

## Azar Barzin Mehr Firetemple, Shining Over the Peaks of Sassanids' Era Architecture

Seyed Mohammad Reza Mokhtari Hoseini

Sabzevar Branch, Islamic Azad University, Sabzevar, Iran

[Mokhtari\\_43@mail.ru](mailto:Mokhtari_43@mail.ru)

**Abstract:** The Sassanids' art has been the continuing of Iran, Achaemenids, and Parthian' ancient arts, and is associated with a religious worldview. The structural form of the fire temples has been similar, a dome on the squinches and was situated on a big footstool, which was joined by arcades. Each fire temple, usually had eight doorways, and some eight-corner rooms. Chahar Taq (the four arches) has had four doors or arcades, which was later considered as the basis of great Islamic mosques. Azar Barzin Mehr fire temple is one of the greatest Sassanids' Chahar Taqs, which is situated on the height of the rural highlands of Rivand in fifty kilometers from the west of Khorasan Razavi. The Azar Barzin fire temple has been used only by farmers' class. In the remains, one can see the Tawaf Hall, such of those can be found in most of the Charat Taqs, especially Ghasr-e-Shirin Chahar Taq. Regarding the technical styles and administration methods, it can be stated that Azar Barzin has things in common with Khosrovestan, Ghasr-e-Shirin, and Takht-e-Soleyman Palaces. The building materials have mostly been rubble stone. Moreover, there is some news of finding gypsum mortar inside the outside of the building. The sources of Sassanids' era have known the fire temples of, Azargoshasb, Azarfaranbagh, and Azar Barzin Mehr from the three mythological fires of Zoroastrianism belonging to respectively one social class (priests' fire, worriers' fire, and farmers' fire).

[Seyed Mohammad Reza Mokhtari Hoseini. **Azar Barzin Mehr Firetemple, Shining Over the Peaks of Sassanids' Era Architecture.** *Life Sci J* 2012;9(3):1171-1174]. (ISSN: 1097-8135). <http://www.lifesciencesite.com>. 163

**Keywords:** Fire temple, Barzin Mehr, Chahar Taq, Architecture, Azar, arch, pier, squinches, dome

### 1. Introduction

The Sassanids were people from Fars State. This state was governed by local princes, who claimed to be the Achaemenids' posterity, and knew themselves as the heir and guardian of the mentioned-dynasty traditions. Ardashir I, the founder of Sassanids' dynasty, and two went to Ctesiphon two years later, after killing the Parthian's king and founded the dynasty by his coronation, in the year 266 AD. His grandfather, Sasan, was the officer guarding the highly famous temple, Izad, Anahita in Estakhr. His father, was one of the local kings. The Sassanids' art is basically associated with a religious worldview and although it is the continuing of ancient Iranian and Parthian arts, and has been from under the influence of different movements from east and west, owns its specific characteristics. Since from the long-term Sassanids' governance (224-624 AD) many art works and buildings have been left, including: ornaments, buildings, cities, dome-shaped figures, fire temples, and other arts related to architecture (Uphan Pope, (1982)).

#### 1.1. Fire Temple

The Sassanids' temples and fire temples that have thousand years practices and traditions were dispersed in all parts of Iran and Sassanids' kingdom. Some of them were in the sight, and were dedicated to public worship, while the others were only used by

priests, and were used for keeping the Holy Fire. The temple that was the place specialized for public general ceremonies of fire worshiping was first discussed during the second century AD by Pausania. As it was mentioned there were some fire temples in Iran at that time, and there were religious buildings that did not have anything in common with fire worshiping. Kangavar temple has been one of them that has been dedicated to goddess Anahita (Schmandt-Besserat, 1980). In the modern building that included the place of Holy Fire, and in where the believers participated in religious rituals, the fire has been in a dark and closed room of the related buildings. On the contrary, the altar that was situated in the center of the yard, its significance and extent increased. Then it was situated on a high platform that has mostly decorative aspects, and it was Chahar Taq. Some of these Chahr taqs, are still remained in a more or less bad situation in Natanz, Kazeroon, and Firooz Abad; however, the buildings that were surrounding them are destroyed.

#### 2.1. The Building Form of Fire Temple

The building form of fire temples was the same everywhere. The fire was situated in the middle of the temple, and Holy Azar was constantly burning in it. Every fire temple has had eight doorways and some eight-corner rooms. One sample of this building exists in Yazd nowadays that has been one

of the ancient fire temples, and has been turned into a mosque when Islamic people conquered the city. Moreover, in the book of [*Ashnaie ba Banahaye-e Tarikhi*] getting acquainted with historical buildings edited by Mirdanesh is written that they had similar forms. "A dome was situated on the squinches, and on the huge footstools, that were joined together by arcades. Sometimes, the internal temple was surrounded by a passageway, which was like a guard for that."

### 3.1. Chahar Taq

Is a dome that is situated on four pillars, which were joined together by arches, and it has been nearly the general form of the Sassanids' architecture or the canopy of numerous fires that were shining on the chest of Iran's mountains. It means the canopy of the fires that have been in the middle of Zoroastrianism fire temples, and it was the basis of Iran's great mosques, which was first unique to this shape and form, and then, has been combined with other factors of that time architecture. The Sassanids' fire temples have been composed of a huge yard, in the middle of which there was, situated a high platform, and on that Chahar Taq, there was the place of fire. Chahar Taq owned four doors or arches that used to be situated in the center of Zoroastrianism temples or the Iran's mountain range as the canopies of fire during the Sassanids' period.

#### 4.1. The Constituent Elements of Chahar Taqi Buildings

- A square plan
- Four columns or piers on the above-mentioned plan
- Four arches that join the four piers.
- A dome that is built with the help of four rooms or squinches.
- The four doorways that are created in the form of a rectangle, finally.

Arthur Pope, the American famous orientalist and Iranologist introduces architecture as one of the basic elements of Iran's art and culture. Art is as old as history in Iran, and architecture is one of the most ancient arts. Iran's architecture is the variable identity card of the Iranians since from the old times. The tradition and customs, rituals, spirit, morality, thought, and generations' notions have a clear reflection of Iran's history. Not only in great buildings, but also, in small buildings, one can see these reflections. The fire temples and regality villages that have been created in all parts of Iran, the scattered signs of which are left around, have hidden a lot of Iran's architecture culture in it. In the ancient

Iran, the fire temples and regality villages were built on the hills. In the regality villages, there were temples attributed to Mehr and Nahid (the water's angel) worship. The regions that are not attributed to Pol-e-Dokhtar, or Dokhtar's Castle are the same Nahid's (the water angel) ancient temple. The ancient Mehr worshipers touched the water before entering the temple, and called it Mehrab (the altar; Persian Mehrab, is possibly derived from this word in the Islamic period). Islamic architecture is the result of many year's revolutions, though, our ancestors art talent, and their inspirations from traditions, and other nations' achievements. Although, the Iran's architecture face has accepted some changes and revolutions, its unique spirit and powerful nature have always remained alive and flourishing, and have changed its capacities with time. Regarding the significance of Sassanids' era, and the high impact of this era in the growth of Iran, and other countries culture and art, especially architecture, and its related elements, cities, palaces, fire temples, and other buildings of Sassanids' era, have been referred many times in different sources (Grabar O.1987). As an example, the fire temples of Firooz Abad, Takht-e-Soleyman, Azargoshnasb (Niasar) between Kashan and Delijan, (Baku, Ghasr-e-Shirin in Damghan, Tape Mil fire temples) on the road of Rey-Varamin, (the old fire temple of Estakhr, Masjed Soleyman, have been mentioned frequently, but unfortunately the Azar Barznim Mehr fire temple has been mentioned less, which is going to be explained in this article.

#### 5.1. Azar Barzin Mehr

Is one of the greatest Sassanids' Chahar Taqs that is situated on the northern heights of Rivand village in 50 kilometers of the west of Sabzevar in one of the most impassable geographical regions in the forms of few remains with the major stile material? In order to achieve the mentioned building, one is facing with steep valleys and nearly unattainable, above which a massive stone heap with a height of 100 meters has raised its head from the bed of the river, and a famous Chahar Taq in a mood of silence and wonder with illusion and greatness has been based overlooking the river and around the stone heap with an indescribable landscape. The Azar Barzin fire temple has been one of the most important Chahar Taqs in the Sassanids' era, which has been unique and for the workers' class, only.

#### 6.1. The Explanation of the Building

In order to strengthen the first pillars, and to coordinate the lower surface of the building with its square plan, the constructors have built clerestory. In fact, it can be stated that nature has helped a lot in

conducting this architectural plan, and the architect has succeeded in creating natural clerestory and a permanent Chahar Taq with little insertion in the southern and eastern part of the heap. In the southern and northern embedded piers, the Tawaf Hall has been guided. Nowadays, a few works of the Hall have been left, and undoubtedly, similar to other Chahar Taqs, especially that of Ghasr-e-Shirin, the existence of the mentioned Hall has been regarded as the necessities of Sassanids' Chahar Taqs. The square dimensions inside the building has been  $60/6 \times 60/6$ , and the length of quartet doorways, or in other words, the distances between the piers have been 30.4, and their width is different from 2 to 5.2 meters. In the four corners of the building, the four squinches have created four side walls. By the means of these squinches that are all stone the architects could easily change the square plan to a center circle, and they could raise the dome at its top. The parts that have been observed, remind us the designers' work in the buildings of Khosrovestan, and Ghasr-e-Shirin Palaces. The northern arch of Chahar Taqi, is almost safe and sound, and is similar to the horseshoe-shaped arcades of its contemporaneous buildings such as the northern and southern gates of Takht-e-Soleyman; however, it cannot cope with them in terms of dimensions and greatness. This building is seven meters long in the status quo, and due to the falling of ceiling debris, it is not possible to measure the exact size and the height of the dome. Many researchers have similar opinions about the Azar Barzin fire temple, and have named it as the farmers' fire. In Pahlavi texts, it is stated that the Azar Barzin Mehr fire temple has been the farmers' worship place in Rivand Mountains. Regarding the legend of planting a tree by Zarathustra in Khorasan, attributing this fire temple to the farmers in that era, is close to the truth.

About the tree planting in Tarikh-e-Beyhaghi, it is written that Zarathustra, who has been the owner of magus, has chosen two villages and ordered to plant two cypresses to those villages. One in Kashmar, and one in Farivamd village, and the Zarathustra, the fire worshipper had planted those trees. Moreover, it is written in Shahnameh that

*Like Azargosab, Khordad, and Mehr  
Shining like Bahram, Nahid, and Mehr*

Christine believed that Azarbarzin or the farmers' fire has been situated in the east of Sassanids' country, in Rivand Mountains, Lazar Farapi believed that Rivan village has been the Moghan village, and Jacques believed that the place of Azar Barzin Mehr fire temple has been in the Mehr

village, on Khorasan, near Sabzevar. In another place, Ferdowsi believes that

*First, He founded Azar Mehr Barzin  
Look at the country to see what practices it  
established  
The Mehr Barzin was looking for smoke  
It was shining without any wood and smoke*

Considering Ferwosi's poems, it can be stated that the fuel of the fire temple has been something different from wood similar to the fire temple of the ancient city of Shiraz, why it did not leave any ash.

### 7.1. The Materials of the Building

The main materials of the building have been the rubble stone, which has been provided from the heights around the Chahar Taqi, and we can see the bigger figures and cutting rocks. The expert of Cultural Heritage and Tourism of Sabzevar talks about the existence of gypsum mortar inside and outside of the building. Moreover, in the furtherance of expert studies of the Organization of Cultural Heritage of Sabzevar, in the entrance of the Hall, and architecture residues, the maintenance of bones in this fire temple on a mountain called Rivand (Rivas), has been identified. By rhubarb that is an herb with thick and fleshy stems, a wine called Haoma, and has been used in the Persian era (the first to the third millennium BC) in religious and ritual ceremonies. In Borhan-e-Ghate, this essence has been named Suma in Sanskrit that has been mixed with the pomegranate twig, and sowed on the fire. The sources of Sassanids' period, and the narratives existed have known the fire temples of Azar Faranabgh, Azar Goshnasb, and Azar Barzin Mehr from the three mythical Zoroastrianism fires, each of which has belonged to one social class, priests' fire, worriers' fire, and farmers' fire, respectively that have been established in Fars, Azerbaijan, and Khorasan by Jamshid, Kai Khsorow, and kai Gashtasb.

### Acknowledgements:

Author is grateful to the persons for support to carry out this work.

### Corresponding Author:

Seyed Mohammad Reza Mokhtari Hoseini  
Sabzevar Branch, Islamic Azad University, Sabzevar,  
Iran  
Email: [Mokhtari\\_43@mail.ru](mailto:Mokhtari_43@mail.ru)

**References**

1. Christensen, A., "Sassanid Persia", *The Cambridge Ancient History, Volume XII: The Imperial Crisis and Recovery (A.D. 193-324)*, Cook, S.A. et al, eds, Cambridge: University Press.
2. Daryaeae, Touraj (2009), *Sasanian Persia: The Rise and Fall of an Empire*. I.B. Taurus.
3. David, Nicolle. 1996. *Sassanian Armies: the Iranian empire early 3rd to mid-7th centuries AD*, Montvert, 1996.
4. Elton L, Daniel, 2001. *The History of Iran*, Greenwood Press.
5. George Rawlinson. 2005. *The Seven Great Monarchies of the Ancient Eastern World: The Seventh Monarchy: History of the Sassanian or New Persian Empire*. ISBN 1-4219-5734-5.
6. Grabar O. 1987. *the Formation of Islamic Art*.
7. Schmandt-Besserat, 1980. *Ancient Persia: The Art of an Empire*.
8. Singh JS, Singh SP. Forest vegetation of the Himalaya. *Bot Rev* 1987;52(2):80-192.
9. Upham Pope, (1982), *Introducing Persian Architecture*, Tuttle Publications, ISBN 978-080481366.

7/10/2012