



ČAHĀRBĀĠ

ČAHĀRBĀĠ, lit. “four gardens,” a rectangular garden divided by paths or waterways into four symmetrical sections. [This article deals with the origins of the *čahārbāġ* in the Achaemenid period. For the Sasanian and Islamic periods see *bāġ* and *čahārbāġ* in the Supplement. See also on individual *čahārbāġs* below.]

Recent excavations at both Pasargadae and Susa suggest that the history of the *čahārbāġ* begins in the Achaemenid period. The clearest evidence comes from the Palace Area at Pasargadae. There the surviving elements of several stone water channels help to define the plan of a major garden, which was founded in the later years of the reign of Cyrus the Great (559-30 b.c.). Those stone channels that have been uncovered so far describe the outline of two contiguous rectangular garden plots and the limits of a broad pathway that once enclosed the whole on at least three sides (Stronach, 1978, pp. 107-12). Furthermore, a fresh analysis of the plan of the Palace Area reveals that a required “line of sight” down the long axis of the garden, as defined by the fixed throne seat of the king within the “garden portico” of Palace P, would have bisected the long sides of the two rectangular plots (Stronach, 1989, fig. 3). Such dispositions would necessarily have provided four separate plots, each nearly 70 x 50 m in area, within the confines of a rectilinear garden flanked not only by Palace P but also by two ancillary “garden pavilions.”

The regularities in this innovative Pasargadae design seem to find an echo in Xenophon’s account of Lysander’s visit to the park of Cyrus the Younger at Sardis, where he marveled at the trees “finely and evenly planted” and at the



way everything was “exact and arranged at right angles” (Oikonomikos 4.20f.). The grounds of a palace of Artaxerxes II (405-359 b.c.) at Susa may be more confidently associated with a quadripartite plan. The design of this monarch’s “pleasant retreat,” located on the right bank of the Shaur river, appears to have included an almost square garden with axial sight lines intersecting at right angles. The two key vistas can be presumed to have extended from the “garden portico” of a large hypostyle hall marking the east side of the garden and from a vantage point probably preferred by the king in the portico of an elevated pavilion that once overlooked the north side of the garden (Boucherlat and Labrousse, fig. 25).

In view of the previously unsuspected antiquity of the quadripartite garden plan it is certain that such gardens (and even the sequence of two such gardens along the principal axis) were familiar to the Sasanians, energetic builders who particularly delighted in the creation of very elongated garden designs (cf. Pinder Wilson, fig. 2.). The Koranic conception of the “eight gardens of Paradise” may thus have been partly connected with an evolved, formal garden of this type with eight plots that was already well represented in the Near East at the beginning of the Islamic era.

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