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ĀTAŠKADA

ĀTAŠKADA (New Persian) "house of fire," Mid. Pers. *ātaxš-kadag, kadag ī ātaxš*, a Zoroastrian term for a consecrated building in which there is an ever-burning sacred fire (see *ātaš*); the name is less commonly attested in the Zoroastrian Pahlavi books than the synonymous *mān ī ātaxš, xānag ī ātaxš*. Western scholars usually render all three terms by "fire-temple." The temple-cult of fire appears to have been instituted only in the latter part of the Achaemenian period (4th century B.C.), and there is no allusion to it in the Avesta, nor is any Old Pers. word known for a fire-temple. The Parthians appear to have called such a building an **ātarōšan* "place of burning fire" (the term survives as a loanword in Armenian *atrušan*), and there are a number of foreign literary references to fire-temples in their epoch. The prosaic nature of the Mid. Pers. names (*kadag*, *mān*, and *xānag* are all words used for an ordinary house) perhaps reflects a desire on the part of those who fostered the temple-cult in Pārs to keep it as close as possible in character to the age-old cult of the hearth-fire, and to discourage elaboration (see *ātašdān*).

After the Arab conquest a different name for a fire-temple came into general use among the Zoroastrians, namely Dar-e Mehr, and eventually this entirely replaced the older terms for the Irani Zoroastrians. The Parsis, on settling in India, adopted also the Gujarati term *agiary (agīārī*), a literal translation of *ātaškada*, which they use side by side with Dar-e Mehr. In the 20th century the Faslis, a reformist group among the Parsis, revived the term *ātaškada* as a name for their new fire-temple in Bombay. This term is also now used by the Zoroastrians of Tehran for their chief fire-temple. As a descriptive one it is

readily understood by Muslim Persians, who down the centuries have applied it locally to various ruins which are held to be those of fire-temples.

The oldest identified remains of a fire-temple in Iran are those on the Kūh-e Ḵᵛāja in Sīstān where a stone fire altar is present. Only traces survive of the ground-plan of the oldest building, which has been assigned tentatively to Seleucid or early Parthian times. This temple was rebuilt later in the Parthian period, and further enlarged and remodeled in the Sasanian epoch. A relatively large number of ruins of fire-temples are known from the latter period, mostly in southwestern Iran (Fārs, Kermān, and ʿIrāq-e ʿAjamī), but the biggest and most impressive are those of Ādur Gušnasp in Azarbaijan. The characteristic feature of the Sasanian *ātaškada* was a domed sanctuary or *gombad* in which the fire itself was established. This had a square ground-plan and four corner-pillars which supported the dome (the *gombad* proper) on squinches. On a number of sites the *gombad*, made usually of rubble masonry with courses of stone, is all that survives, and so such ruins are popularly called in Fārs *čahār-ṭāq* or "four arches." Archeological traces, and literary evidence, suggest that the *gombad* was regularly surrounded by a passage-way or ambulatory, for the use presumably both of the priests who tended the fire, and the worshippers. A typical small *ātaškada* appears to have consisted of the fire-sanctuary itself, with this passage-way; a smaller room or rooms for storing fire-wood, incense and utensils; and a *yazišn-gāh* or "place of worship" where the priest or priests would celebrate the rituals of the faith. These were never performed within the *gombad*, where no veneration might be offered except directly to the fire itself. There are also at some sites the traces of a large hall, no doubt a place where a congregation would gather to celebrate the *gāhāmbār*s and other feasts.

Modern usage shows that embers from a sacred fire might be taken into such a hall to make a fire there for congregational worship; but there is no evidence, literary, archeological or traditional, to suggest that a sacred fire itself, once established on its pillar-altar in the *gombad*, was ever moved except in its own interests (i.e., when the sanctuary needed to be cleaned or repaired, or for the fire's safety, when danger threatened). The theory, first put forward by A. Godard, "Les monuments du feu," *Āṯār-é Īrān* 3, 1938, p. 12, and widely adopted among archeologists, that a sacred fire was ordinarily kept hidden in a secret place, to be brought into the *gombad* only on festive days, or for other special occasions, not only lacks any solid evidence to support it, but runs counter to Zoroastrian concepts of the dignity of a sacred

fire. This, once “enthroned” (*nišāst*; see *ātaš*, as the idiom is), with solemn rituals in its own sanctuary, should burn there “victoriously” (*pad wahrāmīh*) in perpetuity, as fixed and firm in its sanctified abode as the household fire upon the hearth (see M. Boyce, “The Sacred Fires of the Zoroastrians,” *BSOAS* 31, 1968, pp. 52-53 with n. 9).

At the great fire-temple of Ādur Gušnasp at Taḵt-e Solaymān in Azarbaijan, archeologists uncovered at the end of a series of pillared halls, traces of a *gombad*, which seems to have replaced an earlier flat-roofed sanctuary, and the base of a great stone fire-altar; also the remains of an elaborate complex of structures including courtyards, domed rooms, passage-ways and porticoes, as well as lesser fire-chambers. The building materials here were dressed stone and baked brick, and there are traces of rich adornment—paneling of thin leaves of marble, and, in the *gombad* itself, frescoes of white stucco, with more than life-size figures. The Sasanians did not permit the use of cult-images in worship, but tolerated representations of divine beings in high relief; and it is probably such representations which Masʿūdī refers to in his account of the ruins of the great fire-temple at Istakhr (Eṣṭaḵr). These he describes as being of a very imposing building, with pillars made from huge blocks of stone, with carved capitals, the whole surrounded by a wide open space enclosed by a stone wall, covered with fine representational carvings. “The neighboring inhabitants” (he says) “saw in these the figures of the prophets” (Masʿūdī, *Morūj*, ed. Pellat, II, p. 400, par. 1403). All traces of this fire-temple, already in ruins in the ninth century A.D., have since vanished; and the same is true of the magnificent temple at Karkūy, whose fire appears to have been extinguished in the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century. Just before that time Qazvīnī describes the lofty twin domes of the temple, each crowned with a single horn, curving inwards, so that together they resembled the horns of a huge bull (*Kosmographie*, ed. Wüstenfeld, Göttingen, 1848, II, p. 165).

In Islamic times the fire-temples of Iran were all either demolished (the ruins, if any remained, having since generally disappeared), or replaced by mosques, some of which incorporated and effectively swallowed the older buildings. Only here and there the *gombad* of an old *ātaškada* can still be discerned within a Muslim place of worship. A notable example was to be seen till recently in the village mosque of Yazd-e Ḵāst in Fārs (described by M. Siroux, *Bulletin de l’Institut français d’archéologie orientale* 44, 1947, pp. 105-66); others also exist in area of Yazd (see M. Shokoohy, “Two Fire Temples Converted to Mosques in Central Iran,” in *Papers in Honour of Professor Mary*

Boyce II, Acta Iranica 25, Leiden, 1985, pp. 545-72). The Zoroastrians themselves had to keep those sacred fires which they managed to preserve in low mud-brick buildings, indistinguishable from humble dwelling-houses. Here, as a further precaution, the fire chamber was often hidden away among the recesses of the thick walls, and took various shapes accordingly, being sometimes rectangular and barrel-vaulted. In every case the small chamber had a double roof, to protect the purity of the fire, and the little holes for the smoke were set at angles to prevent rain or any small object falling into the sanctuary. The fire chamber was always paved (often with a pebble flooring), whereas the rest of the building frequently had only dirt floors.

To judge from travelers' descriptions, the Parsi *agiary*s in Gujarat, which was mostly under Muslim rule from the fourteenth century, were equally humble until British domination brought greater security to the community. The old Dar-e Mehr at Navsari (essentially a place of worship rather than a fire-temple) remains a building of this character, though much enlarged; but no Parsi sacred fire proper is housed in a building older than the late eighteenth century. Most of the Parsi temples belong to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and are constructed in a pleasant blend of local styles, with an element occasionally of British Victorian. The fire itself is regularly installed in a central sanctuary, square, and pierced on three sides by window-openings, through which the worshippers can see it. (The principle thus appears to be the same as that of the Sasanian *čahār-ṭāq*, which similarly allowed the fire to be viewed through apertures.) Only the priests who tend it being allowed, with their extra purity, to enter the sanctuary itself. For the ground-plan of a typical small *agiary* see Avesta, tr. Darmesteter, I, pl. I.

The Zoroastrians of Iran began rebuilding their Dar-e Mehrs on a larger scale in the late nineteenth century, when the Muslim oppression started slowly to lessen. Some of their new buildings, in baked brick and stone, were of impressive size, and pleasing appearance. Muslim architects had necessarily to be employed for their construction, and they were often built in the general idiom of Iranian architecture. (Hence the larger fire-temple at the village of Šarīfābād, built in fact at the beginning of the present century, has been tentatively assigned by M. Siroux, on stylistic grounds, to the Safavid period [*Āthār-é Īrān* III, 1938, pp. 83-87; cf. Boyce, *Stronghold*, pp. 77-78 n. 25].) A number of the Iranian fire-temples were reconstructed, however, on the Parsi plan. Both in Iran and India there are modern fire-temples which are embellished with adornments consciously inspired by the Achaemenid ruins

at Persepolis, notably the winged figure in a disc, bull-capitals, and (in one instance in Bombay) impressive guardian animals.

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