

24. Water existence in Mehr and Anahita Temples is essential. So it can be concluded that water was in this place from past to present in the form of springs, wells, water reservoirs, and Sangab. Examples of churches exist today in Europe and Asia with mithraum and water in them (Javadi, 2014:36).

25. Depending on the climate, The kind of the tree can be different.

26. Anahita and some gods of ancient Greece and Rome that were affected by Iranian mythology also have four horses stock. Chlipa with two equal hands are symbols of Sun and related to Mehr cult. The broken Chalipa is called Soastika.

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for cardinal directions or four sacred elements.

- Existing of an inventory combine creature similar to Ahura Mazda in two places, one in Mary Annunciation scene and the other one in Stephanos stoning scene.
- The five important animals in Mehr and Anahita religion, means crows, cows, snakes, fish and lion on east wall of the chapel. These symbols are towards east and sunrise.
- Existing of Pigeon image on dome wall. Pigeon is the messenger of Anahita that was later converted to Christianity.
- Multiplicity of Shamse symbols as a sun, symbolic design for Mehr.

#### **D-Historic signs:**

- Church history has been estimated up to the

9th century. But other facilities such as towers date back to the Sassanid and Parthian times, the first time of Christianity spread among the Armenians.

- Risk of being buried a sacred person at this location.

#### **E-Name signs:**

- A room named Daniel stove shows there was a place to kindle important fire in this church and it refers to sacred Fire praised by ancient people. There are numerous natural, decorative and architectural documents in this building that can all be confirmed in order to prove this hypothesis: St. Stephanos church building is located in the old Mehr temple location.

## **Endnote**

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1. This church is also known as “Holy Nady”, located in Gharakelisa village, Syahcheshme Functions of Mako City. Holy Nady Tomb is there. Armenian believe that Tatavos church is the first church that was created by order of evangelists and disciples in the world (M.Azad, 2006).
2. St. Stephanos church is one of the great churches that was created between the fourth to sixth centuries AH or 10 to 12 AD. Due to the harsh winters of the region and Armenians migration from Julfa, St. Stephanos church was not thriving anymore and so became famous as “Kharakelisa” which means ruined church (M.Azad, 2006).
3. It is located beside Baron Village, 40 kilometers away from Syahcheshme, on slopes steep of the mountain, on Zangmar river shore. By virtue of Khalifeh Gari Council comment, this church is related to 10 AD. It is a compact and single building on the heights overlooking the river. It is very similar to the chapel. This church because of baron dam construction, the church was likely to go under water. So the church was transferred to a higher location (M.Azad, 2006).
4. Daresham is a village in Arsankan rural district in Poldasht part of Mako City. Its water supply is from Aghchay and its way is malraux. This willage is also called as Shakandi (Dehkhoda. Vol 7. P.9413).
5. blog.com <http://mandagarana.persian>
6. History and geography of Arasbaran, Hasan Dosti (1994) <http://hg1332.blogfa.com>
7. [www.freezones.ir](http://www.freezones.ir) / 8. [www.freezones.ir](http://www.freezones.ir) / 9. [www.azargoshnasp.net](http://www.azargoshnasp.net)
10. Hence, Stephanos died because of stoning by unbeliever. / 11. <http://en.wikipedia>
12. [www.freezon.ir](http://www.freezon.ir) / 13. [www.armenia.pedia.org](http://www.armenia.pedia.org) / 14. [www.Iran.mania.com](http://www.Iran.mania.com)
15. At the time of taking picture from the church the bell tower was destroyed for unknown reason. This picture is only represent the position of the tower in front of the church dome. To see old photo of bell tower you can refer to Image 1.
16. Stephanos is pictured by tree stones on head and shoulders in Christian art.
17. Censer is another symbol which make Stephanos recognizable in Christian art.
18. [www.freezones.ir](http://www.freezones.ir) / 19. [www.freezones.ir](http://www.freezones.ir) / 20. [www.freezones.ir](http://www.freezones.ir) / 21. [www.lid.org](http://www.lid.org) / 22. [www.lid.org](http://www.lid.org)
23. [www.armenia.pedia.org](http://www.armenia.pedia.org)

These patterns are used in many other parts of the church.

The pattern of Pigeon also seen on dome wall, that is the symbol of Anahita and came later to Christian art.

The outer view of the south wall has the image of an eagle and Shamse. Eagle is also a Mithraistic symbol as messenger of Mehr and also the last stage in this cult.

The last point is holding a special celebration in 26 of December as the day of Stephanos celebrity. In the begin time of official Christianity, the Jesus birthday was determined the same day as Mehr birthday at Yalda. Before that this day was celebrated gloriously all over the Roman dynasty for a long time. By passing more than thousands of years from Jesus Birthday contract, because of the inaccuracy of calendars and also year's circulating, the Jesus birthday is now held with some days difference from Mehr birthday in Yalda. So for sure Stephan celebrity that holds one day after charismas is related to the former

religious that has been stayed up to today and became a Christianity custom.

The next point is Noah and his mother burial in Marand region. Relating the holy places and rituals to prophets such as Noah, John the Baptist, Solomon, David, Daniel, Elias and even Ali is a tradition that can be recognize in many parts of Iran. Different Sunni and Shiite dervishes sects have beliefs of the past and the era of Mithraism that its signs and symbols are evident in their traditions and ceremonies.

This belief that Mehr will appear in every millennium as a new personal is a Mithraic belief that has been maintained with mystery and concealment up to now. So that has become a newer belief for the next generations (Avarzamani, Javadi, 2016).

So Marand region, the location of the church of Saint Stephanos in appellation and its relationship with Noah and his mother, that perhaps related to Anahita shows other symptoms associated with ancient religions of Iran.

## Conclusion

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It is obvious that the great human civilization and cultures are not created all of a sudden, but gradually by refining older culture and creating a new thinking. Since before the Christianity introduction, the Mitraistic culture and architecture existed in this area, at least the appearance of new culture is based on the same basis.

The point that the oldest churches in the cultural land of Iran are the same as mitraistic temples that have changed their function and in the next era became architectural pattern for newer churches, is a natural happening and historical documents confirmed it.

Among the most important factors associated St. Stephanos Church place with Mithraism, ancient Iranian religion, the most important of them can be summarized as follows:

### A-Natural signs:

- Natural and geographical situation of the Church in the Highlands
- Existing of a holy spring at the bottom of the building
- Existing of an old holly Plane tree

### B-Architectural signs:

- Walls, towers and Stone gate around the building was common for protecting Ananhita temples in ancient Iran, because they had many treasures and wealth. Also it was common to build Ananhita and Mehr temples beside each other and near flowing waters and springs.

### C- Decorative signs:

- Numerous and abundant chalipa (cross) decorations refers to the symbol of four-horse chariot of Mehr for Iranian, and before that was a symbol

(Hami, 1977:65).

Mehr and Anahita followers prayed on height. Also most of the Christian old monuments which were built on height, were in fact Mehr and Anahita Temples that changed to churches. This history of development can be recognized in many of them (Ibid: 33-38).

St. Stephanos is also located in mountainous region and on height. The sanctity of the place due to the sacredness of the former religion that surely was Mehr and Anahita cult, hundreds of years before the founding of the church, could be a good reason to put the remains of Saints in this place.

The church location, a flourishing<sup>24</sup> valley in a mountain, existing of a spring under the monument and a holy plantain<sup>25</sup> beside it, can be mentioned to prove the raised hypothesis.

In fact churches modeling Mithraism Architecture temples and also rituals, ceremonies and beliefs of this cult is vividly obvious. About architecture we can point to the impact of Mehr and Anahita Chartaqy architecture on Armenian architecture style in churches. "Two rooms nested pattern and corridor with rocking roof is so similar to Iranian chartaghy" (Ibid: 35). and this pattern is followed by many Armenian old churches.

Another important feature of the church is towers and walls around it that seems strange about the building of a church. Because in no other churches we can see towers or walls around the building. In the book "Ghasran History" Mr. Hossein kariman mentioned that most of the Anahita followers built towers and walls around the Sassanid temples to protect assets that people brought as a vow to the goddess.

One of the ancient background signs of this church is revealing application of many decorative motifs that can also be seen in the oldest formal churches in Christian history, such as

Gharakelisa in Iran. Some of the motives used in Stephanos are likely inspired by the designs of the previous and important building that because of that walls and towers were built.

For example, the patterns that are around the cross window, on the exterior walls of the sanctuary, towards the east and sunrise can be noted. The image of four animals are seen in this part that are important symbols of Mehr and Anahita. These animals are Lion, snake, crow and fish, and their relationship to Mehr and Anahita was mentioned in previous part. We can't consider unaware and just imitative usage of previous patterns. Because the animals type of decoration and carefully lay outing around a cross pattern, shows kind of aforethought. One reason is that this Mitraistic patterns are on east part of the building. Means the part towards the sunrise and behind it the sanctuary is located. Sun is the symbol of Mehr and mithraeums are towards sunrise" (Burckhardt, 2003: 65). This Qibla compliance shows the Close relationship between religions of Mehr and Christianity.

The other point is cross with four equal arms or Chalipa that had been used a lot in the building decoration. Chalipa is one of the Mehr symbols as its four-horse chariot. This is visible besides other symbols of Mehr, like lion, bull, fish and cypress.<sup>26</sup>

About Daniel stove various hypotheses have been proposed. Like that he was a prophet or saint from 5 A.D. This text is not about who it really refer to, but by recognizing the reason of appellation of stove, a lot about the history of this building can be revealed. Stove in meaning of a place to make fire can be the same as holy fire place in ancient temples.

In part of bell tower decoration, the image of an eight-pointed stars and a flower look like sun is seen. Both of them are old Iranian symbols as signs for light, brightness and a symbol for Mehr.

cave. Because of Mehr birthday in mountain, the Cave Mountains and because of the flowing water goddess, Ananhita, they chose Cave Mountains besides springs as the shrine of Mehr and Ananhita. Also in some stories said that Mitra (Mehr) is born of pine or cypress that also shows the value and importance of tree in this cult. In Zoroastrianism falling tree is a cardinal sin, and Islam also has the same opinion. Tree because of its fertile and greenness is a symbol of fertility and blessing that can be seen in Ananhita as the goddess of fertility.

### **Visual and decorative symptoms of Iran ancient temples**

Moreover than environmental and geographical indications of Mehr and Ananhita temples, there are some decorative elements that are usually related to rites and rituals of these cults. As even now “in most of the Mithraeum in Europe and Asia, patterns of Sun, Moon and Stars and their signs of the twelve zodiac such as lion, cow, Scorpio, Libra, crab and etc. can be seen” (Javadi, 2015:38). Some other signs and symptoms associating to Mehr and Anahita are birds such as eagles, peacocks, crows, rooster and holy animals such as Cows, goats, snakes. They are visible on designs of fabrics, dishes, objects and other works of art. Ghirishman knows fish pattern from ancient art of Goddess Ashy. “This Goddess of fertility was worshiped in Susa for centuries and is the same as Anahita” (Ghirishman, 2001). Overall signs such as lotus, fish, dolphins, ducks and jag are known as Anahita symbols” (Yahaghi, 1991:425). Also “Swan, dove and pigeon are considered Anahita couriers” (Ibid : 347).

Mithraism in Iran is mixed with Zoroastrian, in west with Christianity and in India with Hinduism (Javadi, 2016). So the existence of Mithraism signs in old churches in Iran is not out of mind.

### **Relationship between church of Saint Stephanos and ancient temples of Iran**

During the Parthian, Christianity gradually spread in northern part of Iran in the area which now called Armenia. At this time Mitra, the great Aryan god, was highly regarded. Mithraism Religious background is proven in “daresham” area. So that, in order to preventing the spread of Christianity instead of the ancient Aryan religious, the Armenian King ordered to kill 3,500 and GhareKelisa is the burial place of the martyrs.<sup>23</sup>

However after the official of Christianity, the old temples directly changed to churches. These temples need no changes in their structure to become a church because similar rituals and ceremonies were held in them and they had the same sanctuary directions (Javadi, 2015:35).

The temples usage changing can also be seen in Europe. Many abandoned Mithraum changed to churches. Even churches built on them by Christians. Researchers could find many Mithraum caves under old churches in Rome (Merkelbach, 2009:291). The trace of Mithraums are visible in many important churches of Europe and Asia. We can refer to St. Clement Mithraum in Rome (Javadi, 2015: 34).

Hami also mentioned St. Stephanos church in his book as St. Stephano and emphasize that this place was a valid Mithraum before changing to a church. “The St. Stephano is the most spectacular Mithraum since the Arshaak (Parthian) rule in Armenia that still remains in Iran and after Armenian people became Christian, it changed to St. Stephano church.

This Mithraum as like the others has three Corridors that the two eastern ones have changed to church. There is still the Stone base of Mehr statue in the west corridor. In the east part of the church the underground Mithraian accommodation with stone walls and ceilings is remained”



Fig.17. An example of a stone prayer room of the church.  
Source: [www.mcirilm.ir](http://www.mcirilm.ir)

and celebration of Fire were hold in Atashkade and some existing temples were converted into Atashkade at that time. Many of that ancient Atashkade are still called “daremehr” (door of Mehr) that shows their relationship to Mehr in the past. Most of these buildings were built on height and near the mountains and fountains. It seems that in some times Mehr and Anahita Prayers and rituals commemorating of fire has been established at the same time in one place. As the same as this event repeated at the time of the spread of Christianity for many of the Mehr temples again. With a different that at this time Christianity was under the influence of ancient Iranian religions. Follow it in making most of the Christian holy places the former ancient holy places were used again in cultural land of Iran. This fact can be recognized by environmental, landscape and engraving pattern Signs in the first

ancient churches (Avarzamani & javadi, 2016).

To investigate the reasons for Stephanos Church history relation as a holy Christian place to Mehr and Anahita rituals, it is necessary to mention some of the most important signs of ancient Iranian temples. Some of the signs are related to church location and its geographical and natural point of view. Some other signs can be seen in kind of architectural decorations or sanctuary navigation and also parts replaced to previous structures.

### Natural signs of ancient temples

Some of the geographical and natural features of such of these places are including mountains, springs and old trees.<sup>23</sup> Trees and plants were symbols of greenery, freshness and blessed and besides flowing waters attributed to Anahita were sacred and respected; until Zoroaster declared tree felling is a major sin. Following waters also must keep clean so that people can use them and water polluting is a major sin too. Temples of the Sun and Moon gods or Mehr and Anahita who are gods of light, brightness, fertility and also waters client, were usually besides each other and near springs and old trees. Ancient Iranians worshiped Mehr and Anahita gods as the symbol of Sun and Moon. So respecting water as the guardian goddess of clean waters and fire as the symbol of light and warmth or the light of sun god was popular between them.

Mehr who was the owner of vast plains and his native was in mountain and cave, borned from lightning between two rocks in Alborz Mountain and done the holy Sacrifice in the cave. In believes of other people also mountains were holy and consider them as the gods place. So they built mountains resembling mountains or on them (Javadi, 2008:15). Mehr and Anahita temples more over than their natural sign of water had the geographical sign of being near a mountain or in a



Fig.14. A view of a stone monastery next to the church.  
Photo : Golnaz Keshavarz, 2011.



Fig.15. An example of Armenian inscription on the church walls.  
Photo : Golnaz Keshavarz, 2011.

apostles and saints are in this church, including St. Stephanos and Daniel bones. <sup>22</sup>

### Signs of Iranian ancient religions

Mehr cult was the strongest religion that spread from Iran to other countries and its reflections on Islamic-Iranian culture and Christianity is evident. Based on historical evidence during Mad era, Mithraism existed in Iran at that time. In beliefs and customs of ancient Persia, two important gods (Ananhita and Mehr), existed very strongly. Their natural signs such as Plants and water, fish, bull and also architecture and holy sites are so interwoven that separating them from each other is not an easy task.

Today many holy sites that located besides water or one day there existed a fountain or a holy tree are relics of ancient beliefs and have root in Mehr and Ananhita cults. Many of these places in the time of Zoroastrian in Iran changed to Atashkade. When Zoroastrianism was the official procedures in court, Mazda's role was so crucial. But still the gods of water and sun, Ananhita and Mehr, were existed as Mazda fellowships. Respect for natural elements like water, fire, plants were also in behavior and orders of Prophet Zoroaster, and was continued from the past. Prayer



Fig.16. St. Stephanos church plan.  
Photo : Golnaz Keshavarz, 2011.

Two boxes are seen on the both side of the cross window: on the top of them pattern of cross with four equal arms (chalipa) and on the half of the bottom Armenia scripts. (Fig. 13)

Beside the church, a half-ruined monastery with many rooms exists. Upstairs rooms for travelers and pilgrims and downstairs as stalls for beasts. (Fig. 14) Architecture style and materials used at this place are different from the main church. Hundreds of Armenian inscriptions are inside and outside of the church. By translating them we can be aware of the church Founder, its architecture, building date and even part of the history of people who lived in this land. <sup>18</sup> (Fig.15)

### Interior Characteristic of the church

The church plan is cross-shaped and has three parts: chapel, apse and porch. (Fig.16) Behind the porch, under the main dome, the chapel is located. The corners have mogharnas decoration and under the dome have colorful pictures that reminds religious painting styles of 16 and 17 A.D.<sup>19</sup> Three stone player rooms, one in the middle of the apse and two others on the north and south of the porch, are from Qajar period. <sup>20</sup> (Fig. 17)

“Daniel stove” is a hall attached to the north wall of the church, which has 6 meter width and near 20 meter length. This hall has three parts:

- 1-”Daniel stove” which is departed from the hall by a wall and has the name of “Daniel” who is famous as a saint in the 5 A.D.<sup>21</sup>
- 2- Community hall in the middle.
- 3-The place of baptism at the end of the east hall with high platforms and baptism stone table (sangab) in the middle.

In Tavernier itinerary, the famous French explorer in safavid era, and pictures archives of Golestān Palace that are taken by “alikhān vali”, the roller of north Azarbayjan in Naseredin shah in Qajar period, it is mentioned that bones of Chris



Fig.12.Crusade window and five mehr symbol around it. Photo : Golnaz Keshavarz, 2011.



Fig.13. Overview of the east wall of the church. Photo : Golnaz Keshavarz,2011.



Fig. 6. The inlaid entrance door  
Photo : Golnaz Keshavarz, 2011.



Fig.7. An example of church carvings  
Photo : Golnaz Keshavarz, 2011.

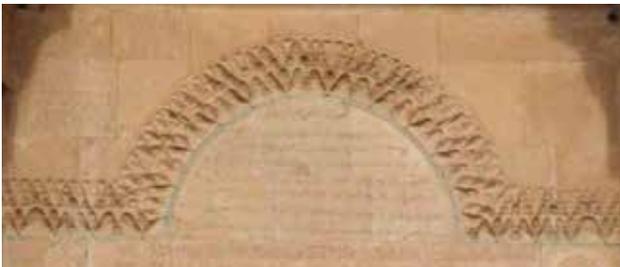


Fig.8. Image of Persian inscription over the entrance  
Photo : Golnaz Keshavarz, 2011.



Fig.10. Eagle image carrying the lamb  
Photo : Golnaz Keshavarz, 2011.



Fig. 9. Crucifixion of Christ image  
Photo : Golnaz Keshavarz, 2011.



Fig. 11. Stephanos testimony scene  
Photo : Golnaz Keshavarz, 2011.

central story character. A pattern like a symbol of Ahura Mazda is also seen. Under this section is a window frame in the form of a cross. The most important point about this cross window is the symbols in the form of animals around it. (Fig.12) A crow is seen on the right and a bull on the left side of top of the cross. Below at the right is a snake and on the right side is two fishes. At the end on the Cross base, two male lion are carved symmetrically.

important. From the top at first an image of eagle can be seen that is carrying a beast with his claws. On the both side of it flowers look like Sun are visible. (Fig.10) Under this pattern two decorative flowers are seen. Under them in a rectangu-

lar box a scene of a story is seen. It is probably the scene of martyrdom of Stephanos. (Fig.11) We can recognize tree stones on the top of Stephanos head.<sup>16</sup> A censer is seen in his hand.<sup>17</sup> three angels are traced as the sign of the holiness of the



A. Bull head Image



B. One of the apostle image



B. One of the apostle image



C. Image of cross and shames



D. Four wings angel

Fig5. Pyramidal church dome. Photo : Golnaz Keshavarz, 2011.

located above his head and shoulders and a palm branches in his hand. These palm branches are the symbol of martyrdom.<sup>10</sup> 26 of December is the Stepnon celebrity and holds one day after Christmas.<sup>11</sup>

#### • The history of the church

Some people think that stephanos church building is related to early Christian. Tavernier, a french traveler, believes it belongs to Safavid dynasty. While the style of architecture, building and decorating shows that the church was built between fourth and sixth AH like Tatavos church. Its architectural style is a fusion of different styles of Urartu, Parthian and Roman.<sup>12</sup> Inside of the building has been decorated by paintings of Honatanyan.<sup>13</sup> After the amazing buildings “Ejmidzin”, “Tatavos”, “Akhtamar” and “Estephanos” This style community called “Armenian style” in church building. During the data collection to record three ancient Iranian churches in UNESCO World Heritage List, bones were found in the Church Stephanos. The discovery of the bones shows that Stephanos Church in the early period of its life had great importance, as far as bones kept in it which thought to belong to Christ’s apostles.<sup>14</sup>

#### • Architectural and decorative specifications of outer space

High fence and seven guard towers and five cylindrical stone bars like fortified castles of the Sassanid era and the early centuries of Islam surrounding the church area. The church is composed of three sections: The bell tower, chapel, and Daniel stove. The bell tower is on the porch, in stratified connected to the southern wall of the church with octagonal pyramidal dome which stands on eight columns with beautiful capitals cylinder of red stone.<sup>15</sup> (Fig.4)

Four wings angels had carved on top of the dome arch and images of bull head can be seen top of them. In a rectangular shape box a Crusader had

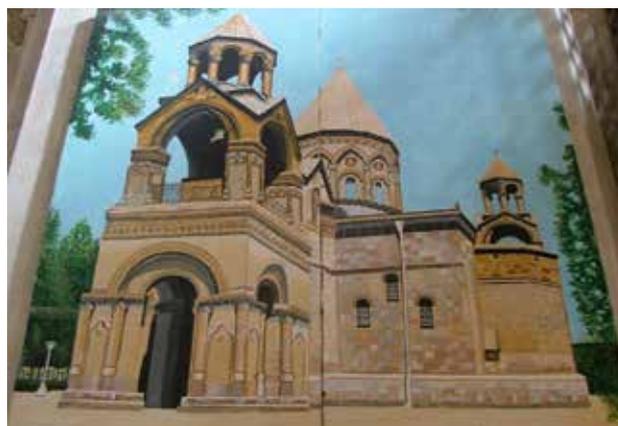


Fig. 4. Painting of St.stephanos church before the destruction of the bell tower. Source: Author, a picture from a drawing in St.stephanos church site.

been carved. Flowers similar to Sun and Shames are on its both sides and top of it picture of a peacock or a dove is seen (Fig.5).

The chapel is 21 in 16 square meters. The entrance door is Inlayed and is related to the Qajar era (Fig.6). The carvings of the bases, False Ceilings, Columns, chain patterns Sides of Mogharnas and roof decorating above the entrance are also very novel (Fig.7).

A nastealigh inscription is seen at the top of the church entrance door which belongs to the year 1245 AH. (Fig.8) The text says that “daresham” village was bought by Abbas Mirza, Qajar prince, and he consecrated it to the church stephanos.

As it said different decorations can be seen on the chapel wall. On top of this wall, under the roof top is a circle shape with another smaller circle in it that may be a symbol for Sun. Under this shape is the picture of Christ crucified. (Fig.9) Beautiful mogharnas decorations can be seen on the church chapel entrance. Cruciform motifs (chalipa) are around the tree windows under the picture of Christ crucified.

In the south of the church chapel on the mural, symbols and engravings are seen that are very



Fig1. A view of Gharakelisa.  
Source : <http://assyrian.irib.ir/persian/kondaktoru/item/7441>



Fig2. A view of Zor Zor (rain) church.  
Source : <http://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/>

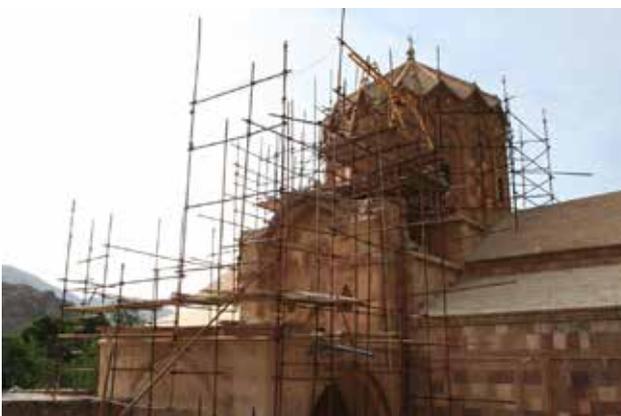


Fig3. A view of St.stephanos church.  
Photo: Golnaz Keshavarz, 2011.

er in Avesta. In ancient times it called Erask and Greeks called it Arask. (Dehkhoda, 1955:1544) It is written in Avesta that in the side of Daitya River Zoroaster was commanded to invite people to God. <sup>6</sup> The root of the word “marand” that St. Stephanos Church is located in, in the Armenian language means buried. It is said that Marand is Noah’s and his mother burial place.<sup>7</sup> Old historians have written that Marand was the capital of Vaspuregan province in Sassanid period. Remains of an atashkade on the khakestari hill of marand can be a good reason for it.<sup>8</sup>

Armenia was a part of great Iran and is the first official position of Christianity. Armenians have probably risen from Phrygia. They were Aryan people and at the time of Cyrus the Achaemenid obeyed Persians.<sup>9</sup> According to Armenians historical sources in the Sassanid period, Before tended to Christianity, part of them were Zoroastrian and the other part Mithraist. Armenian in the time of Parthian (248B.C -224A.D) turned to Christianity but before that, According to documents and like many other Aryan people, worshiped gods such as Mehr, Anahita and Ahuramazda. (Maleki, 2012: 170-171) Many temples left by the Mithraism in the east of Armenia emphasize on this fact (Javadi, 2015: 33). So it is natural that many of the old monasteries which located in the mountains and on heights have Signs of ancient temples. As the other enceinte gods in Iran had temples in the mountains. (Ibid: 33)

### St. Stephanos church

#### • Appellation

St. Stephanos name comes from the Greek word Stephanos which means “crown” and is a symbol of perfect martyrdom in Christianity. St. Stephanos was directly send from apostles of Christ, St. Peter and St. Matthew. St. Stephanos image is recognized by three stones which are

## Introduction

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The role of religious beliefs in ancient Iranian culture was so strong that caused the rise of influential civilization and art in the East and West of the world. Iranians respected Life-giving elements are water, fire, earth, plants and heavenly elements like moon, sun and stars, throughout history. They made Myths and dedicated temples to them. Because of sacred history of many temples, they continued to have been used with ritual changes and by arrival of new faith in the form of the later religion. Among these, the church of St. Stephanos can be mentioned. There is ample evidence which indicating the former impor-

tance of this location in Mehr religion.

In this speech, after considering the geographic location of the church, the historical background due to geographical names and its relationship with Armenian culture will be examined. Also symbols of Iranian ancient temples will be discussed to study the possibility of adapting them in the church symptoms. By matching these information, the Hypothesis of “The relationship between Location and history of St. Stephanos church with Iran’s ancient religions (Mehr and Ananhita)” temple, Will be examined.

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## Research background

Many studies have been conducted about the relationship between a lots of Iran’s holy sites and ancient Persian religions. Including the books such as “baghmehr”, Ahmad hami, “Calendar and history of Iran”, zabih behrooz, “Query about Mehr and Nahid”, mohammad moghadam and “Iranian Treble of Place” written by shohre javadi and seyed amir mansori. Also papers such as “Nature and Landscape Elements in Sasani Culture”, “Holy Places in touch with nature” and” Continuity of Signs and ‘Mehr’ Caucasus Architectural Remains in Churches of Armenia and Georgia”, all by Shohre javadi have studied. In the last paper specifically the relation between the sacred Christian buildings with Mehr religion have stamped out.

## Research method

Qualitative and deductive research method in comparative manner by Library and field studies have been used. Also by observing and analyzing author images of the church, the hypothesis has been tested and proven.

## The geographical importance of North West churches of Iran

For the close proximity of West Azerbaijan and East Azerbaijan provinces borders in Iran to Azerbaijan country, Armenia and Nakhchivan, Many Armenians live in this region of our country and also many houses of worship have established for them. Three very old churches of Iran are located in these two provinces with the names Gharekelisa<sup>1</sup> (Fig.1), St. Stephanos, kharabe or daresham church<sup>2</sup> (Fig.2) and also Church of zor zor (rain)<sup>3</sup> (Fig.3). The Stephanos Church is located in sixteen kilometers west of Julfa, east Azerbaijan province in Marand. It is three kilometers away from south bank of Aras River in a village called “daresham”<sup>4</sup>. The name of the Church is given from “Stephanos”, the first Christian martyr. Because of its establishment in daresham village, it is also called deresham church.<sup>5</sup>

Aras River and the geographical area of the church has Appellation and significant historical background for this research. In the opinion of some orientalist Aras is the same as Daitya Riv-

# Church of St. Stephanos with a History of Iran Ancient Temple

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## Abstract

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The old land of Iran has many ancient holy sites. These locations other than relating to the existing religions, are associated with the Iranian ancient faith. Iranian have respected the life-giving and natural elements throughout history and dedicated temples to them. Church of St. Stephanos was one of the great temples of Iran in the past. In order to understand the ancient history of Jolfa, we need to understand particular features such as engravings, symbolic patterns, nature and architectural characteristics. In this paper the hypothesis is sought to be proved by generally mentioning the importance of region history, describing the features of the Building and by analyzing the reliefs.

Religious symbols and natural indicators are the evidence to prove this hypothesis that: St. Stephanos church was used as a holy place in ancient Persian history and then it has been altered to a church during the time.

## Keywords

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Church of St. Stephanos, Temple, Symbolic patterns, Mehr religion, Christianity.