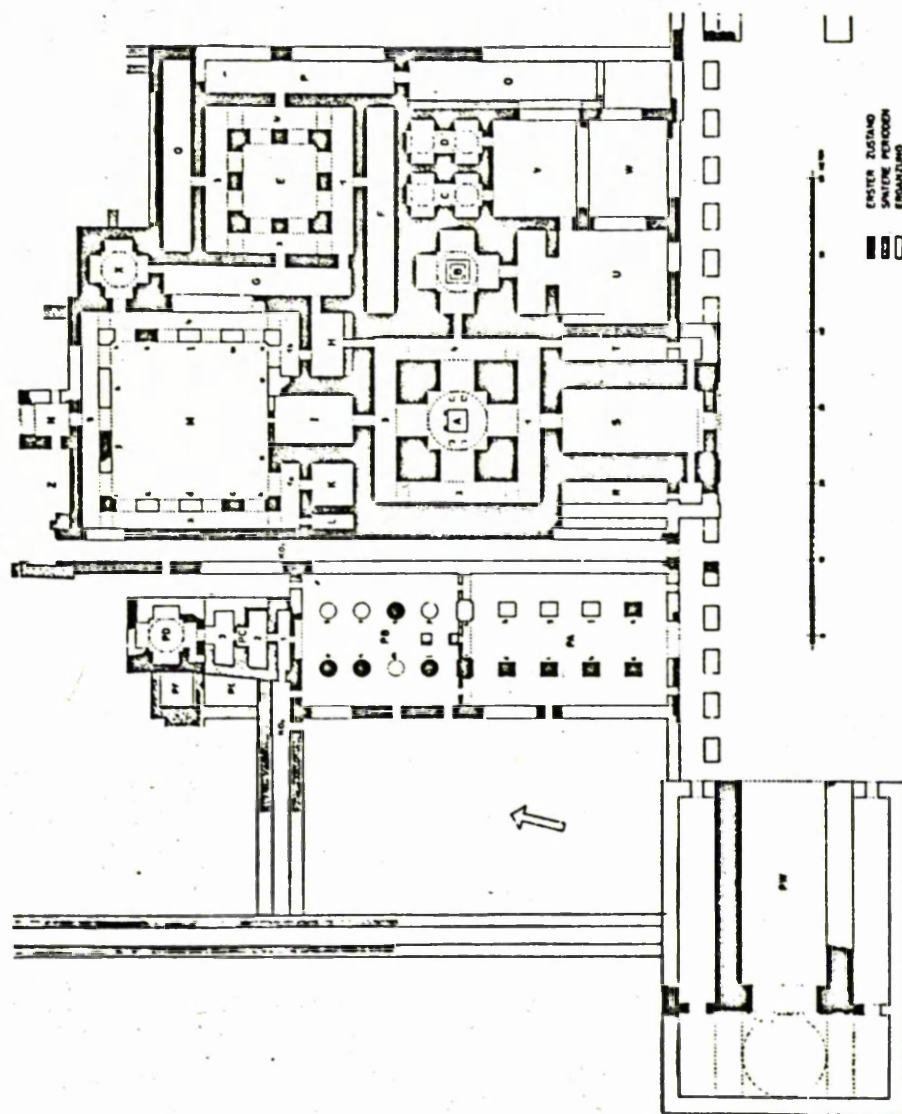


Fig. 11

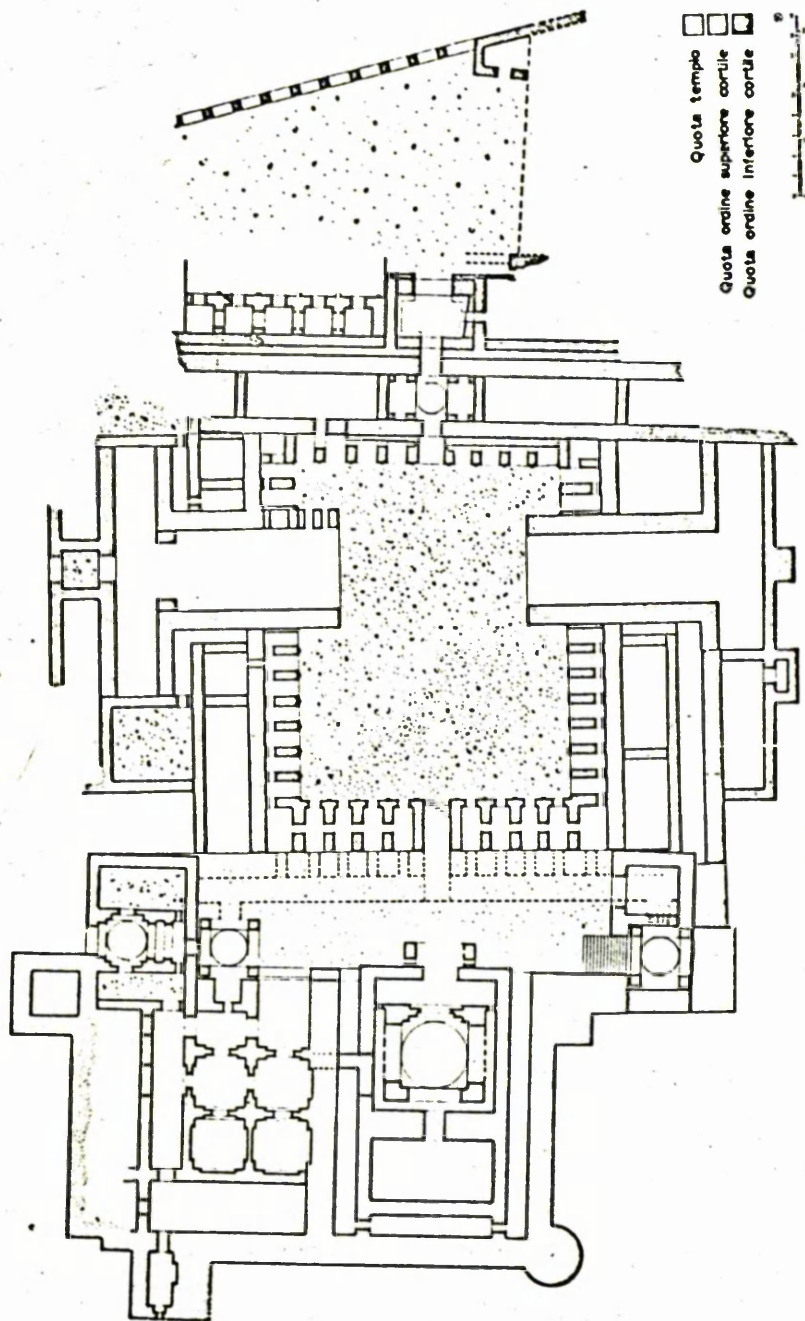
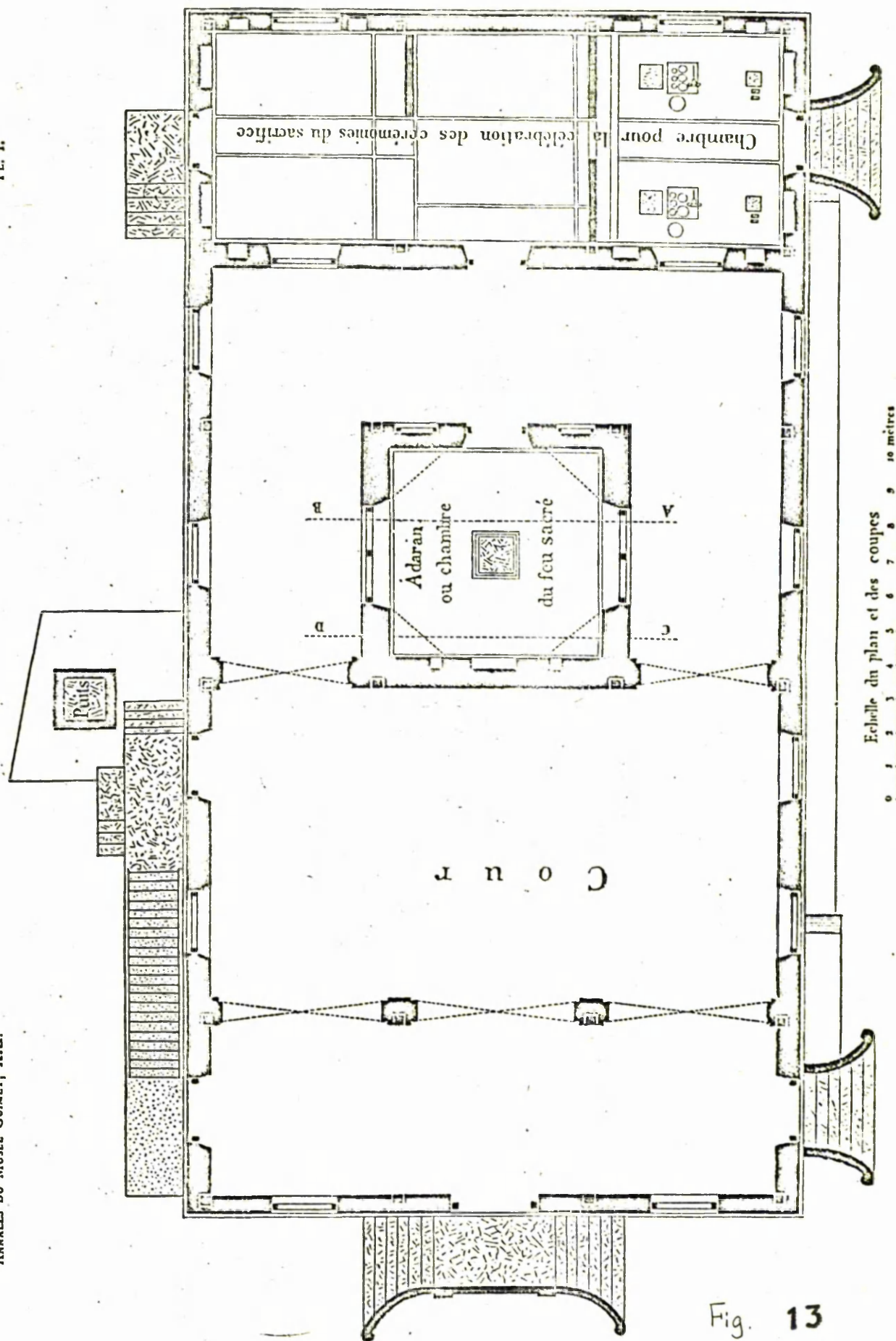


Abb. 11. Gāga Šahr. Sassanidische Anlage (nach Gullini).



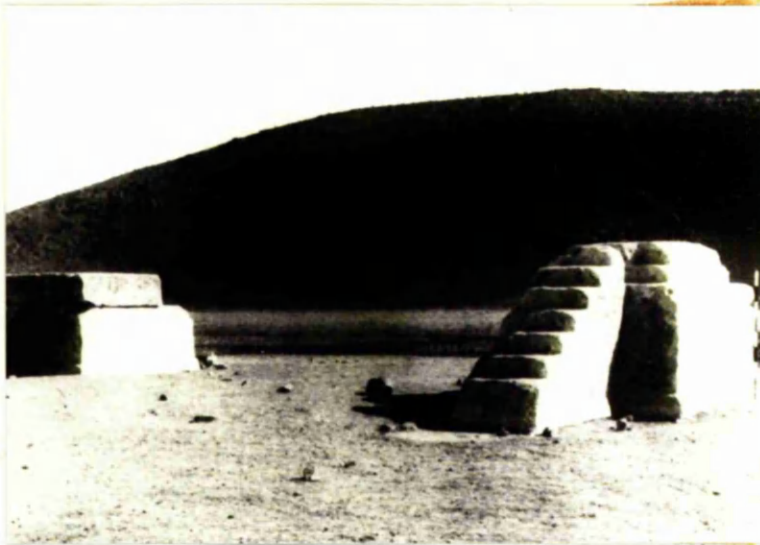


Echelle du plan et des coupes  
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 mètres

PLAN D'UN TEMPLE DU FEU

(AGYARI DE-SETHI JUBHAI PADABHAI, A COLADA, BOMBAY : voir l'explication de cette planche et des suivantes au chapitre III de l'introduction.)

Fig. 13



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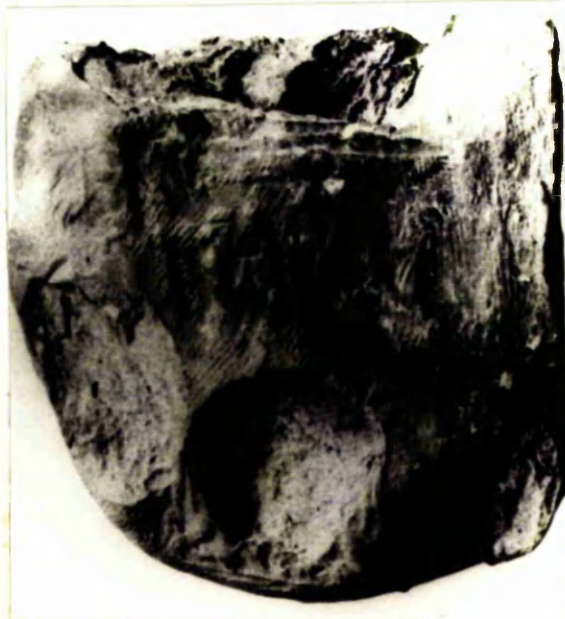




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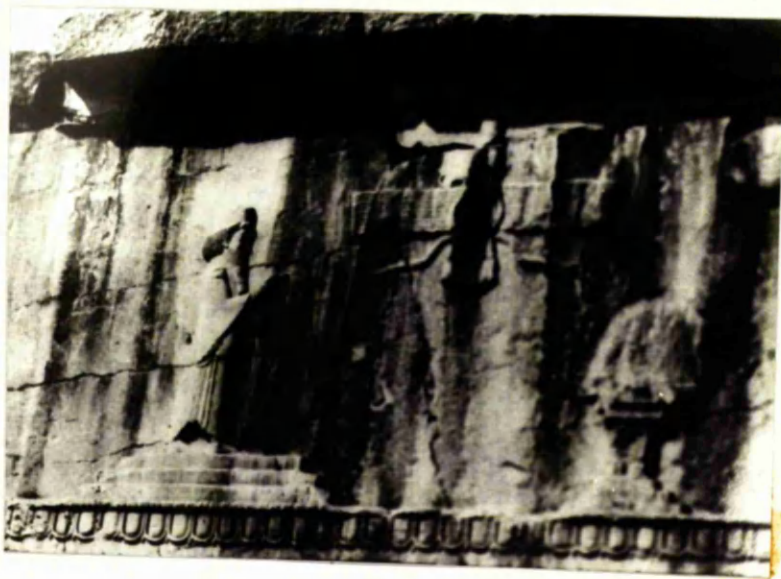
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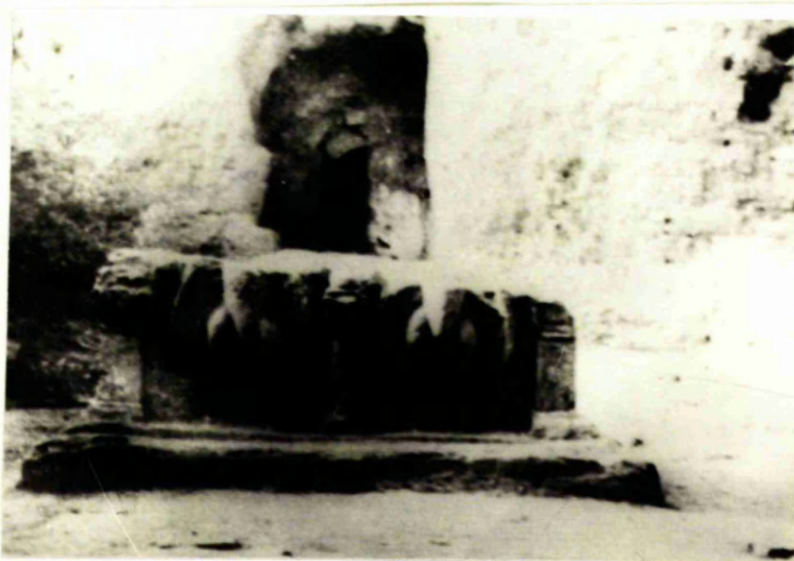
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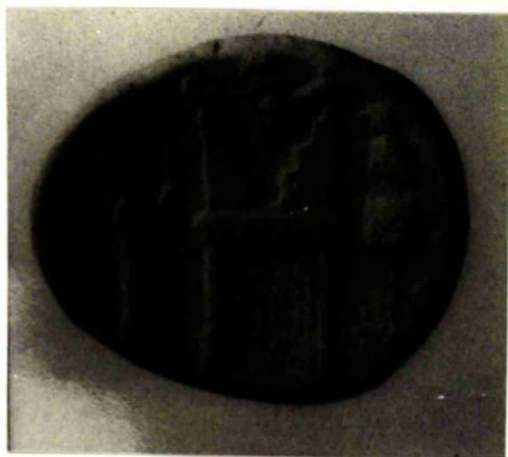
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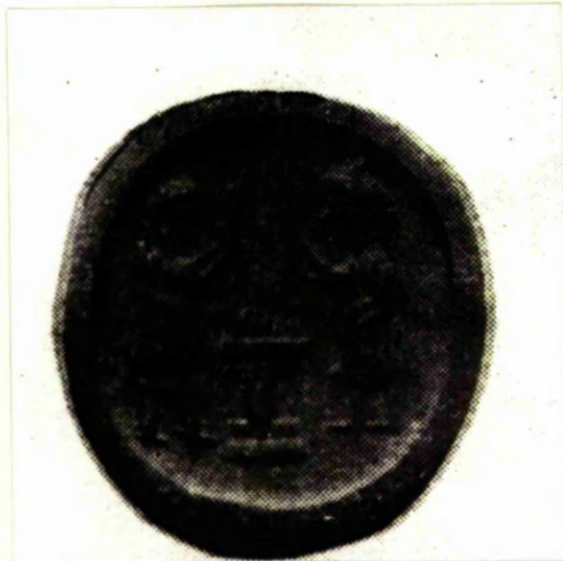
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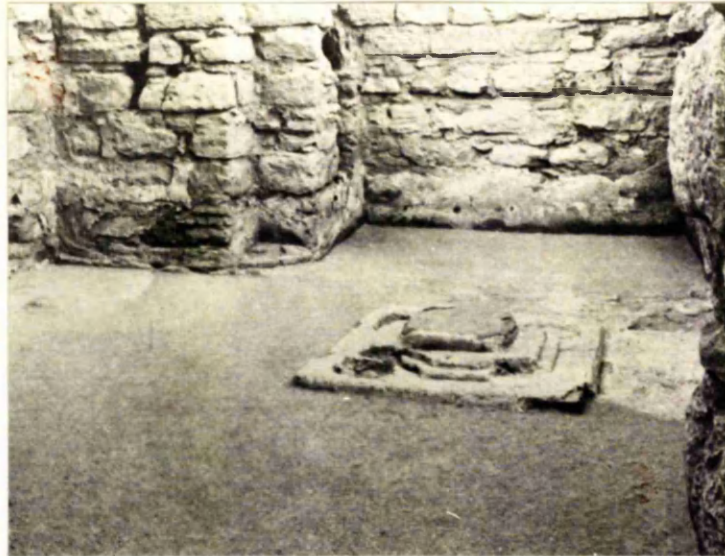
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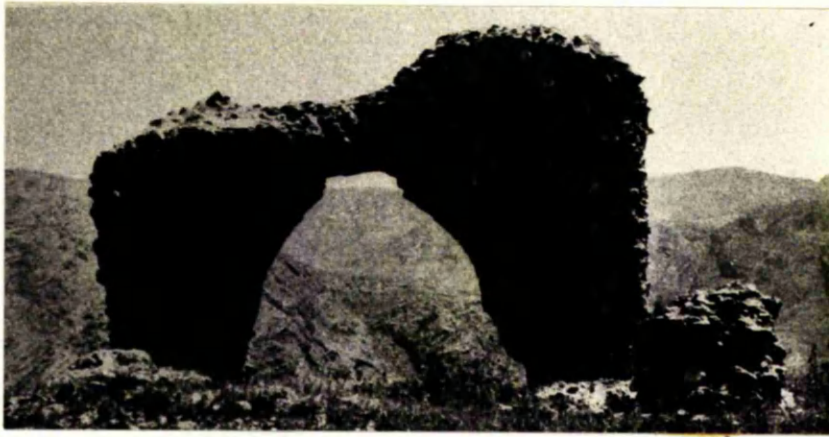


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