

contention that the Sassanid hunting ground pavilions in the Kermanshahan region to date present the sole rare attestations and candidates of the architectural concept of *destagerd* from ancient Iran.

Currently, there are too few archaeological data to enable commenting on the true function of the Parthian tetrapylon at Qala Zah'hak of Azerbaijan, and my interpretation of it as a *destagerd* is still not but a mere hypothesis. Because, though it satisfies the requirement of the combination of water and green landscape with a unique, massive and lofty architecture whose tetrapylon character enabled domination over the surrounding scenery, no traces of garden designing and ornamenting have so far been attested at Qala Zah'hak.

The Sassanid designers and architects were mindful of and emphasized adhering to the conventions of Iranian garden designing, i.e. the three elements of

green landscape, water and a unique visually impressive building, in construction of Farhad Tarash and Taq-e Bostan. The relevant complex in Kangavar differs from these two monuments in that the element of water as well as religious and ritual representations are lacking there. Thus, the *destagerd* of Kangavar in relation with the surrounding plain was presumably a royal palace in a hunting ground or a seasonal residence, while Farhad Tarash of Bisotun and Sarab of Taq-e Bostan served multiple functions such as gardens, summer palaces and sanctuaries at the same time.

The shared geography and temporal and spatial proximity of the monuments located in Kangavar, Farhad Tarash and Sarab with the Sassanid structures in Qasr-e Shirin suggest that the Kermanshahan region was apparently used as a primary summer residence and hunting ground by the Sassanid monarchs.

#### Endnote

\*.This paper rewriting an author's article entitled "An Overview of the Sassanid Hunting-Parks of Western Iran" which have been published in the Journal of Manzar (Vol.3, Issue 14, Spring 2011).

1. It should be remarked that recent studies of Nrc (Sh. Javadi & F. Avarzamani) on the relics of Kangavar has proposed this idea that twin purposes as the temple of Anaitis and hunting park can be merged. Consequently, it can be proposed that Taq-i- Bostan in Kermanshah had twin purposes as the temple of Anaitis and Mithra and also the royal hunting pavilion of Khosrow (Thanks to Sh. Javadi & F. Avarzamani). Compare to the author's ideas, however, their ideas must be examined by future excavations.

#### Reference list

- Amid, H. (1990). *The Persian Dictionary*. Tehran: Amirkabir Publications.
- Lukonin, V. G. (1969). *Kul'tura Sasanidskogo Irana*. Iran v III-V vv. Moscow: USSR Academy of Sciences (Russian).
- Mansouri, S. A. & Ajorloo, B. (2008). Farhad Tarash in Bisotun: A sample of Sassanid landscape architecture, *Journal of Bagh-i-Nazar*, (10): 49-68.
- Moeen, M. (1971). *Moeen's Persian Dictionary*. J. Shahidi (ed.), Tehran: Amirkabir Publications.
- Omrani, B. & Moradi, A. (2014). Qal'eh Zahham & Mithraic architecture, *JARCS, University of Tehran*, 2 (6): 113-30.
- Pigolevskaya, N. V. (1956). *Goroda Irana*. Leningrad: USSR Academy of Sciences (Russian).
- Amoozegar, J. & Tafazzoli, A. (1996). *Pahlavai Language: Literature & Grammar*. Tehran: Moeen Publications.
- Azarnoush, M. (1981). Excavations at Kangavar, *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran*, 14: 69-94.
- Curtis, J. (2000). *Ancient Persia*. London: British Museum Press.
- Flandin, E. N. J. B. & Coste, P. X. (1851). *Voyage en Perse, Pendant Les Années 1840 et 1841*, Paris: Gide et Jules Baudry.
- Frye, R. N. (1963). *The Heritage of Persia: the Pre-Islamic History of One of the World's Great Civilizations*. New York: World Publishing Company.
- Ghirshman, R. (1962). *Iran: Parthes et Sassanides*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Herrmann, G. (1977). *The Iranian Revival*, London: Elsevier & Phaidon.
- Kleiss, W. (1970). Zur Topographie des Parther Hangs in Bisotun, *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran*, (3): 133- 168.
- Kleiss, W. (1973). Qal'eh Zohak in Azerbaidjan, *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran*, (6): 163-188.
- Salzmann, W. (1976). Die Felsarbeitung und Terrasse des Farhad in Bisotun ein Spät Sassanidisches Monument, *Archäologischer Anzieger*. 110-134.
- Vanden- Berghe, L. (1959). *Archéologie De L'Iran Ancien*. Leiden: Brill.
- Ajorloo, B. (2010). An overview of the Sassanid hunting parks of the western Iran, *Journal of Manzar*, (14) : 10-15 .



Fig. 4. The Eyvan-e Taq-e Bostan in Kermanshahan. Source: Flandin et Coste, 1851.

the king and the royal family during their gaming pleasure. The mutual concordance between the elements of natural landscape and the representations of the goddess Anaitis, all of which were revered in the Mazadism cult of early Iran, should also be emphasized (Ibid).

#### • Destagerd of Kangavar

The stone ruins that have come to known as the Temple of Anaitis lie in the Kangavar city of Kermanshah province. Though assigned to the Parthian period, it seems be more to a Sassanid palace rather than a Parthian sanctuary or an Anaitis temple, probably commissioned by Khosrow II, as was possibly also the case with Farhad Tarash as well as the monuments in Taq-e Bostan and Qasr-e Shirin (Fig. 6). As pointed out by Ali Akbar Sarfaraz, the immediate landscape of the alleged temple is not fitting with a military, residential or ministerial function (Ibid). Emphasizing the Sassanid origin of the monument, the late M. Azarnoush absolutely ruled out a religious function for the monument, emphasizing that atop the bulky columns around this great portico sat barrel vaults that distinguished the structure's appearance from those of fire temples or water sanctuaries such as

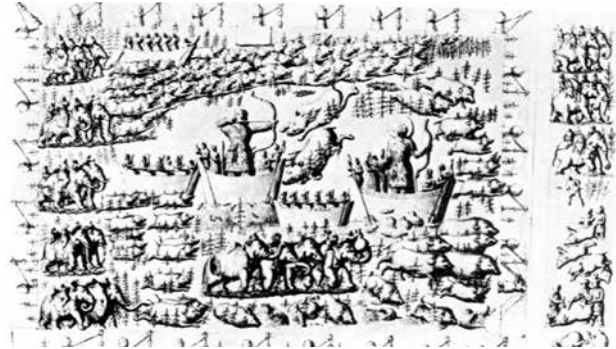


Fig. 5. The relief of Khosrow II at Taq-e Bostan Kermanshahan Source: Flandin et Coste, 1851.

the Anaitis Temple in Bishapur (Azarnoush, 1981). Thus, drawing on the available archaeological dataset, the function of this monument, originally comprising a large portico with lateral staircases and gigantic stone rails all around it, should be reconstructed with reference to the natural landscape of the surrounding plain, which suggests that it might have been originally a *daskereh* or a royal summer residence, quite contrary to the current moniker Anaitis Temple. This seems to be a particularly fitting interpretation as far as the existing indications at the Sassanid sites of Sarab, Farhad Tarash and even Qasr-e Shirin in the Kermanshahan region are concerned (Ajourloo, 2010).<sup>1</sup>

Fig. 6. The ruins of columns relevant to the temple so-called as Anaitis in Kangavar Source: Flandin et Coste, 1851.



## Conclusion

Building the hunting pavilions in connection with the tradition of hunting and the related customs of the noble class and royal family of ancient Iran originated in the Sassanid times. And, though we have archaeological

evidence that the Achaemenid and Parthian kings practiced hunting, not even a sherd of evidence on planning and constructing hunting pavilions has ever been documented and reported from these earlier empires. Thus, it is my

1976). Kleiss thought of the monument as an imperfect Sassanid structure, probably in a boar hunting ground, as it lacked any indications of arches or columns (Kleiss, 1970). Hints for landscape architecture and a *destagerd* in the Kermanshahan region and Bisotun are likewise provided by classic historical sources when they speak of the representations of Khosrow II and the water goddess Anaitis as well as hunting scenes and floral decorations. Such allusions occur in ibn Rusta's *al-Alaq al-Nafisa* (290 A.H.), *al-Istakhri's al-Masalik ul-Mamalik* (318-322 A.H.), *Abudolaf's Travel Accounts* (341 A.H.), *ibn Hawqal's Surat al-Arz* (367 A.H.) and *al-Meqdisi's Ahsan al-Taqasim Fi Ma'rifat al-Aqalim* to name but a few.

In the course of excavations at the village of Bisotun, remains and plan of an architecture measuring 85 x 80 meters were cleared, which have been dated to the Sassanid period by Luschay and Kleiss (Fig. 3). The expedition of German Archaeological Institute has interpreted the opening on the east side the structure as gate, but it was in fact a water conduit because a canal originating from Sarab, called *Jub-e Bisotun*, ran a short distance to the east of the structure. Also, existence of water conduits in the western side of the structure strengthen the possibility that the installations of the stone retaining wall at Farhad Tarash, still unexcavated, would have been related with hydraulic structures. Needless to say, this is again a hypothesis that should be examined through further excavations. At Sarab of Taq-e Bostan there are 6 stone capitals that were moved there from Farhad Tarash. They bear representations of Khosrow II and the water goddess Anaitis along with hunting scenes and floral decorative elements. They evince a date in the reign of Khosrow II for the site, as is also the case with Taq-e Bostan. Moreover, existence of the representation of Anaitis evokes that hydraulic structures and the construction of the fountain at the site of Farhad Tarash were connected with the Mazdaist custom of water worshipping, and therefore it invites comparison with the Anaitis Temple of Bishapur in Persia and Sarab of Taq-e Bostan (Mansouri & Ajorloo, 2008). The original intention of Sassanid masons and architects was possibly to fashion on the piecemeal carved wall of Farhad Tarash an *Eyva* and a scene that would be reflected in the water, imitating the situation seen at

Sarab of Taq-e Bostan (Ajourloo, 2010).

### • Taq-e Bostan

The most characteristic and prominent depictions relating to hunting scenes and hunting tradition in the Sassanid royal art are those carved on the *Eyvan* of Taq-e Bostan in Kermanshah (Fig. 4). Here, we see the Sassanid Khosrow II engaged in boar hunting associated with a group of musicians and courtiers in a boat amid a dense cane field (Fig. 5). The history of this style of representation goes certainly back to the portrayal of Peruz in stucco at Chal'tarkhan of Rayy and even to the fresco from Dura-Europos. In another scene, Khosrow II and the courtiers chasing bear and ibex flocks on horseback; the musicians and the royal retinue accompany them on elephant, horse and camel to entertain the king (Ibid).

As with Farhad Tarash, Sarab of Taq-e Bostan was in fact a monumental structure in the form of a pair of *Eyvans* carved in the face of a rock opposite a spring and a green landscape which were dominated by the structure by virtue of its height. The harmonious presence of natural elements of water, mountain and forest on the one hand, and the carved scenes portraying royal hunting on the other, all combine to raise and strengthen the possibility that Sarab of Taq-e Bostan would have been a *destagerd* with a palace; the two *Eyvans* potentially served as a residence for

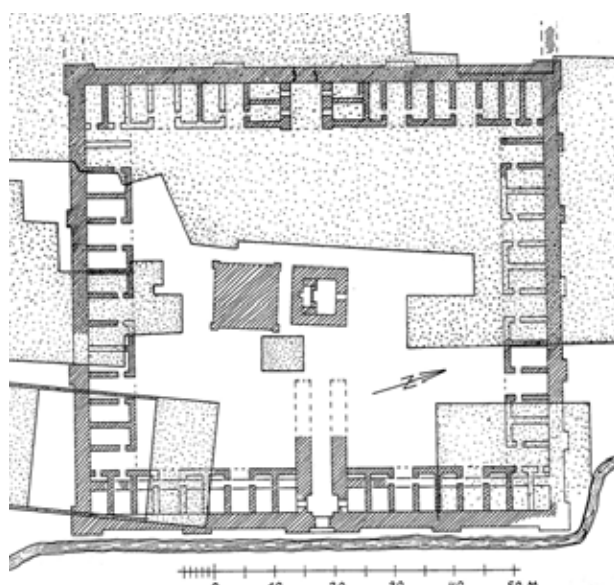


Fig. 3. The Sassanid plan unearthed in Farhad Tarash of Bisotun  
Source: Mansouri & Ajorloo 2008.



attributed to Shapur I, Shapur II and Peruz (Mansouri & Ajorloo, 2008). A gilt plate in the Louvre displays Khosrow II (Khosrow Parvez) hunting a bear and stag, and on the silver one in the Hermitage the Sassanid Shapur II chases a lion (Ghirshman, 1962). The scene of boar hunting seen in a Sassanid fresco deriving from Susa or the Sassanid Peruz Shah in a boar hunting scene represented on the stucco decorations from Chal'tarkhan in Rayy (Ibid) are reminiscent of the scenes in which Khosrow II waits in ambush for a boar in Taq-e Bostan. It is important to note, however, that these representations all have their origins in the depiction of boar hunting in the Parthian art, as an example of which I cited above the fresco of Dura-Europos. Sassanid kings hunting anecdotes are also reflected in historical texts. In particular, Shapur I's inscriptions in Haji'abad of Persia and Tang-e Boraq relate the story of the emperor's zebra chasing and his mastery of hunting and shooting (See Amouzegar & Tafazzoli, 1996). Other than the Sassanid artworks dealing with hunting, archaeological evidence from the historical Kermanshahan region corroborates the existence of royal hunting ground palaces or hunting pavilions, which were required by the prevailing



Fig. 1. The tetrapylon of Qala Zah'hak in Azerbaijan . Source: Hermann, 1977.

tradition in the imperial court. Here, the three sites of Taq-e Bostan, Kangavar and Farhad Tarash of Bisotun are tentatively presented as Sassanid hunting ground pavilions or destagerd.

#### • Farhad Tarash

The incomplete carving work at Farhad Tarash seems to have initially been intended as a panel for a big inscription (Fig. 2), and there was presumably a building complex consisting of a fountain, garden and a Sassanid palace or hunting pavilion. The carved wall of Farhad Tarash at the base of Bisotun Mount together with the installations and the plan of the building discovered in the village of Bisotun lying opposite Farhad Tarash evince a *daskereh* or a royal hunting ground of a Sassanid date whose construction presumably followed the plan of the Persian style of gardens. It is important to note, however, that the complex could be interpreted as a royal hunting ground only with reference to the Khosrow's palace in Kangavar (reputedly known as Anaitis Temple), Sarab of Taq-e Bostan in Kermanshah, and the Khosrow's palace in Qasr-e Shirin (Mansouri & Ajorloo, 2008). Farhad Tarash was assigned to Khosrow II by Luschny and Erdmann attributed it, by analogy to the Sassanid monuments in Taq-e Bostan, to Peruz (Ibid). However, according to W. Salzmann, the Sassanid architects had planned to carve on this 200 x 33 meters wall an *Eyva*, similar to the *Eyvan-e Kasra* of Ctesiphon and larger than those in Sarab of Kermanshah, as well as some scenes on both sides of the large *Eyva* (Salzmann,



Fig. 2. The incomplete panel of Farhad Tarash in Bisotun. Source: Mansouri & Ajorloo, 2008.

## Introduction

---

Having been linked in the Iranian architectural tradition with the royal practice of hunting, the Persian encyclopedic dictionaries of Dehkhoda and Moeen define *Destagerd* as a building or manor used for feasting and partying. Indeed, hunting had been a time-honored custom among the Iranian courtiers and aristocracy probably datable to as early as the Achaemenid era in light of archaeological data. In particular, an Achaemenid seal displays a king chasing a lion in his chariot, and the Median dagger sheathe in the Oxus Treasure, now housed

in the British Museum in London, bear engraved hunting scenes; it is noteworthy, however, that these representations were all inspired by the Neo-Assyrian art (Frye 1963; Curtis 2000). Whereas the archaeological remains related with hunting tradition so far excavated and published from early Iran may be divided into two Parthian and Sassanid groups, the main point made in the present paper is that the architecture of hunting ground palaces in ancient Iran originated in the Sassanid times.

---

## Parthian Finds

There is archaeological evidence that suggest hunting was a commonly practiced activity by the Parthian noble class. For instance, excavations in the structures of the Seleucid-Parthian city of Dura-Europos in ancient Mesopotamia, modern Iraq, have yielded frescoes, now moved to the Louvre, which exhibit scenes of zebra chasing; on another example again from Mesopotamia, now stored in the British Museum, a Parthian horse rider is depicted hunting a lion (see Ghirshman 1962). Despite of the aforementioned evidence, it is not possible at the moment to talk about the archaeological remains of hunting pavilions and hunting ground palaces of the Parthian period with any degree of certainty, although I suppose that the tetrapylon known as the Pavilion of Qala Zah'hak perching high on the eastern fore-mountains of Mount Sahand in Azerbaijan may qualify as a sort of *destagerd* (Fig. 1). Despite of its obvious place in the Parthian history, the tetrapylon of Qala Zah'hak dominating the deep, verdant and snow-catching valley of Qarranqu'chay and Shor'chay rivers has received too little attention in the publications of the western Iranologists: W. Kleiss and G. Hermann attributed it to the Parthians (Kleiss, 1973; Hermann, 1977), while V. Lukonin (1971), H. Luschay (1988), L. Vanden-Berghe and R. Ghirshman failed to comment on it (Vanden-Berghe 1959; Ghirshman 1962). Kleiss may be the sole western scholar to undertake extensive studies on Qala Zah'hak prior to its excavations. He stated that the style of Qala Zah'hak architecture by analogy

to the related structures excavated in Mesopotamia is certainly Parthian, and that, despite its tetrapylon character, it was certainly not a fire temple or a fire altar (Kleiss, 1973). Thus, he is similarly undecided as to the exact function of the building. And why this lofty tetrapylon was put up next to a deep valley? While a Parthian inscription bearing the date of 372 in the Seleucid dating system (i.e., 61 A.D.) recovered during the latest excavations by the East Azerbaijan Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Directorate provide a secure Parthian date for the site (Omrani & Moradi, 2014), the results of these excavations have as yet not contributed anything significant to the function of the tetrapylon of Qala Zah'hak; and my idea of the structure as a *destagerd* simply hinges on the nature of the surrounding landscape and the existence there of game flocks, a hypothesis which no doubt requires further excavations before it is proved.

## Sassanid Findings

Representations of hunting scenes in Sassanid art are more frequent and they show considerable advance both in quantity and quality compared to the other phases of the ancient Iranian art. On the silver, gold and partially gold plated Sassanid trays and plates, now stored in the Azerbaijan Museum (Tabriz) and the Hermitage (Saint Petersburg), Sassanid kings are seen chasing lions, bears, boars, ibexes and ducks on horseback or on foot. These vessels have been

# On the Idea of the Sassanid Hunting Pavilions\*

**Bahram Ajourloo**

Ph.D in Archaeology, Tabriz Islamic Art University, Iran.  
ajorloo@tabrizia.ac.ir

## Abstract

---

The archaeological remains pertaining to hunting tradition and Destagerd, i.e. royal hunting grounds, thus far discovered and published from ancient Iran may be divided into two groups of Parthian and Sassanid. The main argument in the present work is that the architecture of royal hunting ground palaces or hunting pavilions is essentially a Sassanid phenomenon, and that there is currently no definitive evidence on analogous complexes from the Parthian or Achaemenian periods. While there are archaeological data attesting to the popularity of hunting practice among the Parthian aristocracy, nothing can currently be said of the presence of hunting ground pavilions with certainty in this time.

However, the monumental tetrapylon known as the pavilion of Qala Zah'hak in Azerbaijan may be construed as a sort of Destagerd, though of course the hypothesis needs to be examined by conducting further excavations at the site. In the wake of the Parthian period, representing hunting scenes becomes more common in the Sassanid art, though it in reality had its roots in the representation of boar chasing in the Parthian traditions. However, apart from the artworks relevant to hunting tradition from the Sassanid era, archaeological finds from the Kermanshahan region highlight the existence there of royal hunting grounds and hunting pavilions in line with the hunting tradition of the Sassanid court. Here, the three archaeological sites of Taq-e Bostan, Kangavar and Farhad Tarash of Bisotun are theorized to represent potential Sassanid palaces in royal hunting grounds.

## Keywords

---

Ancient Iran, Tetrapylon of Qala Zah'hak, hunting pavilion of Taq-e Bostan, hunting pavilion of Kangavar, hunting pavilion of Farhad Tarash.