Julian: A Newly Discovered Fire-Temple in Ābdānān

Yaqub Mohammedifar and Abbāss Motarjem
Translated by Greg Watson

Sasanika
Archaeology 4
2012

English Abstract:

The highland district of Ābdānān is located in the southern portion of Ilam province. It is dominated by the mountain of Kabir-Kuh which stands over it like a massive wall. In 2001, a team from the Archaeological Department of Bu-Ali Sina University conducted a regional survey of this area. In total, 51 archeological sites were identified during this ground-breaking survey. The site of the city of Julian is one of the most remarkable of these. The newly-discovered Julian *chahartaq* is a fire temple belonging to the Sasanid era. Like many other fire temples of that time, Julian was built with stone and plaster mortar. This *chahartaq* is the surviving part of the heart of a larger structure, and consists of four stone wall and piers of different sizes surrounded by an ambulatory passageway.

This article describes this *chahartaq* as a fire temple and demonstrates its similarities with other related structures (fire-temples) in Iran and neighboring countries. It occupies a large area of the site and has architectural features which allow us to venture a possible chronology for the fire temple of Julian. However, it is important to note that the study of Julian is at present at a very preliminary stage. This paper is the result of a field survey conducted by the writers. Further details about this structure and the town of Julian will only be gained with further investigation and excavations. It is possible that a fire of Ādāran (a local or regional fire as opposed to a Bahram fire of national importance) was venerated in the Julian fire temple. Preliminary studies enabled us to classify this structure with others discovered and excavated in Iran, including Mil-Milgah, Shiyān, Negār and Farāshband. This paper also looks at the possible influence of the ground plans of fire temples of this period, especially those that were built towards the end of the Sasanid era. Examples of such fire temples include Takht-e Soleymān (Āzār Goshnasp), which was among the most important state temples of the Sassanid era.

According to interpretations of Zoroaster's teachings, the only people permitted to enter the sacred fire temples were high-ranking Mobads (Magi or the Zoroastrian priests). Beh-Dins (pious Zoroastrian lay readers), Mobads, and common worshippers would gather in passageways and in front of portals, watching the ceremony enacted by the officiating Mobad from a distance. Our knowledge about the details of this ritual and the ceremonies involved are largely based on Zoroastrian ritual as it is practiced today. Although such ceremonies have lost much of the grandeur they possessed in the Sassanid era, thanks to a tradition of great conservatism in religious practice among Zoroastrians, there may be few fundamental differences with the rites as they are practiced today.

Another point about Julian is that it may have continued to be occupied during the first centuries after the arrival of Islam. The evidence we have for this is pottery shards found on the surface of the site. However, it is not yet clear whether the fire temple was still in use, abandoned, or changed function in the early Islamic era. In addition, the discovery of significant archeological structures belonging to the Sassanid and the early Islamic eras in the Pishkouh and Posht-e Kuh regions suggests that Lorestan and Ilam provinces may hold further important clues that can help us describe and analyze this fire temple and a number of others discovered in Western Iran.

Translated Persian Abstract:

Up to now, the central Zagros region and more particularly the provinces of Ilam and Lorestan, have not been seriously studied from an archeological standpoint. In the course of an archeological assessment, recently undertaken in the district of Ābdānān, which is one of the regions of the southern half of Ilam province on the southern edge of Kabir Koh (mountain), 51 archeological sites and monuments from various periods were identified by the writers of this article. One of the most important of these discoveries was an extensive site called "Julian." During archeological investigations the remains of a town with artifacts dating to the Sasanian and early Islamic periods was identified and documented. At the center of this huge historical site, the remains of a four-buttress barrel vaulted building (a *chahartaq*) was found, which is especially significant. This building turned out to be a fire temple of the type that had an ambulatory corridor around the outside with stairs coming off the sides. Examples of this type of fire temple have been found in the west of Iran, including at Shiyān and Mile Milgeh in Islamābād e Gharb and also in other regions of Iran such as Kerman's Negār Fire Temple and Farāshband in Fars Province. In addition to these, Takht-e Soleiman is another fire temple that has a style of architecture that is considered to be among the most important of its type in the world. In this paper, the newly discovered fire temple at Julian is described for the first time and assessed alongside other similar examples. This is important because the plan of this fire temple allows once again for discussion to be opened on the challenging issue of how these types of fire temple functioned.

Key words: Sasanians, fire temple, chāhartāq, Ābdānān, Julian

Introduction: Methodology

Various objectives are designed into modern archeological studies and investigations. Until recent decades, archeological investigations were considered simply the initial stage of selecting sites for excavation. They were a tool for archeologists to enable them to choose the most promising sites for these long-term excavations. However, these days archeological investigation has been transformed into an independent research methodology that helps answer many of the questions not answered by the excavations themselves, by employing specific scientific techniques and tools.

In scientific investigations, the archeologist is not content with simply identifying the site. Rather, his initial aims should include gaining an understanding the distribution of human

activity across the site and the differences in land use of different parts of the site; determining the degree of interaction between humans and their environment; and, as a result, the environmental and natural resources available to, and utilized by them. These days the complete spectrum of archeological investigative studies is classified into two broad categories: area and regional (landscape) investigations. The first category has a record of several hundred years, while landscape investigations represent a newer methodology.[1] It is also possible to adopt either an "extensive" or an "intensive" research strategy in archeological investigations. Other approaches include adopting either a "systematic" or a "general" methodology for conducting archeological investigations.

Nowadays we find extensive complete investigations in Iran's archeological literature, which address all periods of occupation of a geographical or political site. These sorts of investigations are carried out because there has been a serious shortage of studies aimed understanding historical regions. In these sorts of studies, the archaeologist first identifies the sites and then proposes a chronology for it based on a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the artifacts found there. The position and distribution of finds are plotted on a map. Then, based on this data, a model of settlement is created. The settlement's above-ground extent is identified and also the relationship of the settlement locations to each other, and each one's relationship with its surrounding environment and associated natural resources. The approximate date of construction and the phases of structures in the region are assessed and then, probable historical population changes in the region are extrapolated from this data.

An approach shared by all professional archeologists is to first organize their data, then lay down guidelines for future stages of research. The aim is to assemble as complete a data set as possible, given time and resource limitations, which will assist the archeologist to answer the broad questions posed at the start of the investigation.

Introduction: The Site

In 1380 (2001), an field research program was conducted by the present writers from the Archeology Group of Bu'Ali Sina University of Hamedan, to archeologically investigate and identify the Ābdānān district in the south of Ilam province. Before this time Ābdānān had not been the subject of an archeological investigation. One of the main aims of this program was to investigate, using the regional survey (*makānnegāri* in Persian*)* methodology – a comprehensive investigation which records all periods of occupation, artifact and finds.

In the initial stage of this research program, which was conducted at the center of the site, 51 ancient monuments were found dating from the Neolithic to the Islamic periods. One of the most important discoveries of this work was the identification of a large site with an extent of around four hectares in a place known as 'Julian'. Despite a large portion of this site being cultivated by farmers today, in many parts of the field architectural features remain visible, composed of cobblestones with plaster mortar. Amid the ruins of this ancient city, the remains

[1] Regional Survey

of a fire temple with a square plan draws the eye of visitors more than anything else. The remnants of a fort were found on the high ground overlooking the remains of the city.

Geographical Position

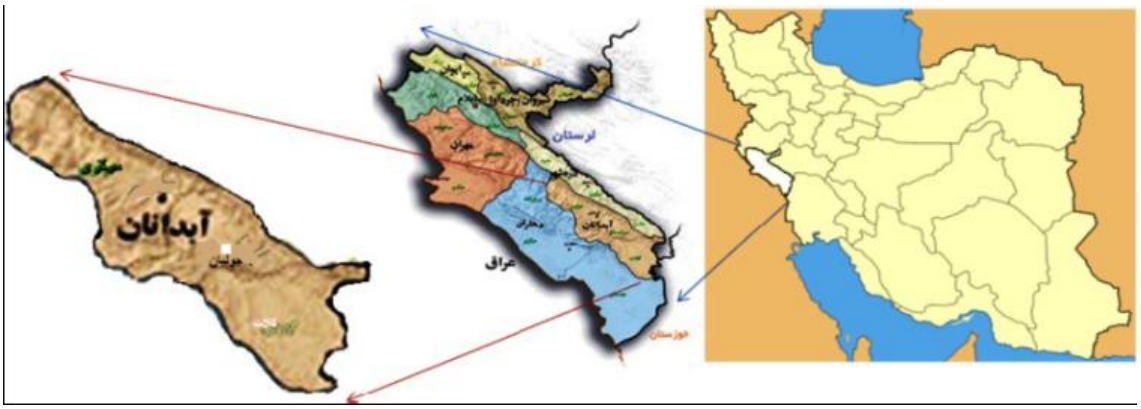
Ābdānān is on one of the southern districts of Elam province. 'Kabir Koh' is the most important range of mountains in the area and stands like a great shadow-casting wall between the two districts of Ābdānān and Dareshahr. It separates the mountainous part of Ilam Province from its hot lowland part. Because of this feature, Ābdānān has two distinct geographical personalities. Its southern part is composed of an alluvial plain, while the northern part is rugged mountains with a climate somewhat different from the south (*Map 1.*)

The ruins of the ancient city known as Julian are located in the mountainous region of Ābdānān in the foothills of Kabir Koh. The remains of this large site are located at latitude N32°56′74″ and longitude E47°32′44″, at a height of 885 meters above sea level. To gain access to the site of the Julian ancient monuments one must take the road between Ābdānān and Moormoori and, at the village of Cham Kabood, turn off onto a village road which leads to the fields. Ābdānān is located to the north of the Dehlorān Plain which runs along its southern margin. About half of the district shares a very similar climate with Dehlorān. However, the northern half of the district is in the foothills of the great mountain Kabir Koh and is semi-mountainous. The road between the two cities runs through passes that are famous throughout the country.

The Ābdānān investigation resulted in the discovery of a great number of stone and mortar architectural features spread across an extensive site that had until then, unfortunately, remained largely unknown.

The Fire Temple of Julian

The extant monuments at the historical site of Julian are located across a broad sweep of the locality. Today, amid agricultural fields, the remains of cobblestones and plaster mortar can be seen. Unfortunately, the local farmers have cultivated much of the site each year, leaving only the remaining high points of the site (such as the foundations of the fire temple) uncultivated. They have gathered up many of the other cobblestones, to facilitate agricultural use of the flatter land. Two unique monuments were found at the site. The first is the fire temple of Julian, and the second is the fort overlooking it, which is 100 meters higher than the average level of the ancient town.

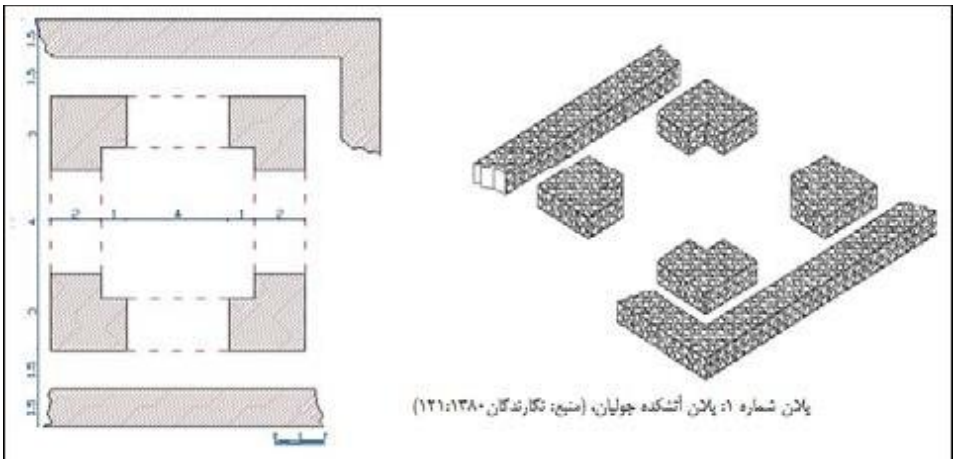


Map 1. Showing Ilam Province and the location of Ābdānān District. 1380/2001.

The Julian fire temple is in the northern part of the Julian site and on the slope overlooking the town. It is an outstanding monument. The building, of four equilateral arches (barrel vaulted) on four corner piers with a dome on squinches – a *chahartaq* – was constructed on a natural hillock or rise, with its four sides oriented on an alignment of around 15 degrees off due north (*plan 1 and figures 1 and 2).* The plan of the Julian *chahartaq*, as with all other *chahartaqs* of the Sasanian period, is composed of four separate cubic rectangular bases. Unfortunately, the monument has suffered considerable deterioration over the years and no sign of the roof remains in place. However, we are able to mount a hypothetical reconstruction of a spherical domed roof based on comparing it with other *chahartaqs* of the Sasanian period. The construction material of this building was completely made up of rock rubble and cobblestones suspended in a plaster mortar. Most of the remaining walls of the building reach a height of 2.3 meters.

Due to the extensive destruction as a result of collapses of the building material, it is not possible to accurately trace the form of the piers, but it is interesting that rocks of larger sizes were used as rubble in the lower parts of the walls, and as one goes up, the stones get smaller. First, the rocks were roughly laid and stacked in the form of walls and then a great amount of plaster mortar was poured into the empty spaces.

In contrast with most other *chahartaqs* where the stones are not laid and are simply piled on top of each other, when the first course of stone was laid for this *chahartaq,* care was taken to ensure that the external wall was regular enough that it provided a relatively smooth external surface to plaster. After this was done, the next course would be laid. This method of construction has a colloquial term in Iran – it is called “the floating in mortar method” (*ghotevar dar malāt*). At the line of demarcation of the piers, entrance doors are sited on the four sides which, as with some other *chahartaqs* of the Sasanian era, connect to the ambulatory passageway that runs outside the four piers. The remains of this ambulatory passageway are clearly visible on the north, east and south sides of the building. However, the remains of the west side have collapsed, leaving a great pile of rubble which makes it difficult to reconstruct without excavations. The width of the ambulatory passageway is 150 centimeters.



Plan 1. The Julian Fire Temple. Source: the authors 1380/2001, p. 121.

Fig.1 View over the city of Julian and the fire temple. Source: the authors.

Fig.2 The Julian Fire Temple. Source: the authors.

The interior space of this *chahartaq*, without considering the space between the piers, forms an equilateral square of around 6x6 meters. Taking the walls of the ambulatory passageway into account, the space of the *chahartaq* rises to 14.5x14.5 meters. The piers are about two meters thick and the walls of the ambulatory passage are 0.5 meters thick. In the absence of archeological excavations, it is not possible to say much more about the building's architecture, although other evidence, including pottery found at the site assists in assembling a chronology for the site {Mohamadifar and Motarjem 1380/2001].

The Julian Fortress

At a distance of about 100 meters north of Julian town, there is a relatively high natural hill that is considered to be a part of the rugged topography of Kabir Koh. This monument is located at map coordinates N32°56′850″ and E47°32′528″. The fortress is about 100 meters higher than the level of the *chahartaq* and overlooks it. It was built on an oval plan, of the same construction material as other buildings at Julian – rock rubble and cobblestones with a plaster mortar. Its shape is much influenced by its topographical position on a hill. The north-south length of the fortress is 70 meters and its east-west width is 60 meters. It has walls 2 meters in diameter, semi-circular towers mounted at irregular intervals that had rectangular embrasures (thin window-like apertures from which to shot arrows) which reduce the diameter of the building. The entrance to the fortress is on its northern side and has enclosing walls on both sides. The strategic defensive position of this fortress undoubtedly means that it was built to watch over and protect the city (*figs. 3 and 4*).

Fig. 3 Position and View of the Julian Fortress. Source: The authors.

Fig. 4. External Walls of the Julian Fortress. Source: The authors.

Ceramics

Our knowledge of the Parthian and Sasanian periods is very incomplete. This deficiency is especially well known when it comes to pottery from the Sasanian era. Not enough attention has been paid to Sasanian pottery at archeological sites. A number of archeologists working at various Sasanian sites have not viewed Sasanian pottery as exceptional and have considered it sufficient to provide simply a superficial description of their finds. On the other hand, some archeologists who have excavated important Sasanian sites have not engaged as much with the issue as they should have. For this reason, our knowledge concerning Sasanian ceramics is very limited and these shortcomings mean that despite the large volume of pottery shards dating from this period found scattered on the surface of sites, we can't use them to determine periodization and precise chronological sequencing for settlement sites. At the same time, important Sasanian sites have been excavated, including Bishapur, Firoozābād, Istakhr, Koh-e Khwajeh, Naghsh-e Rustam, Shoosh, and Takht-e Soleiman. In general terms, pottery production during the Sasanian Dynasty can be considered a continuation of traditions dating back to the Arsacid era, with the exception of grey-ware pottery production being largely discontinued (Kiyāni, 1379/1999: p. 22). Overall, pottery from this period was limited to vessels produced for the purpose of satisfying the domestic needs of the ordinary people (Sarfarāzi and Firōzmandi, 1381/2000: p. 312.)

Richard Ettinghausen believes that Sasanian pottery vessels owe much to the ceramic traditions of the Parthian era, and this focus led to greater and more widespread use of glazes. It is perhaps due to greater activity in the areas excavated in Ninevah, Ctesiphon, Kish, other sites in Mesopotamia, Susa, Ray and Damghan in Iran that they are not able to be used yet (Towhidi 1382/2001: 190).

The Sasanian Empire included a great many territories with their own particular pottery-making traditions. Consequently, pottery of this period adheres mainly to a variety of local traditions.

Any logical effort to identify Sasanian pottery must start at the local level, which then makes possible the comparison of pottery over a wider area. Louis VandenBerghe has done studies on information gathered relating to pottery from the Sasanian period, and believes that pottery from this era has not receive the attention it deserves. At the level of normal use, it seems to have mainly been employed in a domestic setting. This means we find mostly kitchen vessels, water jugs, food storage vessels, pitchers with long and short necks imitating metal vessels of the period, and a type of thin slender vessel similar to contemporary bottles. Distinguishing Sasanian pottery from Parthian-era pottery appears difficult except when it comes from a well stratified undisturbed archeological context relating to each period (Ibid: p. 189).

The glazed pottery includes varying forms of bowl, jug, goblet and food storage vessel, which was made of quite course terracotta pottery. Unglazed pottery, which constitutes most of the pottery of the Sasanian period, is usually undecorated, or if it is, decoration was often molded or impressed. On unglazed pottery decoration can be diverse, and includes points in a circle, a design known as “button form”. Another decorative technique was the etching of decoration on the surface of the pot (sgraffito) (Sarfarāz and Firōzmandi, 1381/2002: p. 313).

The glazed pottery is of good quality. Pottery glazing retains the obvious characteristics of Parthian ceramics that continued through the Sasanian period. Two colors – turquoise blue and green – were used to cover flasks, jugs and large food storage vessels. By contrast with Parthian glazes, the glaze cover on these ceramic products is thin and is of a sort of molten glass and mineral silica. It could be either transparent or a matt glaze. In this period, silica sand was mixed with lead, aluminum, tin, and sodium, together with copper, cobalt and manganese pigments, which were then applied as glazes on vessels.

The pottery shards collected from the surface investigation of the Julian site are of the usual types on the color spectrum – terracotta red, orange, buff, green and grey. The color of the body is the same as the surface of the pottery. Some of the vessels have a strong dense fabric tempered with very fine grains of sand, grit and other minerals. Others, especially domestic vessels, and generally large vessels, have a more friable and porous fabric. (*figs. 5 and 6)*. In addition to sand and grit, these vessels were tempered with chaff and other vegetable matter. (Mohammadifar and Motarjem, 1380/2001).

The technical characteristics of this pottery indicate there were certain preferences at work in the making of ceramic vessels at various sites in the Sasanian period. Much was made according to the individual preference of the potter at the various different sites (*Table 1)*. A preliminary comparative study on the different forms from these sites reveals that special vessels with particular uses can be found at each site. Therefore, in many cases a direct relationship can be demonstrated between the use of the site and forms of vessels discovered there.

An overview of pottery making of this period enables us to distinguish seven distinct cultural regions in the Empire. This shows that Sasanian potters mostly adhered to the local traditions of each region, with each being distinguished by the style of decoration on the wares (‘Asgari-Chāvradi, 1382/2003: p. 288) In actual fact, over the course of this period, apart from difference

in the details of shape, the forms were also transmuted into local styles by their different technical characteristics and the various different types of regional decoration. Of course, it shouldn't be kept far from mind that even in the seven recognized pottery regions homogeneous decoration was rare and most followed a very personal and individual style. It was only the broad *type* of decoration that was held in common. For example, impressed decoration is found on wares from the west of the country but the style of design is different, and only rarely are objects found that are highly similar to each other. Despite this, there is still a way to identify pottery from the beginning and end of the Sasanian period within the limits of a sure index for early and late Sasanian pottery (Khosrozāde and Āli, 1383/2004: p. 45-70).

Fig. 5. Pottery shards found at the site of the fire temple. Source, authors 1380: p. 112

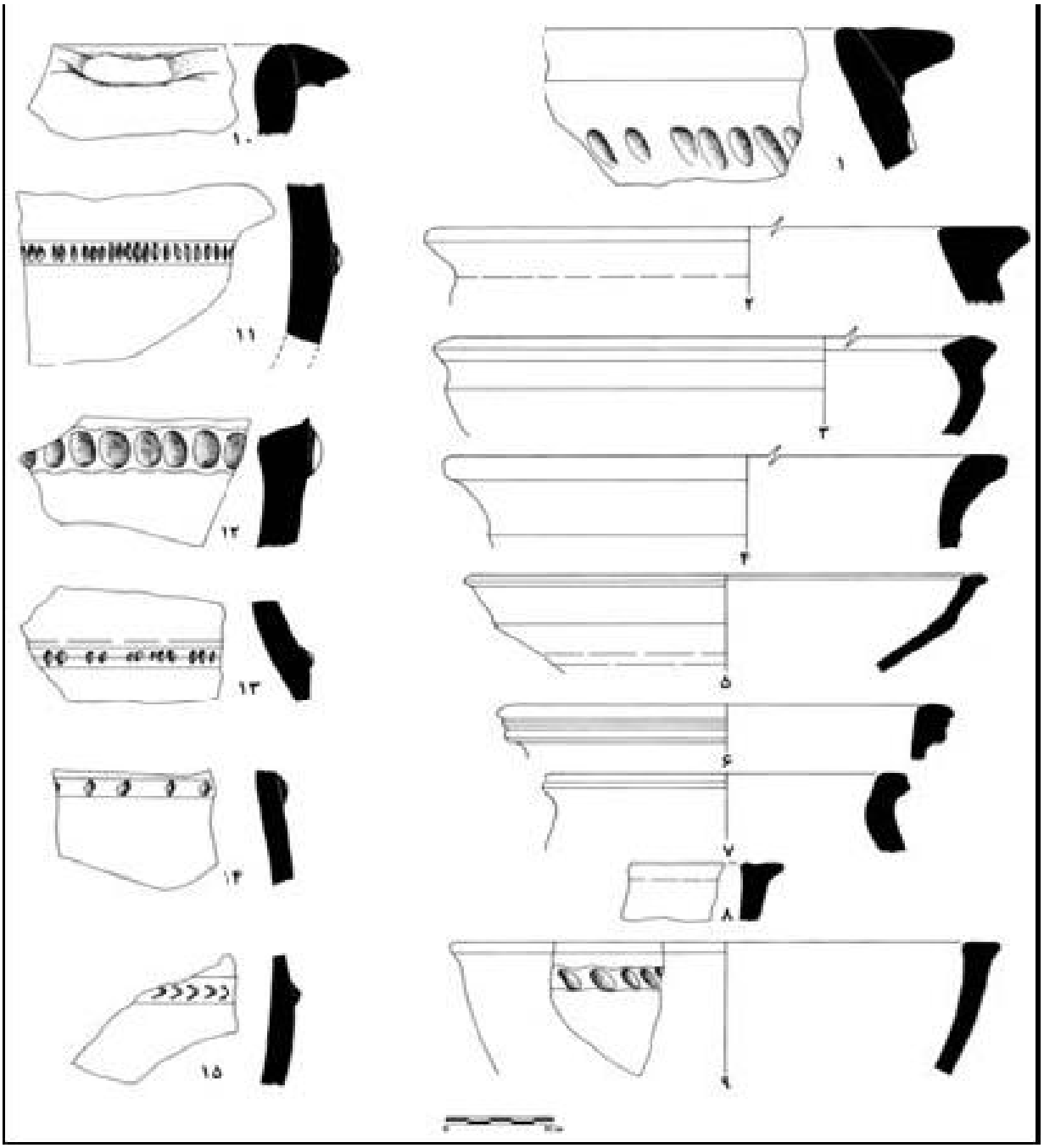


Fig. 6. Rim and profile sketches of a number of pottery shards found during the investigation. Source, authors.

Table 1. Characteristics of pottery found on the surface of the site of the Julian fire temple. Source, authors.

Rank	Type	Diameter	Width	Construction	Period	Firing	Internal Surface	External Surface	Body	Size	Density	Surface color	Body	Remarks	Comparative Source
1.	Rimmed	?	43 cm	Wheel thrown	Sasanid	sufficient	rough	rough	medium	medium	Very	red	red	Deep sgraffito decoration	Alden, 1978, P4, n.21
2.	Rimmed	28 cm	40 cm	Wheel thrown	Sasanid	very	medium	medium	medium	medium	very	brown	grey		Azarnoush, 1994, p213, Fig190:E
3.	Rimmed	31 cm	22 cm	Wheel thrown	Sasanid	sufficient	medium	medium	medium	medium	very	red	red		Azarnoush, 1994, p294, Fig 171:E
4.	Rimmed	24 cm	21 cm	Wheel thrown	Sasanid	sufficient	medium	medium	medium	small	very	red	red		Azarnoush, 1994, p207, Fig. 184:B
5.	Rimmed	22 cm	12 cm	Wheel thrown	Sasanid	sufficient	fine	fine	fine	small	very	buff	buff		Deshayes, 1987, fig 21
6.	Rimmed	18 cm	17 cm	Wheel thrown	Sasanid	sufficient	medium	medium	medium	medium	very	buff	buff		Azarnoush, 1994, p211, Fig. 188:C
7.	Rimmed	14 cm	14 cm	Wheel thrown	Sasanid	sufficent	rough	rough	rough	large	very	buff	buff	Incised horizontal lines	Azarnoush, 1994, p197, Fig. 174:R
8.	Rimmed	?	18 cm	Wheel thrown	Sasanid	very	medium	medium	medium	medium	very	brown	grey		Delshayes, 1987, Fig.21
9.	Rimmed	23 cm	17 cm	Wheel thrown	Sasanid	sufficent	medium	medium	medium	medium	very	buff	buff		Alden, 1978, p84, n21. Azarnoush, 1994. p207, Fig.184: D
10.	Rimmed	?	13 cm	Wheel thrown	Sasanid	sufficent	rough	rough	rough	medium	very	brown	brown	Impressed repeating decora	Deshayes, 1987, Plt60:14

														tion	
11.	Unrimmed	-	17 cm	Wheel thrown	Sasanid	very	medium	medium	medium	medium	very	buff	grey	handle	Azarnoush, 1994, p202, Fig. 180:K
12.	Unrimmed	-	16 cm	Wheel thrown	Sasanid	sufficient	rough	medium	rough	large	very	buff	red	Impressed repeating decoration	Ricciardi, 1971, pp427-442. Kennet, 2002, pp157, fig.5.
13.	Unrimmed	-	12 cm	Wheel thrown	Sasanid	sufficient	medium	medium	medium	medium	very	buff	buff	Finger nail incised decoration	Deshayes, 1987, Plt58:2
14.	Unrimmed	-	9 cm	Wheel thrown	Sasanid	sufficient	medium	medium	medium	small	medium	red	red	Finger nail incised decoration	Azarnoush, 1994, p.202, fig180
15.	Unrimmed	-	8 cm	Wheel thrown	Sasanid	sufficient	medium	medium	medium	small	very	buff	red	Finger nail incised decoration	Azarnoush, 1994, P208, fig.185:j

In terms of the decoration, the designs used on the pottery include sgraffito, repeating decoration, and relief. The incised work is in the form of horizontal wavy lines and repeating marks. The repeating designs include both rope and relief decoration, and also horizontal lines in relief in groups of several lines. The pottery artifacts found on the surface of the site are similar to those found in the attested Sasanian stratigraphy of the excavation of the Fortress of Yazdegerd (Keall, 1981), the Shiyān fire temples (Razvāni 1384/2005: p. 67) and Mile Milegi in Islāmābād-e Gharb (Morādi, 1388/2009, p. 165) (*Table 1).*

Chronology, Landuse and Comparison

In addition to pottery, an important element in assembling a chronology of the various periods, including Sasanian, is use of typologies and stylistics of art and architecture of the Sasanian period. This is one of the ways of determining the chronology of buildings of different periods. One of the characteristics of Sasanian architecture is the use of cobblestones and plaster mortar for walls. However, a serious problem for the identification of structures in the Ābdānān region is the widespread use of plaster mortar for covering external surfaces though a number of different periods. To overcome this problem a comparative analysis of construction methods, styles of architecture and also the particular ground plans of period buildings such as standard Sasanian fire temple layouts is useful.

As was mentioned in the section of this paper which described architectural features, the ground plan of a *chahartaq* with surrounding ambulatory passageway is one of the well known characteristics of religious architecture of the period, and fortunately several examples have been discovered. These include the Shiyān Fire Temple (Rezvāni, 1384/1985: p. 74), Mile Milege, (Morādi, 1388/2009), and also Chan Zhiyeh in Ilam Province (VandenBerghe, 1977, pp. 182-184, fig. 5) (*plan 2.)*

As we know, fire was taken as a symbol of Ahura Mazda and was one of the main things venerated during the Sasanian Dynasty. The Mazdian religion, or rather its new reformed form, the Zoroastrian faith, was the state religion of the Sasanians. Sasanian coins show the king in a pose of worshipping fire before an alter (Widengren 1381/2002, p. 59.

A look over the evidence left to us by classical historians offers much about the sacral traditions out of which fire temples may have evolved. As Herodotus says,

> ...They [the Persians] do not make it a custom to erect images and temples and alters; on the contrary, they even charge with folly those who do these things; because as it seems to me, they do not conceive of the gods as having the nature or likeness of men, as the Greeks do. But it is their wont to perform sacrifices to Zeus going up to the most lofty of mountains, and the whole circle of heavens they call Zeus; and they sacrifice to the Sun and the Moon and the Earth, to Fire and to Water and to the Winds: these are the only gods to whom they have sacrificed ever from the first; but they have learnt also to sacrifice to Aphrodite Urania, having learnt it both from the Assyrians and the Arabians; and the Assyrians can Aphrodite Mylitta, the Arabians Alitta, and the Persians Mitra. Now this is the manner of sacrifice for the gods aforesaid which is established among the Persians:- they make no use of alters neither do they kindle fire; and when they mean to sacrifice they use no libation nor music of the pipe nor chaplets nor meal for sprinkling; but when a man wishes to sacrifice to any one of the gods he leads the animal for sacrifice to an unpolluted place and calls upon the god, having his tiara wreathed round generally with a branch of myrtle. For himself alone separately the man who sacrifices may not request good things in his prayer, but he prays that it may be well with all the Persians and with the king; for he himself also is included of course in the whole body of the Persians. And when he has cut up the victim into pieces and boiled the flesh, he spreads a layer of the freshest grass and especially clover, upon which he places forthwith all the pieces of the flesh; and when he has placed them in order, a Magian man [priest] stands by them and chants over them with a theogony (for of this nature they say that their incantation is), seeing that without a Magian it is not lawful for them to make sacrifices. Then after waiting a short time the sacrificer carries away the flesh and uses it for whatever purpose he pleases...[2]

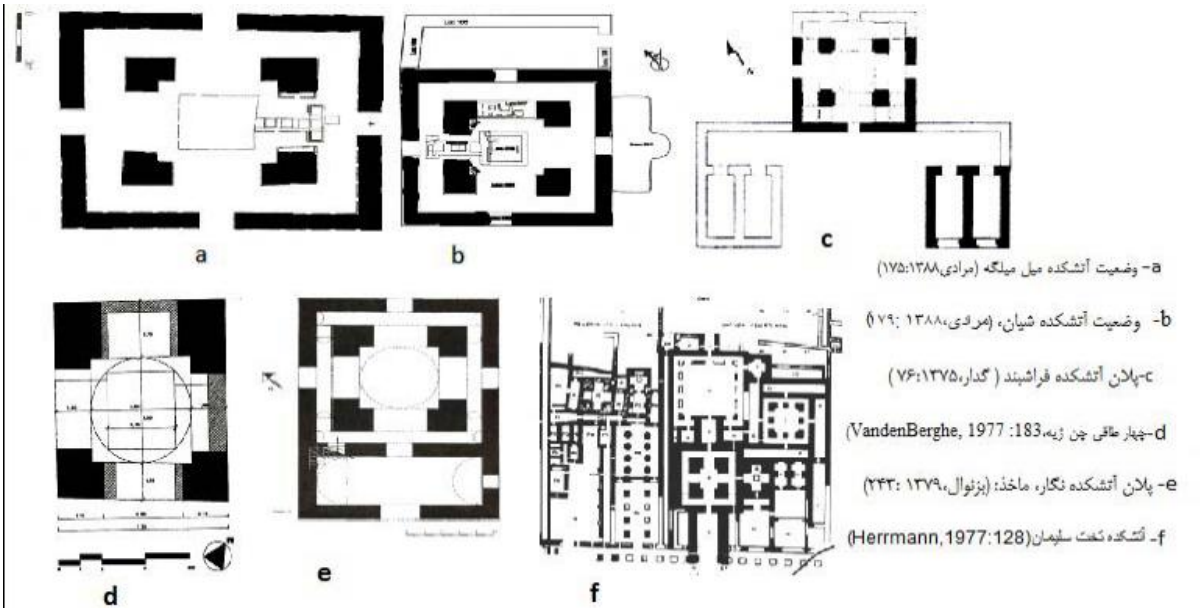
[2] *The History of Herodotus* Vol. 1 (1890)*,* translated to English by G.C Macaulay, Reprinted Macmillan, London, pp. 55-56.

Godard quotes this passage on page 15 of his 1375/1996 work. Our own views regarding Sasanian fire temples owe much to the excellent work of Godard and Erdman. In their view these *chahartaqs* are sacred buildings and a development of those unroofed sites that were previously used by Iranians for worship. These *chahartaqs* are indeed visible from all four directions. This view was generally accepted by all until VandenBerghe and Gropp expressed some doubt about this theory. The cause of this change of perspective was the results provided by the excavation of several fire temples such as those at Kuh-e Khwajeh (Sistan), Takht-e Solieman, Bandiyān at Dargaz among others, which threw into doubt the idea that all Sasanian fire temples had only one unified structural form. It became clear that we had to look for other structures in the ground plans of these buildings (Huff, 1974, p. 247).

Based on religious and historical texts from the Sasanian period, archeologists and scholars of the history of religion have been able to distinguish three categories of fire that were venerated: Bahram fires, Ādarān fires, and the Dādgāh fires. The Bahram fire (the state fire) was the most important and sacred fire and was known as the "Royal Fire of Victory." The fire was stoked and purified using 16 other fires with special rites and ceremonies (Giman, 1385: pp.116-129). The Bahram fire had to blaze constantly with bright and radiant flames in all conditions. This fire was worshiped in large, tier one fire temples like Āzar Gushnasp, Āzar Farnbag and Āzar Burzeen Mehr (Boyce, 1381/2002, p. 156).

In the Avestā no specific term for a fire temple can be found; however, in the Vendidād reference is made the institution of the fire temple. The first clear and specific reference to fire temples is from the third century CE. The high priest Kartir's inscription, dating to the reign of Shahpur the First, refers to the setting up of Bahram fires and other fires (Boyce 1378/1999, p. 326).

In the villages, a very popular deity in shrines of the Sasanian period was Bahram. Bahram was a deity that had a special place (Rajabi, 1380/2001: p. 466). He was an abstract entity, a manifestation of an idea. Verethragna (his Avestan name) meant "smasher of resistance" (Āmuzegar, 1383/2004: p. 27). In a hymn devoted to him (yasht 14) Bahram is said to have ten forms. Each one of them bespeaks the dynamic force of this god. These manifestations are: the strong wind; the bull with yellow ears and golden horns; the white horse with golden caparison; the fierce burden-bearing camel that pounds the earth with its hooves and advances; the sharp-toothed wild boar that kills with one attack, both angry and powerful; the youth aged the ideal fifteen years; the swift flying bird that Hinnelles believes may have been the crow; the wild Ibex; the warlike male goat; and, the man with gold-bladed sword in hand. Each of these forms represented one of Bahram's capabilities. Among these manifestations, two stood out as being especially popular – the swift winged bird, and the face of the boar, which was a symbol of power in ancient Iran (Hinnelles 1373/1994, p. 41).



Plan 2. A number of other fire temples comparable with the Julian Fire Temple: Source, authors.

Of the fires, the fire of Bahram was considered the most sacred and precious. In Iran, the fire of Bahram was worshiped as the deity Bahram or Verethragna, although up to now, no persuasive reason has been suggested for why this fire was named for the god of victory (Bahram). It is interesting that fire actually had its own deity, called Āzar (Boyce, 1375/1996, p. 327).

The Ādarān fire (the local fire) was of lesser status than a fire of Bahram. Only four types of household fires were necessary to set it up, and the rites and ceremonies used to purify and sanctify it were simpler than those for a fire of Bahram. By contrast with a fire of Bahram, this fire was not required to burn eternally. The Dādgāh fire (the family or household fire) was only made of one fire and was easily created, purified and sanctified. Although priests would set the fire up, any "behdin" (pious Zoroastrian) could take charge of it. Each one of these fires had its own separate personality. They could not be mixed together and nor could they be upgraded to another level (Boyce 1384/2005: p. 157). With the spread of the Zoroastrian faith, the number of fire temples and fire places started to increase, so much so that according the historian Tabari, in the reign of Khosrow Parviz (590-628 CE) a great many fire temples were constructed and twelve thousand herbeds (a rank of priest) served in them (Tabari, 1375/1996):, p. 766).

Based on studies undertaken on several excavated fire temples, such as the Mile Milegeh fire temple (Morādi, 1388/2009), the cruciform room PD of Takht-i Soleiman (Nuamann and Huff, 1351/1972, p. 41, figure 16), Torang Tape Gorgan (Boucharlet, 1999, pp. 68-70, the Shayān fire temple (Razvāni, 1384/2005, p. 36), and the *chahartaq* of Chan Zhiye, Ilam Province (VandenBerghe, 1977, pp. 182-184, fig. 5), the censer (fireplace) was located on a central raised podium inside the *yazeshgāh* or inner sanctum. However, in the fire temple of Kuh-e Khwahjeh (Mousavi, 1999, pp. 81-84), and cruciform room B of Takht-e Soleiman (Nuamann, 1374/1995: p. 53) the censer was located inside a brick basin that was built on the floor of the temple. Also, in the fire temple of Mil Haram in Turkmenistan (Kaim, 2004: fig. 4) and in cruciform room A of

Takht-i Soleiman (Nuamann, 1382/2003: p. 53) this religious element is sunk into the structure. Finally, in the fire temple of Bandiyān Dargaz, the censer is sited on the floor of the fire temple (Rahbar, 1378/1999: pp. 219-220). Unfortunately, because no excavations have yet been undertaken at Julian, the precise position of its fireplace is not known at this time. We have thus been forced to turn to a comparative analysis of architectural features and pottery fragments to provide a provisional chronology for the site.

Conclusions

Many articles and books have been written about the importance of fire and the fire temple in the Sasanian period. Numerous archeological excavations have also been undertaken. The purpose of this article has been to contribute an important point to the debate about Sasanian religion and religious architecture. The fire temple discovered in Julian is notable for both the extent of the huge site and its architectural stylistic significance. It is also in a little known area – Ābdānān – and adds another fire temple to the archeological literature of Iran. It is important to remember that studies of Julian are in their early stages and the matters discussed in this article are the result of a purely landscape and field investigation conducted by the writers. It is hoped that extensive excavations in the future will provide further information about the details of both the building and the city of Julian.

It must be acknowledged that the studies conducted so far indicate that the Julian fire temple and more generally, fire temples of this typological group (temples lacking complex architectural annexes), were where the Ādarān fires (regional and local) were venerated rather than the more important Bahram fires. The studies allow us to accept, based on the structures and architectural elements and details of this fire temple that the building is like several other excavated Sasanian fire temples in Iran, such as Mile Milegeh, Shayān, Negār, and Farāshband. Of course, looking at the plan of the great fire temple of Takht-e Solieman, which was one of the most important official fire temples of the Sasanian period, one can see many influences on this form of a standard officially approved plan, particularly in fire temples dating to the end of the Sasanian era.

According to interpretations of the teachings of Zoroaster, the only people who had authority to enter the inner sanctum of the fire were high ranking priests. Behdins, Mobeds and the ranks of ordinary worshippers gathered inside the ambulatory passages and in front of doorways and portals to witness the enacting of ceremonies and hymns from a certain distance. These were read by a priest or priests with authority to do so. Most of our information about the details of the conducting of these liturgical ceremonies comes from Zoroastrianism as it is practiced today. However, these days worship rites and religious ceremonies have lost much of the grandeur and magnificence that they had at the time of the Sasanians. That said, one of the characteristics of the Zoroastrian faith is the conservative emphasis it places on maintaining its religious rites and ceremonies. Thus, it appears that the form of today's ceremonies is not fundamentally different to those of the Sasanian era.

Other notable points about the city of Julian are that according to available evidence – particularly the amount of pottery – it appears that the place remained in use in the early centuries of the Islamic era. However, it is not clear if the fire temple remained in use as a Zoroastrian place of worship into the Islamic period, was used for another function, or became abandoned and started to decay. Moreover, the existence of large settlements of the Sasanian and early Islamic eras in the Pishkuh and Poshtekhuh regions, (modern Lorestan and Ilam provinces), should be considered in any comprehensive analysis of this fire temple and, indeed, several others in the west of Iran.

Bibliography

*Alden, J.R. (1978). *Excavation at Tal-e Malyan*, part I, A Sasanian Kiln, *Iran*, No. 16, pp. 93-101.
*Āmuzegār, Zhāleh (1383/2004), *History of the Legends of Iran*, Semmat, Tehran (in Persian).
*Asgari-Chāvradi, Alireza (1382/2003), *Relative Chronology of Pottery Sampled from Ancient Sites Located Along the Shores of the Persian Gulf,* Collection of Papers from the Second Conference of Young Archeologists of Iran, University of Tehran, 8-9 Ordibehesht, pp. 285-326. (in Persian)
*Azarnoush, M. (1994), *The Sasanian Manor House at Hajiabad, Iran*; Monography di Mesopotamia III, Case Editrice letter, Florance/Firenze, Italy. Translated into Persian by M. Habibi, Iran Cultural Heritage Organisation, Tehran.
*Boucharlat, R. (1999), "Temples du feu Sassanids" (Fire Temples of the Sassanids), *Dossiers d' Archaeologie*, No. 243 pp. 68-70.
*Besenval, Roland (1379/2000), *The Technology of the Arch in the Ancient East,* translated into Persian by Mohsen Habibi, National Cultural Heritage Organization, Tehran. Originally published as (1984), *Technologie de la voûte dans l'Orient ancien. Tome 1 and 2. "Synthése n° 15"*, Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations, Paris, 2 volumes.
*Boyce, Mary (1375/1996), *A History of Zoroastrianism*, Vol. 2, translated into Persian by Homayoon San'atizādeh, Ghoghnoos, Tehran.
*Boyce, Mary (1381/2002), *The Zoroastrian Faith in the Contemporary Era*, translated into Persian by Feridoon Vahman, Cultural Foundation of Iran, Tehran.
*Boyce, Mary (1384/2005), *Zoroastrians: Their Beliefs and Religious Rituals,* translated into Persian by Askar Bahrami, Ghoghnoos, Tehran.
*Deshayes, J. (1987), *Fouilles De Turang Tepe 2. Les periods Sassanides et Lamiques* (The Turangi Tapeh 2 Excavations : The pre-Islamic Sasanian Period), Editians Rccherche sur les Civilizations, Paris.
*Duchesne-guillemin, J. (1385/2006), *The Religion of Ancient Iran*, translated to Persian by Rooya Monajam, Elm, Tehran.
*Godard, André (1375/1996), *The Art of Iran*, translated to Persian by Abolqāsem Sarv-Moghadam, volumes 1,3 and 4, Āstān-e Ghods, Mashhad, Iran (published in English 1965).
*Herrmann, G. (1977), *The Iranian Revival*, Phaidon, London.
*Hinnelles, John (1373/1994), *Persian Mythology*, translated into Persian by Zhāleh Āmuzegār and Ahmad Taffazoli, Cheshme Publishing House, Tehran.

*Huff, D. (1974), "Sasanian Chahartaqs in Fars", *Proceedings of the Third Annual Symposium on Archaeological Research held in Iran*, Iranian Centre for Archaeological Research, Ancient History Museum of Iran, Tehran.
*Keall, E. J. & Keall, M (1981), "The Qaleh-I Yazdigird Pottery: A Statistical Approach", *Iran*, Vol. 19, pp. 31-80.
*Kennet, D (2002), "Sasanian Pottery in Southern Iran and Eastern Arabia", *Iran,* Vol. 40, pp. 153-162.
*Khosrozāde, Alireza and Abolfazl Āli (1383/2004), "Description, Classification and a Typological Analysis of Parthian and Sasanian Pottery from the Zanjān Region", *Collection of Papers from the Iran International Conference on Archeology:Northwester Region*, edited by Dr Masood Āzarnoosh, Archeological Research Institute of the Culture and Tourism Organization of Iran, pp. 45-70. (in Persian)
*Kaim, B (2004), "Ancient Fire Temples in the Light of the Discovery at the Mele Hairam", *Iranica Antiqua,* Vol. 39, pp. 323-327.
*Kiani, Mohammad-Hossain (1379/2000), *History of Pottery and Pottery Making in Iran,* Nasim-e Dānesh Publishing House, Tehran. (in Persian)
*Mohammadifar, Yaghoob and Abbāss Motarjem (1380/2001), *Report on an Archeological Investigation and Identification of Sites in the District of Ābdānān,* archive of the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization of Ilam Province. (unpublished and in Persian)
*Morādi, Yusef (1388/2009), "The *Chahartaq* of Mile Milehgeh: A Fire Temple of the Sasanid Period", *Motāle'āt-e Bāstānshenāsi,* a journal of the College of Literature and Human Sciences, University of Tehran, Vol. 1, No. 1, Spring and Summer 1388, pp. 155-185. (in Persian)
*Mousavi, M. (1999). Kuh-e Khadjeh: un complexe religieux de l'est Iranien (Kuh-e Khadjeh:a Religious Complex in Eastern Iran), *dossiers d'Archaeologie*, Vol. 243, pp. 81-84.
*Nuamann, Rudolf and Deitrich Huff (1351/1972), "The Excavations of Takht-i Suleiman", translated to Persian by Farāmarz Najd-Samie'e, *Majaleh-ye Bāstānshenāsi va Honar-e Iran / Magazine of the Archeology and Art of Iran,* No. 9, pp. 38-47.
*Nuamann, Rudolf (1382/2003), *The Ruins of Takht-e Soleiman and the Prison of Soleiman,* translated to Persian by Farāmarz Najd-Samie'e, second printing, Cultural Heritage Organization of Iran, Tehran.
*Rahbar, Mehdi (1378/1999), *Introducing the Newly Discovered Fire Temple (place of worship) from the Sasanian Era at Bandiān, Dargaz, and an Investigation of Architectural Problems Posed by this Building,* proceedings of the Second Congress of Architecture and Town Planning of Iran, Arg-e Bam, Kerman, Iran, 25-29 Farvardin 1378/1999, Vol. 2, Cultural Heritage Organization, Tehran, pp. 315-342. (in Persian)
*Rajabi, Parviz (1380/2001), *Lost Millennia,* vol. 5, Toos, Tehran. (in Persian)
*Rezvāni, Hasan (1384/2005), *Report of the Rescue Excavation of the Site of the Shiyān Dam, Kermanshah,* (unpublished), Document Center of the Archeological Research Institute, Tehran. (in Persian).
*Ricciardi,R.V (1971), "Sasanian Pottery from Tell Mahuz". *Mesopotamia*, 5, 6.
*Sarfarāz, Ali Akbar and Bahman Firoozmandi (1381/2002), *Archeology and Arts of the Median, Archmenid, Parthian, Sasanian Periods,* second ed. Efāf, Tehran. (in Persian)

*Tabari, Mohammad bin Jarir (1375/1996), *Tārikh arRosul walMoluk (History of Kings and Prophets),* translated from Arabic by Abolqāsem Pāyband, sixteen volumes, fifth ed., Asātir, Tehran. (in Persian)
*Towhidi, Fā'egh (1382/2003), *The Science and Art of Pottery Making*, second ed. Semmat, Tehran,
*VandenBerghe, L (1977), Les Chahartaqs du Pusht-I Kuh, Luristan (The Chahartaqs of PushteKuh, Luristan), *Iranica Antiqua*, Vol 12, pp. 175-190, planche I-VI.
*Widengren, Geo (1381/2002), *Manichean and Zoroastrian Art in the History of Iran 3*, second printing, translated into Persian by Yaghoob Āzhand, Molla Publishing House, Tehran.