



GARDEN V. ACHAEMENID PERIOD

Since the first millenium B.C.E., the garden has been an integral part of Persian architecture, be it imperial or vernacular. In addition to written historical references, archaeological evidence of Achaemenid gardens exists at Pasargadae, Persepolis, Susa, and other sites (Xenophon, *Oeconomicus* 4.20-25; Arrian, *Anabasis* 5.29.4-5; Sāmī, pp. 75-77; Stronach, 1978, pp. 107-12; Pinder-Wilson, p. 85; Yamauchi, p. 332 and n. 55).

The Achaemenids had a keen interest in horticulture and agriculture. Their administration greatly encouraged the efforts of the satrapies toward innovative practices in agronomy, arboriculture, and irrigation. Numerous varieties of plants were introduced throughout the empire (Xenophon, *Oeconomicus* 4.8.10-12; Moynihan, pp. 11, 25).

Aside from the practical aspects of the garden and its sensual pleasures, royal gardens also incorporated political, philosophical, and religious symbolism. The idea of the king creating a fertile garden out of barren land, bringing symmetry and order out of chaos, and duplicating the divine paradise on earth, constituted a powerful statement symbolizing authority, fertility, and legitimacy (Eliade, pp. 59-72; Moynihan, p. 20; Faqīh, p. 566; Stronach, 1990, pp. 171-80).

What made gardens special during the Achaemenid reign was that for the first



time the garden became not only an integral part of the architecture, but was also the focus of it. Henceforth gardens were an integral part of Persian culture. Successive generations of European and Asian monarchs and garden lovers copied the concept and design of Persian gardens (Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* 5.3.7-13; idem, *Oeconomicus* 4.13-14; Moynihan, p. 2 and n. 19; Bazin, 1990, pp. 12-13).

The earliest gardens on the Iranian plateau associated with the Achaemenids are located at Pasargadae, the royal park residence of Cyrus the Great (ca. 559-530 B.C.E.), the founder of the Persian empire. The royal palaces at Pasargadae were conceived and constructed as a series of palaces and pavilions placed among geometrically designed gardens, parterres, and meticulously hewn and dressed stone water-courses, set in a large formal park containing various flora and fauna. Recent studies suggest that this garden may have been the model for the subsequent *čahārbāg* (q.v.) and *hašt behešt* (Stronach, 1978, pp. 107-12; idem, 1989, pp. 475-87).

From the time of the Achaemenid empire the idea of an earthly paradise spread to the literature and languages of other cultures. The Avestan word *pairidaēza-*, Old Persian **paridaida-*, Median **paridaiza-* (walled-around, i.e., a walled garden), was transliterated into Greek *paradeisoi*, then rendered into the Latin *paradisus*, and from there entered into European languages, i.e., French *paradis*, and English *paradise* (*Oxford English Dictionary* XI, pp. 183-84; Yamauchi, pp. 332). The word entered Semitic languages as well: Akkadian *pardesu*, Hebrew *pardes* (*Nehemiah* 2:8; *Ecclesiastes* 2:5; *Song of Solomon* 4:13), and Arabic *ferdaws* (Qur'ān 18.107, 23.11).

Although the concept of a paradise may be traced back to the Sumerian epic of Gilgamesh (Kramer, pp. 147-49), it seems the idea existed independently in the Indo-Iranian tradition, where we find references in the Avesta (Yt. 22.15).

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