

## Conclusion

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Sassanid were the people representing nature vastly in architecture and reliefs as well as exhibiting effects of symbolic elements in the other arts. Vision, sense and choices of Sassanid artists were maximized relying on naturalistic beliefs and led to creation of the most charming landscapes; so that temples, palaces, hunting

grounds and stone inscriptions in vicinity of ponds, springs, mirages and rivers and in the heart of mountains, enormous rocks and caves with huge trees still remain as relics of ancient beliefs on sacredness of nature rooted in the rituals of Mehr, Anahita and Zoroaster.

## Endnote

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\*. This paper rewriting an article entitled "Landscape Elements in Sassanian Art" which have been published in the Journal of Bagh-e Nazar (Vol.1, No.2, Winter 2005).

1. Two winged angles are observed above Taq-e Bostan which is a Mehr memorial. One of the angles has a pearl diadem and the other holds a chalice of pearls. These Mehr winged angles are seen in the Parthian monumental art in Palmyra and Sarir (Dura-Europos); (Pope, 1964: 11).

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Fig. 12. Tang-e Chogan inscriptions on mountains in the vicinity of Shapur River, Photo: Mohammad Askar Zadeh, archive of NAZAR research center, 2003.



Fig. 13



Fig. 14. Anahita temple, Kangavar, Photo: Seyed Amir Mansouri, archive of NAZAR research center, 2013.

Fig. 13. Farhad Tarash, Bisotun, the greatest pre-Islamic man carved inscription, utilizing Persian garden patterns by composing green space, water and architectural form, Photo: Seyed Amir Mansouri, archive of NAZAR research center, 2013.

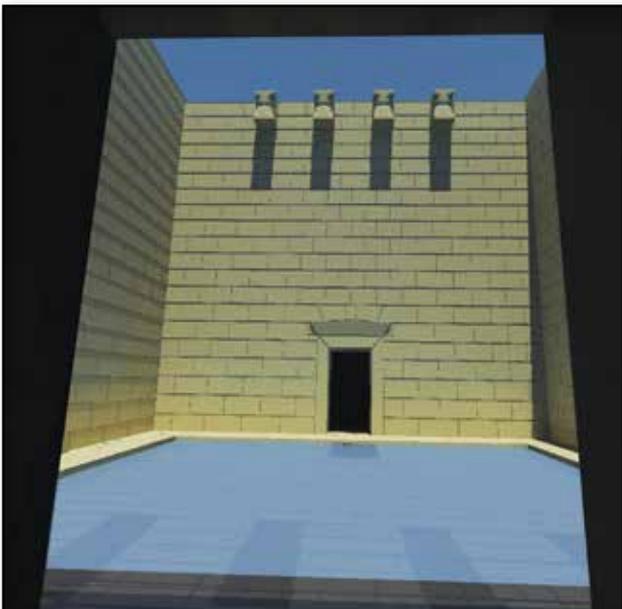


Fig. 15. Anahita temple, Bishapur, Source : Alehashemi, 2009 :61.



Fig. 10. Mehr with sun crown on lotus, Photo: Seyed Amir Mansouri, archive of NAZAR research center, 2013.

used to flow in this place and currently there is a bathroom and mosque near the site which shows people's respect to this place and reveals its relation with Anahita, the goddess of fertility and the Guardian of the water. Being belonged to Parthian-Sassanid era, this place is also called as their hunting ground which is not in contrary of the fact they both existed together in Sassanid period; alike Taq-e Bostan functioning

both as hunting ground for Khosrow Parviz in Kermanshah as a Sassanid paradise and offering carved caves decorated with Anahita, Mehr or Mithra reliefs.

Anahita Temple in Bishapur and in the vicinity of Sassanid palaces is a massive and impressive sample of water temples (Fig. 15). Considering basins, water and cow sculpture images reflected in the water, one of the most beautiful expressions of ritual and symbolic aspect of Anahita temple is exhibited. Sassanid kings were obliged to offer sacrifices annually during harvest season to the goddess of fertility in order to have a blessed year for farmers and country. In case of a drought, people would come and ask the the king to offer more sacrifices and would find him responsible not to have sacrificed enough. People also turn to specific places associated with water, trees and even small local temples to pray for and ask blessing of the goddess of water and fertility. Many of these places and natural elements such as water and trees still remain today which are considered as relics of Anahita. They are combined with new faith and also Islamic belief so that people still come to these places.



Fig. 11-A



Fig. 11-B

Fig. 11. A: Anahita crown ornamented with flower blossoms and pearls, Photo: Seyed Amir Mansouri, archive of NAZAR research center, 2013.

B: Khosrow Parviz' clothes with water shaped pearls, Photo: Seyed Amir Mansouri, archive of NAZAR research center, 2013.

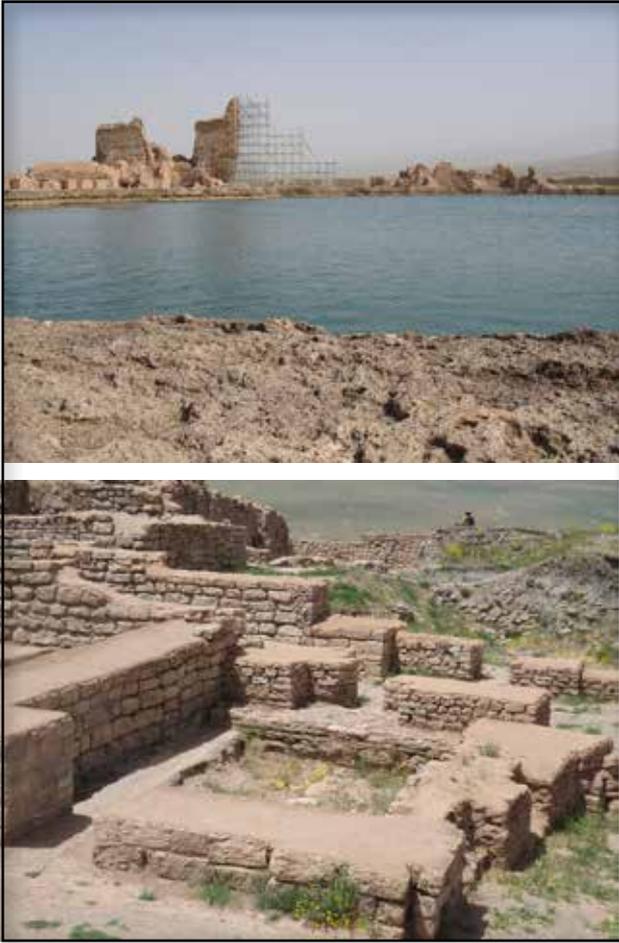


Fig. 6. Chartaqi (pergola), Shiz fire temple, Takht-e Soleiman, Photo: Seyed Amir Mansouri, Nazar Research Center Archives, 2013.

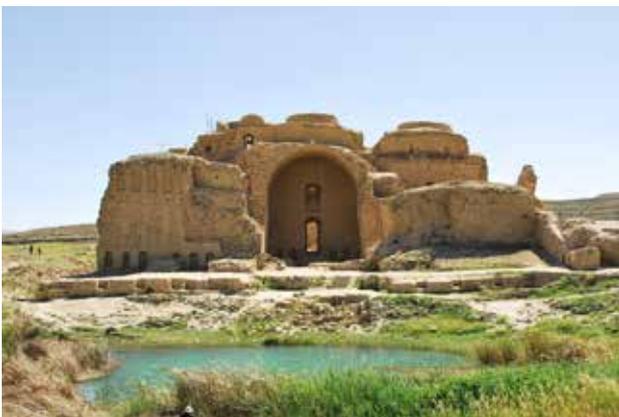


Fig. 7. Artaxerxes II Palace, Fars, Photo: Farnoosh Poursafavi, Nazar Research Center Archives, 2009.



Fig. 8. Taq-e Bostan, Khosro Parviz' hunting ground, temple cave probably related to Mehr and Anahita, Photo: Seyed Amir Mansouri, Nazar Research Center Archives, 2013.



Fig. 9. Anahita, the goddess of fertility and guardian of flowing waters with a water jug, a pearl crown and moon crescent, Photo: Seyed Amir Mansouri, Nazar Research Center Archives, 2013.



Fig. 4. Plants and flowers inspired from nature in Sassanid art, Source: Riazi: 2003.

and clothes of the kings (Fig.11). Tang Chogan inscriptions overlooking Shapur River (Fig. 12) includes five rows of depiction on the left side of the river that shows Shapur's victories over the Roman Empire. There exists another victory inscription on the right side of the river carved in Sassanid style on top of huge rocks and near the water. Farhad Tarash in Bisotun is a panorama of a royal promenade and hunting ground with three elements of vegetation, water and architecture (Fig.13) located in Bisotun and considered "Sassanid program key in the region" (Ajlou & Mansouri, 1999:55) This work is an unfinished huge carved frame with a platform at the bottom and a Sassanid fountain, garden and palace set in its downstream. Sample such as Anahita of Kangavar (Fig. 14), also known as Khosrow palace by some, was an enormous construction whose columns still remain. Water



Fig. 5-A



Fig. 5-B



Fig. 5-C

Fig. 5. A: Ray of light as Mehr symbol, Mithra relief- Taq-e Bostan.  
B: Sassanid coins (Second Khosrow),  
C: First Bahram, Source: Amini, 2006:254, 363.

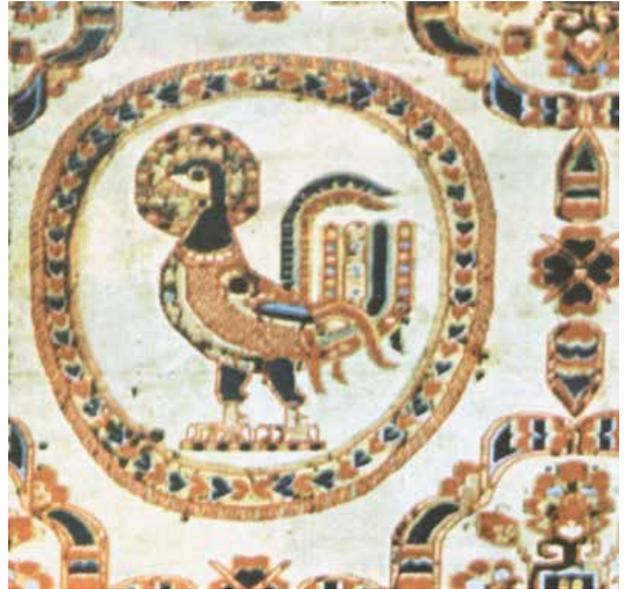


Fig. 3. Rooster, peacock and a legendary animal Sassanid art, silk cloth, Source: Riazi, 2003: 339 -357.



Fig. 2-B



Fig. 2-A

Fig. 2. A: Tree of life, water, Photo: Seyed Amir Mansouri, Nazar Research. Center Archives, 2013  
 B: Tree of life with animals, Sassanid bowl, Source: dr. shahinspanta.blogspot.com

as the elements and symbols associated with the goddess Anahita. Silk and brocade fabrics are also decorated with patterns derived from nature and natural beliefs (Fig. 4).

The figure of the hearth and sacred fire, a beam of light on Bahram's head, pearl and moon on the coins are all religious symbols in relation to the sun and moon deities (Fig. 5).

### Architecture and Sassanid reliefs in relation to nature

Architecture of this period was molded the form of temples, palaces and hunting grounds in the nature in the vicinity of mountains, rocks, water and old trees. Palace and fire temple of Takht-e Soleiman or Shiz in Azerbaijan (Fig. 6), is a magnificent complex comprised of Khosrow Parviz palace near a large lake, Anahita temple's Chartaqi and another building probably Mehr temple. It is decorated with golden tiles depicting phoenix and dragons in cobalt-blue and gold colors and after a long period in Ilkhanid era a palace was built in its vicinity. There existed a figure of Khosrow Parviz on the Crystal roof of the Sassanid Palace as reported by travelers. Artaxerxes II Palace in Firouzabad, on a hill overlooking the spilling fountain, is a unique

work of architecture combined of Sassanid and Parthian architecture (Fig. 7). The remains of three halls, belongs to Sassanid era and the porch and yard is built in Parthian architectural style located in a vast plain and related to fountain and water like other buildings of this age; so that the image of the fire temple, palace and the temporary settlement was reflected in the water. Taq-e Bostan cave temple<sup>1</sup> (Fig. 8) with magnificent stone inscriptions embodied from huge rocks and a reflected image in the near stream is among the most famous Sassanid paradises which are well known as Khosrow Parviz hunting ground. The existing stone inscriptions suggest the relevant religion and beliefs of the period. The figure of Khosrow Parviz coronation, the presence of Ahura Mazda and Anahita and Artaxerxes II crowning from Ahura Mazde and the presence of Mitra shows signs of association with mythical elements of nature.

Anahita, goddess of fertility, prosperity and protector is appeared with landscape symbols of such as pearl, water jug and moon crescent (Fig. 9) and Mehr god is appeared by the symbol of sun corona and lotus flower (Fig. 10). The pearls, buds and flower blossoms, the sun and moon and stars are also observed on crowns



Fig. 1. Mithra birth from cypress tree, Source: Martin Vermazen, 2004:90.

1941: 221). “Rawlinson” considers the place and the carved platform as the main wall of Khosrow Parviz palace that is also confirmed by “King” and “Thomson”.

Naturalism in Sassanid period in art including architecture and decoration is frequent and roots in their beliefs and faith. Sassanid kings were the heirs of Anahita temple and continued to respect the holiness of the goddess. Anahita temples were built in Sassanid kingdom territory providing abundant sacrifices and offerings to this place. As the text of the Avesta in Aban Yasht in praising Anahita declares, tens, hundreds and thousands of camels, cows and sheep were bestowed before her vow to the goddess of water and were sacrificed for the goddess in her sanctuary.

Sassanid princes, who were the cultural heirs of praising Mehr and Anahita, were guardians of Anahita temple in Estakhr. They managed to build fire temples from the second half of their kingdom when Zoroastrianism flourished and became the official religion of the kingdom; while praising Mehr and Anahita gods were frequent earlier and pursued in Zoroastrianism. Respecting natural

elements like water, fire, plants continued as that Zoroaster preached. Fire worship and praising commenced in temples and buildings in heights, in the vicinity of mountains and springs. Some temples become fire temples and some of them are called the door of Mehr as it is evident. This suggests that in courses of time, praising of Mehr and Anahita and its affiliated ceremonies as well as commemorating fire rituals was held simultaneously at the same place. Moreover, the trees and plants which were once symbols of joy and blessing were respected near waters attributed to Anahita during the holy Zarathustra so that cutting them was known as a cardinal sin. In addition, flowing waters had to be kept pure and clean for use and water pollution was considered a major sin. That is why the Persians respected the life-giving elements such as water, fire and the earth and as well as celestial elements such as the sun, moon and stars throughout history by creating myths and building temples to protect them and to use them and seek to them for blessing in life and the hereafter.

In Sassanid beliefs Mehr (Mithra), symbol of light and shining of the sun, was highly regarded at the time of the Parthian as the great god of Aryan. This God in the Sassanid era, along with Anahita was also regarded as the helpers of Ahura Mazda in Zoroastrianism. Based on this strong belief, Mehr and Anahita or the gods of sun and moon and symbols of light and fertility and guardians of clean waters, were usually placed together beside springs and old trees. Many examples of such places are located around the country where people still believe in and are faithful to them with Islamic customs and rituals.

Signs and symbols associated with nature in Mehr, Anahita and Zoroaster rituals includes water and the tree of life (Fig. 2), birds like eagle, peacock, crow, rooster and sacred animals such as cow, goat, snake are observed in cloth patterns, porcelain and other objects during Sassanid era (Fig. 3).

Lotus flower with duck, rooster, peacock and pelican patterns are seen in silver and brass trays

## Introduction

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Since ancient Persians praised Mehr and Anahita gods as symbols of sun and moon, celebration of water for its being related to the guardian and goddesses of pure water and celebration of fire as the symbol of light and sun warmth or light of the sun was quite common. This idea was pursued in Zoroastrianism due to respect to nature and its comprising holy elements of water and plant which was eventually succeeded in Islamic period, according to the Holy Quran and holy word and anecdotes on the importance of nature especially water and trees.

The significance and fear of losing nature accounts for the praises and sanctity of nature and its comprising elements as our ancestors praised water, plants, sun, moon and stars due to their need of them for survival. They also created legends to offer sacrifices for nature in order to retain these vital forces of life for exploit. These sacred natural forces were so valuable that were sworn over which is still a common practice in many rural and urban areas of Iran: "I swear to the eye of sun, to the white headed moon, to the fair and favorite sun, to sunrays, to the bright blown day, to the moon which looks like

a golden flower over the head, to the Tir's sun, to the sear sun, to the light glow and such examples revealing ancient believes" (Farokhi, 1979:113). Lighting candles and lights and recourse of light or fire shows the profound belief in gods of the sun and moon which later also continued in Zoroastrianism. Granting sanctity for mountains and trees are considered ritual beliefs; whereas shepherds in Niasar of Kashan used to leave their herds in the mountains as their keepers.

Mehr, the owner of broad plains and born in the heart of mountain and caves has bestowed his sacred sacrifice and the Persian myth is emerged out of lightning in Alborz Mountains. Considering the value and significance of trees, according to some narrations Mithra was born from a pine or cypress tree (Fig. 1). Cutting trees was a cardinal sin also confirmed in Islam. Trees symbolize fertility due to their evergreen entity which is manifested in Anahita, the goddess of fertility. According to this believes, strong presence and influence of nature elements such as trees, water and signs of the moon, sun and stars are obvious in Sassanid art and architecture.

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**Hypothesis:** Believing in nature, Sassanid people were the greatest landscape throughout the history of Iran where landscape and natural symbols are instilled in other types of art.

### Nature in Sassanid Beliefs

Tendency to nature and honoring mountains, water, fire, plant, sun, moon and stars as nature manifestation was customary in ancient mythical beliefs. Despite existence of different tribes with various language and culture, ritual beliefs in ancient Persian culture prevailed and created a magnificent art and civilization influencing both east and west.

Grandeur and charm of the ancient Iranian religious works related to nature is vastly commended by noble European travelers. The available and destroyed samples are Samples are observed in old travel literature and old pictures. As reported in "Flandin" and "Coste" (French Academy of Sciences), Bisotun was used as Yaylak (summer pasture) settlement and Sassanid hunting ground. "Jackson", the American orientalist, attributes the platform of Farhad Tarash (carved by Farhad) Bisotun to the Achaemenid era. "Herzfeld", the German orientalist, also emphasizes on the Achaemenid origin of Farhad Tarash (Herzfeld, 1920: 17;

## Nature and Landscape Elements in Sassanid Art and Culture\*

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### Abstract

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The Persian originated Sassanid, who were the heir to Achaemenid throne and civilization, ruled Persia over 5 centuries where numerous works of architecture, reliefs, paintings, textiles, porcelain, metal and glass objects, weapons and coins demonstrating Pahlavi symbolic motifs and calligraphy were created. Sassanid art is “new Persian” art comprising the tradition and manifesting history by magnificent and unique landscaping in form of temples, palaces, hunting ground, Persian paradise or the heaven on earth.

Sassanid art is molded on the basis of naturalistic beliefs and faith in Mithra and Anahita goddesses and Zoroastrian religion in a broad territory from Fars to Ctesiphon, Kermanshah, Sistan and Azerbaijan. Considering various precious types of art, the architectural masterpieces of the period includes temples, palaces, hunting grounds and about 34 inscriptions, built mostly in vicinity of natural elements such as mountains, water and trees.

Sassanid people can be recognized as the best landscapers throughout history whereas architectural monuments including temples, palaces and hunting ground, as well as carved graphs in the mountains are demonstrations of the claim.

### Keywords

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Nature, Water, Culture and Art, Religion and Belief, Sassanid.